

# Students in the Real World

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The following was originally produced as a single lecture to students who were returning to school for a new academic year. For this publication, I divided the text into several chapters and performed a thorough revision on them. This allowed me to properly develop the major ideas and to present them in a more usable form. Moreover, a "Questions and Exercises" section was added at the end of each chapter to prolong the reader's attention on the ideas presented, and to help him personalize them.

Although the original intent was to address college students, especially undergraduates who are entering their freshman year, many of the principles and suggestions here are easily applied to other situations. Those transitioning or returning to high school should be able to adopt what is said here without much modification. And some of the ideas presented are general biblical teachings that are relevant to believers living at any stage of life.

Since academics occupy much of a student's time, in what follows significant attention is given to a believer's intellectual engagement with non-Christian thinking in the context of school life. It is understood that school involves more than academic studies, and this is why I also touch upon other areas, although nothing exhaustive can be expected of a short text such as this. Nevertheless, I trust that what follows will provide useful instruction and encouragement to Christian students committed to advancing the kingdom of heaven on the earth through their words and deeds.

Finally, since the intended audience consists of students who closely follow this ministry, the article expects some familiarity or at least easy access to our previous materials. For this reason, it does not always bother to support claims and explain doctrines that we have discussed and established in other places.

## PART 1

Young people are often told that they must obtain an education to prepare for "the real world." This common expression is considered useful when one wants to make a point, but there are many things wrong with it, so many that it is impossible to offer a complete list here. So we must be selective as to what we will say about it, and keep the discussion relevant to our topic.

One major problem with the expression is that, in a context like ours, it is almost never used to distinguish the real world from something that is unreal. Instead, the distinction is made between one part of the world and another part of the world that is just as real. If education prepares people for the "real" world, then what world are the students living in right now? Are they living in an imaginary world? Even a dream is a *real* dream – it occurs in the "real" world. But school life is more than a dream. The expression makes a distinction that is based on perceived significance and permanence, and not the ontology of different realities. Thus it is misleading; in fact, it can contribute to a disastrous mindset.

Since it is used in various contexts, and since those who use it are careless and imprecise (otherwise they would not use it at all), the expression has a range of meanings. In any case, a person is surely mistaken if he calls a part of the world "the real world" in contrast to another part of the world that is just as real. Perhaps most people have never considered the expression, and they use it because of custom. However, besides this explanation, there is certainly also a measure of arrogance behind it – one is so centered on that tiny part of the world that he lives in or cares about that he refers to that alone as the "real" world. The truth is that if we would number all the infants, students, monks, peasants, the whole rural population of China, and all the people excluded by the expression, we will find that the "real" world is in fact so small that most people – *real* people – are not living in it.

There is an important implication for theology. It is often asserted that Christians are called to engage the culture, so that it is unbiblical to withdraw from the "real" world. If there is a sound idea behind this, it is obscured by the terrible expression. What exactly is this "real" world that we are not supposed to withdraw from? Monasteries are as real as anything, and hermits can live in real caves and shacks. Is it sinful to be a farmer where the closest neighbors are miles away? Is it necessarily unbiblical to be a researcher way out there at the South Pole? Things are not more real just because you are closer to the city or financial districts.

A thinking person would not be swayed by an admonition that rests on such an expression (or the idea implied by it), because he perceives that the one who speaks this way is self-centered, condescending, and not very intelligent. Whether he uses these

words or not, he urges others to engage "the real world" when what he means is that they should enter *his* world, the very tiny area in which he functions.

To call life after school the "real" world is an insult to students. It is to minimize their significance, struggles, responsibilities, and accomplishments. School *is* the real world. By the "real" world, parents often refer to the period of life when their children have finished school and would begin to make their own income. Thus the children discover that their parents' whole conception of reality is based on making a living – only when one has reached this stage does life *really* start to happen. Those who are able to think a little deeper then begin to despise their parents' counsel on life. Insofar as the way that these parents talk reflects how they truly think, it is hard to blame the children for losing respect for them.

As I address those of you who are students, I am not going to tell you that what you are doing has significance because you are preparing for the real world. No, you are in the real world *now* – you have been in it since you were conceived. It is true that you are preparing for the next major phase of your lives, but you are not *just* preparing – you are *living* in the real world now.

Of course, even those who do not use the expression can commit the same error as those who do, and that is to measure the significance of a period of life relative to the generation of income, or any other arbitrary or unbiblical standard. Scripture demands us to regard every phase of our lives as significant, because it is lived before the sight of God.

On the one hand, this means that we must acknowledge your accomplishments and not minimize your struggles. But on the other hand, it also means that we must insist on your responsibilities, requiring from you right thinking and right behavior *now*, and that we must call attention to the ramifications of your actions for both the present and the future. In other words, wherever you are in this world, you are *Christians* living in the real world.

### **Questions and Exercises**

- Reflect on your childhood and early education. Even then you were living in the "real" world. What were some of the challenges that you had to face? How did you face them? Did you deal with them as a Christian, and if not, what would you have done differently if you had been a Christian? What Christian counsel would you give to a child or someone who is just starting school?
- Reflect on the differences between this period and the previous stages of your life. Have you taken on greater responsibilities? What are they?

- Consider the changes and the additional responsibilities that you will face in the next stage of your life. What might they be? Will you be passing on from fantasy to reality, or will there be significant overlap in the issues that you must address?
- How did the previous stages of your life prepare you for this period of your life? How are you now preparing for the next stage of your life?
- To begin with, why are these stages and periods of your life defined by external factors and by society, such as childhood, school, vocation, retirement, and so on? Is there any justification for this? Is there something that is constant in your life, or something that proceeds on a different schedule?
- Is there an overarching principle or purpose that guides and unites these different periods of your life? What is it? In what way are you governed by this overarching principle, and in what way are you governed by these stages of life (school, career, family, retirement, etc.)?
- How would a non-Christian answer these questions? And what would you think about his answers? If you conclude that an unbeliever's reply can only end in futility and despair, how does your faith make any difference? Is the difference only psychological, or is it of greater import?
- If you are not a college student, modify these questions so that they apply to your present situation, and then try to answer them.

## PART 2

Many professing Christians lose their zeal or apostatize from the faith when major transitions occur in their lives. One reason for this is that when a person enters a new situation that demands his time and attention, and in which he wishes to excel, he must reassess his priorities. New items are added to his daily routine, and some old ones are abandoned. For some, if God makes the list at all, sometimes he is relegated to an appendix at the bottom. Christians often deceive themselves into thinking that they can get everything else done first so that they can then turn to give their faith quality time without distraction.

However, the Lord admonishes us to think in the opposite direction (Matthew 6:33).<sup>1</sup> Thus one of the first principles that any believer in any phase of his life must enforce is to honor God as the center of his daily living and to make communion with God the foundation for all his other activities. You are not a student who is struggling to remain a Christian on the side, but you are a Christian who happens to be a student at this time.

This sounds cliché, but it is a true teaching that must be implemented. Just because you have heard it many times does not mean that you are doing it. We are talking about more than an attitude, since it requires you to arrange all your activities around your faith. It should affect every decision regarding how you will spend your time and energy. We are talking about a way of thinking that governs your life and produces concrete results. You actually have to do something and make changes, and it should be obvious when you are not doing it.

For example, your academic schedule should be built around your faith and make way for it. Signing up for several demanding courses might make an impressive transcript, and taking on several more might even ensure an early graduation. However, if it means that it will take time away from the things of God – such as study, prayer, fellowship, and ministry – then you must curb your academic ambitions. As long as you have the attitude that you will "make room" for your faith in your schedule, you will keep on piling up sports, clubs, parties, and so on, so that even on a good day you might have only ten minutes left at the end of the night for prayer, right before you fall fast asleep.

Speaking of sleep, how about waking up an hour early every morning for prayer? When I was in high school, I woke up at 5:30 every morning so that I could pray for forty-five to ninety minutes before breakfast. There is no more appropriate way to start a day. But there is no need to imitate someone else or to become legalistic about this – the point is that you will always have more than enough time for the things of God if you make time for them first.

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<sup>1</sup> See Vincent Cheung, "Kingdom First."

As a Christian, I never crammed for an exam in high school and the university. In fact, I never lost sleep over any type of school work. I never worked past bedtime. Even when I had a paper due or an exam the following day, after spending a limited amount of time on it, I would stop everything and return to my biblical studies and ministry work. This is not to say that every person must follow this pattern or that it is wrong to cram for exams. Occasional exceptions that take time away from prayer and ministry might be acceptable (although I did not permit that for myself), but the believer must make sure that he does not make a habit out of it, and habits are built on repeated exceptions until they are no longer exceptions.

In any case, I did not neglect my school work and my grades. Academic performance was part of my Christian witness, not only before men, but mainly before God, since a believer must diligently labor at the tasks given to him. I maintained a high GPA all through my years in high school and university, and graduated with honors. It is always possible to put your faith first and still obtain above average grades; however, depending on various factors, such as your academic abilities, you might have to design a more manageable course load and social life than you would otherwise prefer. And if you mind your faith, it will improve your performance in other areas. God is able to grant wisdom to his people not only when it comes to spiritual things, but also in "all kinds of literature and learning" (Daniel 1:17).

Faith is not entirely a private matter. There is also the matter of church fellowship. If your school is close to home, then there is no need to change anything. But if you are a boarding student, you will have to find a new place for corporate worship and ministry. Although Christian groups and churches abound on and around many campuses, many of them are apathetic in spirit, confused in doctrine, and thus dangerous for new and untaught believers. They will not do much to sustain or further your spiritual progress. So unless you happen to find one of the better ones, the sole reason for attending is often to offer your assistance and encouragement, and as you do so God shall energize your faith and teach you his ways.

It is often said that believers require constant fellowship to even survive, let alone to thrive in the faith. Here is another cliché, but this time it is false. In his providence, God sometimes ordains that a person should stand alone. The key is in learning that a believer is never truly alone, for God is with him. Before they abandoned him, Jesus said to his disciples, "But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me" (John 16:32). Are we to pattern ourselves after Christ in every way but this?

Sometimes it is argued that even Christ surrounded himself with disciples to help him in his work. However, it is obvious from the Gospels that except for helping him with some practical chores, the disciples were more of a burden to him than anything else. He was repeatedly annoyed by them and rebuked them for their lack of faith and understanding. He gathered these disciples not because he needed them, but because they needed him to teach them, so that they could become his witnesses and enter their own ministries after his ascension.



Then, people are fond of talking about "team ministry" and the "apostolic company," using Paul as the prime example. Of course Paul preferred to work together with other faithful believers, and so should we, but he also realized that people were not always dependable. He wrote, "At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth" (2 Timothy 4:16-17). Against what many teach nowadays, Paul rejected the idea that a believer will surely fall if he stands alone.

Here is the difference between a leader and a follower. It is not that a leader prefers to stand alone, but that through faith in God he *can* stand alone, and he can function very well as he does so. In fact, sometimes you are most "alone" when there are believers all around you – consider the three thousand men from Judah who betrayed Samson to the Philistines (Judges 15:11). If in God's providence you must stand alone, then also know that you are able to do it, because he is faithful to keep you from falling.

### **Questions and Exercises**

- As a new academic year begins, what changes are happening in your life? Are there new problems and new opportunities? What are they, and why do they matter? Are these changes internal or external? Are they spiritual, intellectual, or social? How are you responding to these changes? Is there a constant principle or a reference point that governs your decisions?
- Do you agree that you should consider yourself a Christian above all else? And is this how you truly think of yourself? Scripture teaches us to train in the faith as soldiers and athletes. Have you been doing that? Cite concrete examples – actions you performed, decisions you made – illustrating that your faith is indeed your first priority.
- Can you think of instances when you failed to put your faith first? In what ways have you compromised your faith or the time and attention that you give to spiritual things? Cite examples.
- What can you do to improve? Do not answer in general terms or in terms of feelings and resolutions, although these are helpful, but provide specific solutions tailored for your situation. Name the hours, days of the week, durations, locations, actions, and so on. The reason for this is not to become legalistic, but it is because a plan that is too vague might never be carried out.
- List the churches and fellowships that gather on and around campus. Consider their characteristics in detail. Consider their strengths and weaknesses, their faithfulness to Scripture, to the Great Commission, and available ministry opportunities. Consider

how you would relate to each group. Take time to pray, think, and investigate before committing yourself to any of them.

- Is "team ministry" *always* better? When is it better, and when is it not? Does the quality of the "team" members have anything to do with it? How much of our idea of team ministry came from the secular business world? How much of it came from Scripture?
- Consider the group projects in school. Are there occasions when you prefer to work alone? And are there occasions when you prefer to work in a group? Why? And why do some professors make students work in groups anyway? Are they right?
- What are the differences between school projects, business projects, and church or ministry projects? What are the differences in beliefs, purposes, and the grounds for unity and cooperation?
- Are there other cliches, whether from the church or from the world, that you should reject, redefine, or at least reconsider? Give examples.

## **PART 3**

The university is supposed to be an institution for learning, research, and the exchange of ideas. However, Christians are often disappointed that many of these ideas, advanced as established knowledge, are nothing more than false claims and irrational biases that undermine and contradict the biblical faith. Because there is much opposition against Christianity in the university, it is a place where your faith will be tested.

For some people, the pressure is so insignificant that they barely notice it, while others undergo constant struggle, wrestling with questions that come from all sides. Some assume that the university teach the truth, and they wish to hold on to their faith even when the two conflict, or they try to somehow harmonize them. Then, a number of students outright abandon their profession of faith. These are the most foolish and worthless.

Part of the pressure that believers experience in the university is produced by the false perception that the people there are intelligent. Perception is important because many Christians overestimate the unbelievers they meet, and thus fail to notice their intellectual blunders. My faith was never under any threat in the university, since I found the non-Christian students and professors rather unintelligent and irrational. Holding on to my faith was not a problem. The challenge was in limiting blatant displays of disdain for their scholarship.

Believers must derive an accurate perspective concerning the non-Christian intellect from Scripture, which teaches us that all non-Christians are foolish and wicked, and that Christians are the ones enlightened by God's Spirit and instructed by his Word. This means that, whereas the believer should be able to defend his faith, there is no way that any non-Christian can justify what he believes and how he behaves. Non-Christians are the ones who should be intimidated by us, for fear that we will expose their irrational thinking and depraved lifestyle.

Now, when entering an intellectual conflict with an unbeliever, first you need to stand on a strong foundation, and possess a firm grasp of your own position. This means that you must attain an accurate and comprehensive understanding of Christian theology. The Bible exhibits perfect truth and coherence, and to the extent that your theology is faithfully derived from it, it will exhibit the same intellectual perfection. That which is intellectually perfect is also intellectually invincible. But if your worldview is infested with humanism, pluralism, inclusivism, empiricism, scientism, or even Arminianism, inconsistent Calvinism, and other unbiblical teachings, then it is vulnerable to attack.

The content of your theology is essential, and you need more than a superficial understanding of it. It is insufficient to merely memorize the correct formulations of biblical doctrines, but you need to know their biblical warrants as well as the

relationships between these doctrines.<sup>2</sup> Only then can your attack and defense become consistent and fluid at the same time, flowing naturally with the conversation without hesitation or compromise. You will not become stuck to reciting theological formulas, and you will not be confounded just because the opponent alters the language of some old arguments and objections.

Then, you need an approach for intellectual engagement that is both flexible and invincible, that can adapt to any situation and that will always win.<sup>3</sup> For our purpose, we will group the major approaches to apologetics into two general categories.

The first kind of apologetics is evidentialism, a misleading but accepted name. We will include both classical and evidential apologetics under this category. These two methods share enough similarities so that we may discuss them together, but there are also significant differences between them. Since at this time we prefer convenience over precision, we will use the term "evidentialism" to represent both schools of apologetics.

Evidentialism has three major weaknesses.

First, biblically speaking, it is unfaithful. Its assumptions, reasonings, and interactions do not reflect what Scripture says about God, man, truth, and sin. But since we are doing apologetics to defend the faith of the Scripture, this approach undermines its own professed purpose from the start. And if the Bible is a revelation of truth, then anything that contradicts it must be false.

Second, rationally speaking, it is impossible. It begins and proceeds with the same first principles – the same irrational basis – that the unbelievers affirm. The non-Christian trusts his own sensation, but he cannot provide a justification for empiricism. He appeals to his intuition, but he cannot show that it reflects anything other than his subjective bias. He relies on inductive reasoning, but he cannot demonstrate its rational validity. He practices the scientific method, which besides being formally fallacious, rests on induction, sensation, and often also intuition.

In connection with this, notice that our three criticisms against evidentialism are in fact directed at the non-Christian method of reasoning. It just happens that evidentialism has adopted the same non-Christian approach. This being the case, these three criticisms against evidentialism will also destroy the arguments that unbelievers employ against the Christian faith.

Third, practically speaking, it is unusable. Even if we ignore the first and second sets of problems with evidentialism, in practice its effectiveness depends on the opponent's gullibility. This approach can make assertions and claims about the "evidences" that support these assertions, but it cannot present these evidences at the moment of debate. The relevant scientific data, manuscript fragments, ancient artifacts, and so on are not so

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<sup>2</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology*.

<sup>3</sup> For more on apologetics, see Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, Apologetics in Conversation, and Captive to Reason*.

readily available or portable that one can show them to the opponent as arguments are made on the basis of these evidences.

Moreover, due to the numerous premises of evidential arguments, and the complexity involved in establishing each premise, it might take anywhere from several minutes to several decades just to move past the first premise in almost any argument used in evidentialism. Of course, in almost every case, there are many premises that the unbeliever will never agree on. And since these premises depend on irrational methods to establish (sensation, intuition, induction, science, etc.), evidentialism will allow the stubborn unbeliever to indefinitely maintain his resistance.

Therefore, unless the opponent blindly believes the Christian concerning these evidences, or unless from previous exposure he has already been convinced of them (with just as little justification as the believer now uses them), the best that the evidentialist can hope for against a truly skeptical unbeliever is a stalemate. That said, there are indeed more than enough irrational and gullible unbelievers so that evidentialism tends to achieve greater success than it deserves.

The second kind of apologetics is presuppositionalism. This approach refuses to assume unbiblical first principles as the starting point and make the case for the faith on that basis. Instead, presuppositionalism debates these first principles as well as the very idea of first principles, and commends divine revelation as the necessary foundation for all thought and knowledge, showing how it authenticates itself and destroys all opposing views.

This approach is vastly superior to evidentialism. It engages the unbeliever on a whole other level. Since evidentialism stands on an irrational foundation, the best that the Christian can do with it is to show that he is less irrational and that the non-Christian is more irrational. But it cannot provide positive information about anything or justification for any claim. If it is used at all, its function is negative and its result is partial. On the other hand, presuppositionalism reaches the very foundation of rationality and knowledge, and the principles and contents of necessary truths.

However, before we continue, we must make the distinction between pseudo-presuppositionalism and biblical presuppositionalism. This is because there is a school of thought that calls itself presuppositional apologetics, but in reality it begins from non-biblical presuppositions, so that it possesses none of the advantages that apply to true presuppositional apologetics.

Pseudo-presuppositionalism affirms that many of the intellectual tools that the unbelievers use are indeed rationally sound, including sensation, intuition, induction, and science. However, two problems arise when they use them. First, although these intellectual tools reliably perform their expected function, the unbelievers cannot account for them, and cannot provide rational justification for them. Second, without divine revelation to provide the controlling intellectual principles or presuppositions, the

unbelievers will misuse these tools, so that they will permit and produce false conclusions.

There are in turn two fatal problems with pseudo-presuppositionalism.

First, its adherents embrace intellectual tools and ideas that are inherently irrational, so that even if they first hold to divine revelation as their foundation, they still cannot justify or account for them. Thus it remains that these tools and ideas will permit and produce false conclusion no matter what. And it follows that to introduce them into their worldview is to poison the entire system.

For example, while confronting the unbelievers and even the evidentialists, they marshal all kinds of arguments against the certainty of empirical investigations. Although they do not say that sensations cannot provide knowledge at all, they do insist that the unbelievers cannot account for their reliance on their sensations, and that their sensations at least sometimes deceive them.

But after they have asserted divine revelation as the necessary precondition for all knowledge, they never proceed to offer a precise demonstration on how it accounts for a reliance on sensations or the belief that our sensations provide a basically reliable way to obtain knowledge. They simply assert that it is so, and at times they would even throw around several biblical passages that they claim to support their view without actually showing their relevance or showing that they indeed prove what they claim that they prove. They likewise fail to account for or justify intuition, induction, and science, among other things.

Second, not only do they fail just as miserably as the unbelievers in justifying or accounting for their reliance on sensation, intuition, induction, and science, they even admit that these irrational ways of knowing and reasoning are necessary in order to discover the contents of divine revelation. In other words, although they claim that it is revelation that accounts for, say, our sensations, our sensations are what allow us to access revelation in the first place.

The result is not just one vicious circle disintegrating into a mess of confusion and nonsense, but worse than that, they have placed themselves in the exact position of the unbelievers – they make themselves and their own human investigation the center and precondition of all knowledge. They explicitly place revelation under sensation, intuition, induction, and science. And in many ways, this is even worse than even an explicitly anti-Christian philosophy that has enough sense to question irrational epistemologies.

It is futile to assert that this system of thought consists of a web of beliefs rather than a self-destructive circle. The idea is only plausible if sensation can indeed access revelation, and if at the same time revelation indeed affirms the reliability of sensation. Since they cannot demonstrate the latter, the former remains unaccounted for and unjustified. Thus there is no self-sustaining or self-justifying "web" at all, since the various points within this so-called web is in fact hostile to one another.

Therefore, pseudo-presuppositionalism presents a mere smokescreen against the unbelievers – its confusion is its only strength. And it leaves as its legacy one of the greatest embarrassments in the history of Christian thought. To our disappointment, this is also the predominant school of presuppositionalism. It makes strong claims and it has numerous followers, but in reality it makes the Christian faith no less vulnerable than any other irrational worldview, since its very foundation is anti-Christian irrationalism.

It makes a presuppositional critique of evidentialism, but in the end it makes the very principles of evidentialism its own epistemological starting point. It thrives on the willingness of believers to think that they are submitting all their thoughts to Christ without truly having to question their commitment to anti-biblical principles. Like evidentialism, it is unbiblical, irrational, impractical, and also hypocritical. However, as with evidentialism, there are indeed more than enough irrational and gullible unbelievers in this world for it to attain some measure of success. In addition, the great confusion that it generates can often cause unbelievers to hesitate before realizing that the whole approach is nothing more than self-contradictory nonsense.

So we reject not only evidentialism, but also counterfeit presuppositionalism. Instead, we turn to embrace a biblical presuppositionalism – the approach that truly affirms revelation as the only foundation for rationality and knowledge. This approach can be aptly designated by several terms, each emphasizing a different aspect of it. To distinguish it from pseudo-presuppositionalism, names such as biblical foundationalism and biblical rationalism are preferred.

Christians tend to recoil from anything that comes under the label "rationalism," but here we are using the word in a literal sense and not its historical or popular sense. Some forms of rationalism claim to grasp truth by "reason" alone, and reject revelation from the beginning. This is, of course, not what we mean by rationalism in this context. Both Christians and non-Christians have invested the word with so much extra meaning that it seldom stands for mere rationality, but it is usually burdened with false assumptions about epistemology.

Thus by "reason" alone, some people include the idea of using intuition to obtain the needed premises, but they have no justification for doing this. It is also popular to identify reason with the use of sensation and science. This is why some people complain that I abandon reason when I reject science as a rational way of knowing anything about reality, although I do so precisely because science fails to stand up under the simplest logical analysis. It is because Christians have also accepted this loaded concept of reason that they avoid putting too much emphasis on it, for fear that they would exalt man's powers over divine revelation. However, this concern is unnecessary once we unload the extra baggage that has been attached to reason.

Now, the first definition in *Merriam-Webster* for "rationalism" reads, "reliance on reason as the basis for establishment of religious truth." And its second definition for "reason" says, "the power of comprehending, inferring, or thinking especially in orderly rational

ways." There is nothing in either of these definitions that requires us to reject revelation from the start.

Then, since God's mind is perfectly rational, and since his revelation is perfectly rational, this means anything that contradicts divine revelation is irrational. From this perspective, there is nothing wrong with outright identifying revelation with reason – that is, revelation is reason with content. In fact, instead of adopting one of the traditional positions – faith *against* reason, faith *and* reason, faith *above* reason, and so on – we take the biblical position that faith *is* reason. To avoid confusion, "reason" can refer to logically valid thinking without referring to content, and "Reason" can refer to reason with content, that is, the self-disclosure of the mind of God, or Christ the Logos.

The confusion over the word "reason" partly comes from the fact that reason or logic itself is without content. By itself, logic cannot proceed anywhere or reach any conclusion, but one must feed it with premises to begin the thinking process. And this in turn requires an epistemology, a way of knowing these premises. Perhaps because of this, people have come to identify their favored epistemological principle with reason itself. However, if the epistemology is itself faulty – that is, if it supplies false premises, or has no way of justifying its premises – then logic will only lead the thinker from one error to another.

On the one hand, biblical rationalism places a greater emphasis on reason than any other system of thought. And on the other hand, its sole reliance on Scripture as its source for true premises means that no stronger emphasis on revelation is possible. Beginning from God's infallible revelation, it proceeds to deduce one's entire belief system, to defend this belief system, and to refute all non-Christian religions and philosophies. It refuses to rely on intuition and sensation in its epistemology, because they cannot yield true premises needed for rational thought. And it refuses to accept conclusions reached by inductive and scientific reasoning, because these are logically invalid methods of processing information.

Since biblical rationalism merely processes and applies divine revelation, it remains simple and flexible, in that it is at the same time a system of theology, philosophy, and apologetics. Unlike pseudo-presuppositionalism, because it practices a true reliance on divine revelation, and revelation is infallible, biblical rationalism itself is true, coherent, and invincible in intellectual conflicts. And because it pays attention to its own basic principles and those of others, it deals a death blow to the unbeliever's system of thought in every argument it advances and every answer it supplies. At every turn, it strikes hard at the foundation of the non-Christian's thinking. Again and again, it exposes his intellectual futility and moral depravity. And at any point in the conversation, it is able to present the light of God's revelation through Jesus Christ.

The non-Christian appeals to his own way of knowing, claiming that he has information that gives him a way out. Instead of saying that the unbeliever merely cannot account for this information, or that although his way of knowing might be reliable, the information is somehow wrong, biblical apologetics destroys all of this nonsense and destroys all that



he depends on, all at the same time, leaving him without help and without excuse, and holding out the gospel of Jesus Christ as his only hope.

Moreover, although it is always appropriate to prepare as much as possible, because its sole dependence is on revelation and rationality, the biblical apologist can enter into any debate against any person fully assured of his own victory, even without first knowing what kind of person he is debating, or what kind of arguments and objections will be brought up.

That said, because the biblical apologist understands the true nature of false epistemology and invalid reasoning, he can freely select from the whole range of classical and evidential arguments in the course of debate. He does not rely on them to prove his own case, but only to show that the unbeliever is defeated even if his non-biblical principles are allowed. In other words, he shows that the unbeliever cannot wield even his own weapons, although these weapons are powerless in the first place. And since the biblical apologist makes it clear that he employs these classical and evidential arguments to perform a negative function, they can never backfire against him.

Now, there are other schools of apologetics besides what we have considered above. For example, one may demonstrate the superiority of the Christian faith by examining history, culture, and literature. We may call them historical apologetics, cultural apologetics, and literary apologetics. Our materials often do not mention them when comparing the different approaches because these methods do not even attempt to set forth a rational case, but rather focus on the effects and the feelings generated by Christian ideas versus non-Christian ideas.

Practical and existential arguments are not compelling, and from a strictly rational perspective, they often contribute nothing to one's case. Just because non-Christian ideas have proved destructive to society does not mean that they are wrong. Making this point does nothing to refute the non-Christians, unless we can somehow prove that what is destructive is also untrue.<sup>4</sup> And even if we make the case that the Christian ideas have contributed to the progress of science, education, and government, so what? It does not automatically mean that Christianity is right or even good.

In fact, we must take care lest in making the case that Christianity is practically and existentially superior, we reduce it in the minds of others into something that is merely practical and existential, or that we believe it only for the practical and existential benefits. If it is reduced to such a level, then it is also easy to think of it as replaceable, just as soon as something is invented that is also practically effective and existentially satisfying. If this is the basis for faith, then even the possibility that a similar belief system could be invented is sufficient to neutralize any claim to exclusivity. Non-Christian views must be excluded by logical necessity, and not just on the practical or existential level.

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<sup>4</sup> The definition of what is destructive is also a problem, since it requires an absolute standard of measurement, so that once we manage to defend a definition of it, we will have already established the Christian faith.

Our claim is that Christianity should be affirmed because it is true and rationally necessary. Only biblical presuppositionalism successfully argues for this, and therefore this is our main approach, and the only necessary one to use when engaging unbelievers. The arguments from other methods may be employed as optional add-ons to make our presentation subjectively more compelling to the unbelievers, while making it clear that we do not regard Christianity as true on the basis of these optional, inferior, and even rationally irrelevant arguments. The only logical value that they provide is to expose self-contradiction within the non-Christian systems.

In fact, because classical and evidential apologetics cannot self-sustain, and because pseudo-presuppositionalism self-destructs, biblical apologetics is the only approach that gives a safe platform for these classical, evidential, practical, and existential arguments. Precisely because we do not depend on them and do not claim too much for them, they can now be fully unleashed without destroying our case or compromising our intellectual integrity.

### **Questions and Exercises**

- When defending the faith against unbelievers, do they manage to give you any trouble? What sorts of people are they – students, teachers, parents? In what contexts do you converse with them about the gospel? What kinds of arguments do they use to challenge your faith?
- Why do you find some these objections difficult to answer? Is it because you either consciously or unconsciously sympathize with some of the anti-biblical assumptions behind these objections, so that you cannot see through their fallacious nature? What are these anti-biblical assumptions? Why do you sympathize with them? What can you do about this sinful sympathy for anti-biblical thinking?
- How do you perceive these unbelievers? Do you regard them as intelligent, upright, and compassionate, only that they have not yet accepted the gospel? Is this what Scripture says about unbelievers? What does it really say about them? And why is it that you have been holding to an unbiblical estimation of non-Christians? If Scripture does not teach it, who taught it to you?
- Upon examining what Scripture really says about the unbelievers, how does this information influence your perception of them? And how does this in turn influence the way that you interact with them and whether you are intimidated by them?
- What are the differences between classical apologetics and evidential apologetics? We mentioned that there are insoluble problems with both approaches, but of the two, which approach is superior? Why?

- Examine several versions of the cosmological argument. Do they employ different starting points? Why? What problems are the apologists attempting to avoid with the selection of these starting points? And what peculiarities in these premises are they trying to exploit? Are they successful?
- Obtain at least two complete presentations of pseudo-presuppositionalism. Use only the best examples from its leading and most trusted proponents. Read them, and then refute them. In the process, consider what they say about sensation, intuition, induction, and science both before and after they assert presuppositionalism as the solution. Is their so-called presuppositionalism able to answer the very arguments that they use against evidentialism? Or does it crumble under the same criticisms? Explain and demonstrate your conclusions.
- Locate either a written debate or the transcript of an oral debate between an atheist and a pseudo-presuppositionalist. Preferably, both of them should be the most highly regarded and established representatives in their fields.

You will find that the atheist loses the debate. At the same time, since his opponent is a *pseudo*-presuppositionalist, you will find that his defeat is not as decisive as you might prefer or expect. You might find that the believer allows his opponent to get away with many false assumptions. This is because, being a *pseudo*-presuppositionalist, he also shares many of these anti-biblical assumptions. In fact, in some contexts, such as when he attempts to refute biblical rationalism, he might admit that these anti-biblical assumptions even epistemologically precede his own Christian presuppositions, that he requires them to know about Christianity in the first place.

Since atheism is so easy to defeat, the Christian can always have the upper hand, but the weakness and inconsistency that you perceive come from the internal contradictions of pseudo-presuppositionalism. With this understanding, go through the debate again and devise better arguments and refutations than those offered by pseudo-presuppositionalism.

Then, turn your attention to the pseudo-presuppositionalist and refute him. If he is truly a pseudo-presuppositionalist, you should be able to refute him just as quickly and thoroughly as you do the atheist. However, the atheist is not able to perform such a refutation since he is bound by his own anti-biblical presuppositions, the same ones that the pseudo-presuppositionalist affirms. Once you abandon these false principles, you are able to refute both sides with equal ease. That said, an unbeliever who is willing to sacrifice his own claim to rationality can push toward mutual destruction when debating a pseudo-presuppositionalist who shares the same anti-biblical assumptions.

- How do you use the word "reason"? What do you mean by it? Consider how you use the word in theological and philosophical discussions. Do you find any unbiblical baggage and unnecessary assumptions in how you use it? Some people assume a full-

blown theory of epistemology with the word. Do you think they are aware of this? And do you think they can justify this? What are the problems with it?

- What is biblical apologetics, biblical presuppositionalism, biblical foundationalism, or biblical rationalism? Explain its theological and biblical basis. And explain how it proceeds in practice, in an actual debate. Note whether your understanding of this approach is too mechanical, and if you are reducing it to a mere formula, to be memorized and recited. This is a common flaw that hinders the effective use of biblical apologetics.
- Initiate informal debates against at least two unbelievers. Attempt to keep your side of the debate friendly and without any rhetorical flair. The rhetorical aspect of debate is a legitimate study, but at this time we are concerned with the strictly rational side of apologetics. If you debate only two unbelievers for this exercise, it is preferable to choose one atheist, and one follower of a non-Christian religion. Then, rate your performance. If you fail to attain overwhelming victory without any strain or effort, if it requires more than 3 to 10 seconds to devise a refutation to each of an opponent's arguments, no matter how complex, or if you hesitate on even one of the objections from an unbeliever, it is highly recommended that you review our materials on biblical apologetics.<sup>5</sup>
- Cite or find examples of arguments that are rooted in other approaches to apologetics, from arguments that concern history, culture, literature, and other areas. Refute them. You should find that they cannot withstand the simplest rational analysis as to their validity or even relevance. As a defense of or proof for the Christian faith, you should be able to annihilate each of these arguments in under 3 to 5 seconds.
- Consider what happens when an apologist engages an unbeliever by mainly using one of these methods. How would a debate between them proceed? Also, consider what happens when a pseudo-presuppositionalist adopts these arguments. What happens in terms of the rationality and the consistency of his system? What could happen to him in debate? Now consider how a biblical apologist looks at these arguments. Does he consider them necessary? If not, does he find any use for them? How would he use them? What effect can he produce with them? Will they backfire on him? Explain your answer.

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<sup>5</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, Apologetics in Conversation, and Captive to Reason*.

## PART 4

Our approach to apologetics ought to be biblical and rational, and biblical rationalism is the only option. The previous chapter, however, does not include an explanation of biblical apologetics or practical instructions on how to apply it, and neither will we go into detail about that now. This is because these have been extensively discussed in our other publications, and you are advised to study and review them.<sup>6</sup>

Without repeating what I have said in other places, I will add something here that should prove immensely helpful to the budding biblical apologist. I am referring to the deficiencies of a mechanical understanding and practice of apologetics, including the use of formula in conversation and debate.

Sometimes people ask me if I could summarize for them everything they need to know about biblical apologetics in two or three paragraphs, or to reduce my entire approach into a short list of bullet points. Indeed, the approach can be meaningfully described in a few paragraphs, but it is obvious that these individuals do not want a summary because they wish to reduce what they understand into a convenient form, but they wish to study a summary so that they can understand and learn to use it in the first place. However, a short summary leaves out so many details, including the arguments that support the asserted premises, that it will offer limited help to someone who does not already understand this approach to apologetics. It cannot enable a person who is confused about it to understand it and implement it.

To draw an example from another system of apologetics, consider the cosmological argument. Even with something like this, it will not do just to memorize the steps. A person must understand the principles behind that argument, and how to defend each premise. Each opponent is different, and might have different objections to each step, or might present these objections in different ways. A person who merely memorizes the steps and the words can easily become lost in a conversation or debate.

Some people submit their own summaries and paraphrases for my approval. Although the effort is commendable, they suffer from significant inaccuracies, and usually they are too mechanical. Most of the time, their attempts betray their failure to grasp the essence of this approach. As I have always insisted, it does not consist of a formula or a series of steps, but a combination of a body of knowledge and a way of thinking – that is, biblical knowledge and rational thinking.

This body of knowledge is that which we defend, and with which we attack. This way of thinking is what governs our application of this body of knowledge in our interaction with unbiblical ideas. Since what is biblical is also rational, we can simply say that the

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<sup>6</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, Apologetics in Conversation, and Captive to Reason*.

essence of biblical apologetics is the biblical way of thinking. What appear to be recognizable "steps" in my presentation of this approach are its manifestations and not its essence. In other words, how it is presented can vary depending on the context, such as what kinds of ideas we are seeking to counteract.

This is why biblical rationalism carries unlimited power and flexibility in debate when it is correctly understood and practiced. It does not matter whether it is a written dialogue or an oral debate. It does not matter how the conversation starts or where it strays. It does not matter if the opponent is a child or an adult, a novice or an expert in a field. It does not matter even if the opponent's belief system is foreign, unknown, or randomly invented – the biblical apologist adapts as the debate proceeds. He can use whatever he has available to him for various purposes. He can bring into the conversation what he understands from other fields to construct secondary or ad hominem arguments, or he can know nothing but Christ crucified. In every case, he is assured of victory.

Sometimes a person would study our materials and begin to practice biblical apologetics with great success, but then stumble over a particular argument or objection from an unbeliever. He suddenly does not know how to proceed, as if biblical apologetics does not apply to *this* challenge. In every case, and for whatever reason, the trouble is that the person has stopped applying the biblical way of thinking.

Let us construct an illustration from an unbeliever's perspective. Consider the morality of a relativist, who says that there is no absolute standard of good and evil, but that everything is "relative." A typical challenge might be, "Then, murder might also be good, and rape might not be evil." In itself this response presents no logical refutation of relativism, but only one of its implications. The relativist only has to say, "That's right," and move on. Yet, some relativists are stumped – not because relativism has been refuted, but because he has stopped thinking like a relativist. Of course, relativism is false and can be refuted, but the point is that the relativist does not have to lose the debate *right at this point*, that is, if he will just continue to think like a relativist.

Apply this to biblical apologetics. Some objections cause beginning biblical apologists to stumble, not because they refute the biblical worldview, but because they temporarily derail these Christians from thinking consistently with it. The difference is that, whereas relativism is false and will therefore crumble under rational analysis, the biblical worldview is perfect, and exhibits greater and greater brilliance the more it is scrutinized. This can be demonstrated, however, only if the apologist persists in a biblical way of thinking no matter what questions and objections are brought up.

Perhaps some of those who are too rigid with biblical apologetics make the mistake of thinking that the arguments themselves are a body of knowledge. They should be asking, "What should inform my thinking? And what should direct my thinking?" – it is revelation that informs (or provides correct content for thinking), and reason that directs (or ensures validity in thinking). But instead, they tend to ask, "What should I say to answer *this* question, *that* objection?"

They tend to memorize answers when they should learn the body of knowledge and way of thinking from which all answers arise. And this is why they would ask what to say to a particular challenge, but when they encounter even a slight variation of the same thing, they must return to inquire again. Maybe memorized responses and convenient formulas provide a sense of security, but this is deceptive, because if they depend on these things, they in fact become more prone to failure in debate.

After the above warning and explanation, it might appear ironic that I am now going to present a formula for limited use in apologetics. However, it is precisely because I am about to present this formula that the preceding comments are necessary, since many people are already too prone to become mechanical in conversation and debate about the faith.

Although formulas should never be necessary, there are at least two acceptable uses for them.

First, formulas can help the beginner and the less accomplished apologist. The formula that I am about to give you will help to begin and sustain a logical analysis of your opponent in debate. It will give you something reliable to fall back on, and thus boost your confidence. But keep in mind that in the long run, dependence on any formula will hinder a person's development, and so it is best to be weaned from its use.

Second, the deliberate use of a formula in debate can serve to humiliate an opponent. That is, one way to expose the foolishness of a non-Christian's philosophy and the ease with which a Christian can refute it is to defeat him through the obvious and repeated use of a simple formula. It demonstrates that his beliefs cannot withstand any rational analysis, and that he cannot answer even the most basic questions, things that even a toddler can ask. This practice also makes it easy for observers to perceive the inferiority of the unbeliever's position.

Then, another reason why I wish to present a formula here is to show you what a good one should look like. Given that it is often already a mistake to use formulas in debate, the problem is further aggravated when these formulas are lengthy, complicated, and inflexible. There are arguments that require a perfect setup – an attentive opponent who does not interrupt, an appropriate starting point for the conversation, and a step-by-step procession from one item to another in the prescribed order. If the argument has any punch at all, it is neutralized when the opponent objects to a premise in the middle of the presentation, so that the whole debate becomes sidetracked.

In contrast, the formula that I will introduce below is simple, flexible, and robust. In fact, it can function in the midst of total chaos. Moreover, except for the formula itself, there is no information to memorize. That said, it has major limitations, but we will discuss them later.

And here is the formula: "So? Why? Really?" This is it. This is the entire formula. It is simple but powerful. Although there are only three words in it, using nothing but these

three words, any believer of any aptitude can crush any student, any professor, and any variety or combination of non-Christians.

The word "So?" refers to *relevance*. If you would stop to consider all the objections against Christianity that you have encountered, you might be surprised to find that many of them are irrelevant to the debate. And even when the topic could be relevant, the unbelievers often fail to show this relevance. The same problem of irrelevance occurs when they present the case for their own positions. Therefore, one way to neutralize their arguments and objections is to question the relevance of what is said, and to demand the opponent to show this relevance.

The word "Why?" refers to *justification*. Many statements presented as arguments are in fact only assertions. You must ask the opponent why his assertions are true. In response, it is likely that he give you another set of unjustified assertions, so that you will need to ask "why" again. But notice that the other two words are also available to you. You can ask "So?" – that is, you can question the relevance between the two assertions or sets of assertions, and demand your opponent to show this relevance. With only these two words, you can expose the fact that the opponent's position lacks any kind of justification, and that not only are his objections irrelevant, but even the propositions within his own worldview are irrelevant to one another.

The word "Really?" refers to *validity*. In this context, validity does not refer to the truth of a position, but to the correct form of an argument. A "valid" argument is one in which the conclusion follows from the premises by necessary inference – that is, the premises *must* logically produce that conclusion, and it is the only possible conclusion given the premises. The question "Really?" is therefore posed against the relationship between premises and conclusions. So when you ask for justification for an assertion made by an unbeliever, and he provides you with an argument to support this assertion, then besides questioning the relevance of the argument, you should also question whether it is logically valid. Reasoning from intuition, sensation, induction, and the scientific method are all invalid, since they all proceed in logical leaps, and none of their conclusions are reached logical necessity.

These three words apply to all non-Christians arguments, whether those that attack the Christian faith or those that defend non-Christian positions. As such, the formula can serve both offensive and defensive purposes in apologetics. Since the arguments and objections from non-Christians are never consistently relevant, justified, and valid, anything that they say in conversation or debate will quickly crumble under these three words. In fact, even one of these three words can destroy all non-Christian belief systems. None of them can continue to withstand a persistent pressure to show relevance, justification, or validity.

Now, with all that I have said against formulas, if this one can defeat all non-Christian arguments and objections, then is it not a good formula? Should we not make it a regular part of our apologetics? The answer is that almost anything can defeat non-Christian arguments and objections, and the fact that something works does not make it a good or



complete solution. Instead of aiming for the minimum, we must strive to be thorough in our refutation of non-Christian belief systems, completely destroying everything that they believe in, and then we must faithfully present the total biblical worldview.

The three words in this simple formula remind us about the questions that we should ask during a conversation or debate. Sometimes when Christians come across anti-biblical arguments, they tend to go by whether they "feel" right to them. If they can sense nothing wrong, then they do not know how to respond. This happens frequently with those believers whose minds have not been renewed by sound theology. The formula reminds them to be deliberate in examining the argument for relevance, justification, and validity.

On the other hand, the skilled biblical apologist possesses superior intellectual reflex. Since his thinking has been trained to follow deeply ingrained biblical and rational paths, his perception is quicker and clearer, and he naturally comes up with stronger arguments and countermoves. He does as if by instinct that which the beginner must deliberate upon. This is why rather than be satisfied with a decent formula, the biblical apologist must strive to make his craft into a natural reflex.

Moreover, the formula given in this chapter does not include any actual information, such as the biblical view of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, soteriology, or any other doctrine. It is possible to devise a more complex one that includes some of this information, but it is certain that the full scope and depth of biblical rationalism can never be reduced to a manageable formula. The one in this chapter is nothing more than a convenient way to remember one small aspect of biblical apologetics.

Of course, even when using this formula, the believer should usually vary his expressions. He could keep on saying, "So? So? So?" But unless he is trying to humiliate his opponent by the obvious use of a rigid line of questioning, he should demand proof of relevance in other ways. For example, he could say, "How is this relevant to the debate?" Or, "Even if this point is correct, how does it refute Christianity?" Or, with the question of validity, he can say, "I asked you to justify your assertion and you gave me an argument, but your conclusion does not really follow from your premises. Just because A and B are true does not mean that C is true."

I cannot stress enough the need to be weaned from the use of formulas and rigid tactics in apologetics. The strength and beauty of the biblical approach is unleashed only when we move on from bullet points and memorized answers to where we can maintain natural interaction with unbelievers using a biblical way of thinking. What we call biblical rationalism is just another name for the mind of Christ, and when we interact with the unbelievers from the mind of Christ, our encounters with them will have less to do with methods and techniques, but for them it will become more and more like an actual conversation with the Risen Lord. The biblical apologist is one who thinks like Christ, not just one who has memorized tactics and answers.

## Questions and Exercises

- Do you have the desire to reduce biblical apologetics to a simplistic form? Why? Do you desire this because of the convenience, for a sense of security, or for some other reason? What are the advantages of such a summary? What are the disadvantages and potential pitfalls? Is any summary sufficient? In what ways can oversimplification be misleading and self-defeating?
- Have you ever been stumped by a non-Christian argument or objection? What was the nature of the difficulty? Did you have trouble because of a lack of information? Could you have responded and defeated the non-Christian anyway, even without this information? How? If it was for some other reason, what was it?
- The simple formula presented in this chapter is able to refute every page of every non-Christian textbook in your entire curriculum. To put it another way, whereas biblical revelation can withstand the analysis, the formula can destroy all human claims to knowledge in all of history. There are several exercise you can perform to demonstrate and apply this.

Open one of your textbooks to a section where it presents a claim of some sort, preferably one that is widely endorsed and supported by arguments. Make sure you read as much about it as is necessary to understand the context. Using only the three words in the formula, refute it. If you are a beginner, you should be able to do this within 3 to 10 seconds. Any biblical apologist with a normal level of competence should be able to refute it by the time he finishes reading it, if not way before.

Now, open any textbook found anywhere on university campus to any page. Make sure you read the page or the section within the proper context so as not to misrepresent what it is claiming. Using only the three words in the formula, refute it. Repeat this as many times as you wish with as many textbooks, papers, and journals that you can find. Locate something at random, or attempt to find the best of the best. Refute them. Again, nothing should take longer than 10 seconds to refute.

- Assuming that you are successful, what does this say about human methods of investigation and non-Christian claims to knowledge? Are non-Christians intelligent? Do they know anything – anything – at all? Remember that you have been restricted to use only the three words in the formula. You have not been using the full resources of biblical apologetics.
- If non-Christians are so thoroughly ignorant and irrational, then why attend a secular university at all? One proper perspective might be to think that a secular university is not a place to learn rational truth, but to learn about what non-Christians believe, and by understanding what they believe, we are able to function in a non-Christian society. If we desire to learn truth, we must learn it from God himself, who has revealed it in the Bible. Are there other reasons to attend a secular institution?

- Teach the formula to a child, preferably one who is under ten-years-old. Ask him to refute, using only the three words, the non-Christian claims and arguments that you have just refuted in the above exercises. The child might have much more trouble understanding the non-Christian ideas than the formula. If so, explain them to him, and make sure he does not take the non-Christian claims and arguments out of context.

If possible, arrange for the child to speak with a professor in your university. There is no need to call it a debate, but have the child ask questions about the professor's field of expertise and to politely refute everything – *everything* – that the professor says using only the three words. Make sure that you train the child to persistently think in terms of the three words and what they represent, since it will be improper to coach him during his conversation with the professor. The point is to illustrate that even a child can refute any non-Christian professor of any field using this simple formula alone.

- Arrange to debate five to twenty non-Christians *at the same time*. Preferably they will take different positions on various issues so that there will be some variety. Do not invite only atheists, but also adherents of non-Christian religions. Using the three words of the formula, debate and refute all of them at the same time. The precise format is up to you and the unbelievers. They can take turns, or speak whenever there is something to say. You can debate each one individually, or encourage them to collaborate. Find ways to make things difficult for yourself. Be creative. Now, since this might be a rare opportunity, after a short while you might wish to stop limiting yourself to the three words and proceed to employ all your skills and resources as a biblical apologist. Keep track of the debate and make sure you achieve decisive and overwhelming victory against every person.

Note: I strongly oppose the idea of practicing or testing apologetics. "Practice makes perfect" is false. It is possible to practice all the time and not improve, but if you understand the biblical principles of apologetics, it is possible to do it very well even on the first attempt. When we are doing apologetics, we are dealing with people's souls, and we should not practice at their expense. So when I prescribe these exercises where other people are involved, I am not at all encouraging you to try apologetics or to play apologetics, but to do apologetics. These exercises are designed to display the power and flexibility of biblical rationalism, as well as to expose the foolishness and impotence of non-Christian thinking. As with ordinary situations, our goal is still to promote the gospel and God's honor.

- Obtain written presentations of non-biblical approaches to apologetics – classical, evidential, pseudo-presuppositional, cultural, literary, and so on. Using only the three words of our formula, refute all of them. Although the Christian contents attached to these presentations might generate some confusion for you, none of them should take you much longer to refute than any non-Christian belief system. Allow yourself 20 to 30 seconds at the most for each.

- Consider your own understanding of the Christian faith. Take time to think through your understanding of every major topic in theology and philosophy – this is your belief system. Now attempt to refute it with the three words in our formula. Be thorough – do not hurry through this. If you have never done it before, a complete theological and philosophical self-examination should take days, weeks, and months, not minutes or hours.

A consistently biblical theology should be immune to such an attack. Note the areas where you are vulnerable, then spend as much time and effort as necessary to fix them. In some cases, you will find that the problem is only a matter of proper articulation. But in other cases, you might find that your present position is unbiblical and irrational, and must be abandoned for a biblical and rational view.

## **PART 5**

When it comes to engaging anti-Christian ideas, the two major groups of people that you must deal with in the university are the students and the professors. From the spiritual standpoint, they fall under the same category – they are unbelievers – so that we take the same philosophical stance toward both groups. But from a social perspective, there are marked differences in the positions that they occupy in our lives, and these differences carry practical ramifications as to how we must relate to them when preaching the gospel, defending the faith, or just standing our ground. Therefore, for our purpose, it will be helpful to consider the two groups separately.

Then, let us not forget the anti-Christian ideas coming from those who call themselves believers. When you strive to articulate your faith with biblical faithfulness and precision, sometimes the strongest opposition will come from Christians, or those who claim to be Christians. But there is no need to give them special attention here, since it remains that most of them will be either students or professors, so that our discussion will apply to them as well.

Now, we will not spend much time on the students, since they are your peers, and there are no special restrictions when it comes to how you must relate to them.

Perhaps the first thing you should know is that just because a person is a college student does not make him intelligent or rational. In fact, his pride and what little he thinks he knows might make him even more careless. The two implications for apologetics is that there is no need to be intimidated and that it is a mistake to assume that your opponent will readily understand anything about the ultimate questions or the rules for valid argumentation. It is impossible to underestimate unbelievers – most Christians make the mistake of overestimating them, and this generates a mental block in their own minds that prevents them from optimal performance in debate.

As for the practical aspect of dealing with students, I recommend for most cases the use of informal and extended conversations when discussing matters of faith. By "extended" conversations, I refer to repeated discussions that can last from days to months.

Some Christians are used to packaging the entire gospel and its defense in a ten-minute presentation. But this hit-and-run approach is often less than ideal. It takes time to say all the things that you need to say, to dismantle your listener's beliefs, and to fully present your own. Therefore, it is best to take the long-term approach, and maintain communication with the unbelievers. Of course, sometimes this is impossible, God will often do a quick work of conversion through a five-minute presentation of the gospel. But this should not be the norm. There is no reason to hurry with people that you will see over and over again.

How a conversation on faith begins is also important. Some teachings on evangelism assert that there is something defective with your faith unless you inform someone that you are a believer or preach the gospel to him within the first several hours or days of meeting him. And there is certainly no trace of the Spirit of Christ in you if he still does not know that you are a believer after a whole week! Why, you must be quite ashamed of the gospel.

However, there is no requirement in Scripture as to how soon you must let someone know that you are a believer or preach the gospel to the person upon meeting him. Binding the conscience with man-made rules on this matter is a problem at least as severe as the one that it is trying to fix. Of course, if for some reason you think that you should be the one who preaches the gospel to a certain person, and if you have no expectation of meeting that person again, then by all means initiate a conversation on the subject. There is no need to hesitate.

But if it is likely that you will meet the person again and again, then it is often best to wait for an appropriate opportunity. Perhaps this person will bring up a topic that can naturally transition into a discussion about the gospel. This way the person is committed to carry the conversation to a natural conclusion.

Of course, you can just walk up to someone and say, "Do you know Jesus?" And he will say, "No," and walk away. This is fine when you are using a machine gun tactic in street evangelism, and you will get some people's attention this way. But with people you know, and whom you will meet over and over again, a natural entry into the topic is far superior. In fact, you can spend weeks with a gentle application of the "So? Why? Really?" formula to undermine the person's confidence in his own intelligence and belief system before transitioning into an explicit discussion about the ultimate questions and the biblical worldview. So this is not a call to be passive, but to be patient and strategic.

Things are different when dealing with professors. Students have no authority over you, and they do not give exams and grades. Professors, however, are supposed to teach knowledge, and they expect you to demonstrate understanding in that which they teach. This is fine in principle, but problems occur when they teach anti-biblical ideas as if they are truth, and then expect you to accept them.

Biology courses offer some of the most explicit examples of this. At the beginning of one of the many biology courses I took, the professor stated that when it comes to evolution, "we need not see any conflict with the Genesis account as long as we do not take it literally." Well, of course! All conflicts of ideas can be neutralized as long as you do not take one side literally. But the question is why we should take science seriously rather than the Bible.

We have shown elsewhere that science is not only unreliable, but that it has no rational contact with reality at all, and that all its conclusions are false. Its method precludes discovery of any true information about anything. So here we will not repeat an analysis

of science, but given these facts about science, we must consider how to deal with professors who affirm anti-Christian ideas on the basis of science.

There are at least three reasons to avoid making the actual scientific evidences and arguments the primary battleground.

First, since your professor is an expert in his field, it is less likely that you will beat him at his own game, that is, if you completely adhere to his terms and the context he constructs. This is not to say that your professor is correct given his methods – no, I am saying that he can bluff better than you can when you play his game by his rules. He knows far more about the jargons, names, dates, theories, experiments, publications, and other information related to his field. If he wishes, he could even make things up as he goes along, and you would not know when he is telling the truth and when he is not.

Second, not all scientific alternatives to anti-biblical science are correct. For example, you could attempt a scientific refutation of evolution with intelligent design, but some of the things asserted in intelligent design publications might be wrong. You must be able to tell the difference, and there is no guarantee that you will always be able to discuss intelligent design better than your professor. Worse, if you happen to endorse some details in the intelligent design arguments that turn out to be false, then your opponent can seize on this as a demonstration of your lack of information and judgment.

Third, since the scientific method itself is irrational and can never attain any knowledge, any information about reality, to defend truth based on scientific arguments is ultimately futile. If you are able to gain the upper hand at all, the best that you can do is to show that you are less wrong, and not that Christianity is necessarily correct. If the point is to refute false ideas and promote the biblical faith, then it is necessary to lay aside false methods of discovery and have a truly rational discussion on the ultimate questions concerning knowledge and reality.

Therefore, from the perspective of winning the debate, the most effective strategy is not to challenge one scientific theory with another, but to challenge science itself, and show that it is impossible to know anything by science in the first place. The arguments needed to do this are numerous and irrefutable, and have been presented elsewhere in our publications. In essence, we challenge the assumptions behind science, such as the unity and the stability of the universe, the reliability of sensation and induction, the formal logical validity of scientific reasoning, and so on. The upshot of this is the total humiliation of human speculation. Whereas the scientist can say, "From the perspective of science, which cannot find truth, here are the conclusions," he cannot claim that these conclusions have anything to do with the truth about reality.

That said, the most rational approach is not always practical or even possible in some situations. It is unlikely that a professor will allow you to hijack a class on biology to discuss the finer details of epistemology and the philosophy of science. And you must remember that a professor is still a person – he can be sinful, unfair, and wicked. If he is a non-Christian, then no matter what he says, he is not a seeker after truth. He does not care

that science is false, as long as there is no one to challenge him on that. This is why you must exercise caution, or else you might find yourself suffering unnecessary persecution at his hands.

Here we can make only some brief suggestions about how to behave during class and exams.

With even minimal competence in biblical apologetics, you can easily humiliate your professors before all the students in the classroom. However, it is almost never appropriate to do this, although there are biblically sanctioned exceptions. One of the most abused verses in apologetics is 1 Peter 3:15, which says that we must answer for our faith "with gentleness and respect" when dealing with those in authority. It is often taken out of context and given universal application, but the verse indeed applies to how you deal with your professors, since they are in authority over you. You might find their comments just as irrational and irreverent as those that come from the students, but with them you must exercise special patience and restraint.

Besides the biblical restrictions, there is also a practical backlash to inappropriate outbursts in the classroom. One of my high school English courses had us read Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and during a discussions on the early part of the work, I spoke up and corrected the teacher on something she said about the Bible, and then I corrected Milton as well.

My comments were indeed accurate, and my teacher and Milton were mistaken. But the way I spoke was so sudden and blunt that the teacher went into a mild shock and the students appeared afraid of me for the rest of the semester. So, although it was probably appropriate to speak up against the misrepresentation of Scripture by my teacher and Milton, it would have been better if I had done it in a way that furthered the Christian faith.

To correct the overbearing impression that I generated, I began to show patience and restraint when it came to biblical and religious matters, although I still spoke up without compromise. Meanwhile, I made sure that I remained a regular contributor to class discussions and faithfully worked on all the assignments. The result was that, although some damaged had been done by my initial error, I was looked to as the class's authority when it came to Scripture and Christianity, and thus was granted opportunities to correct misrepresentations and to briefly expound on biblical doctrines as a natural part of class discussions.

In most cases, the worst that one can do is to take over the class and preach a full-length sermon. Even if the professor can tolerate it, which is unlikely, the students will not. They do not pay expensive tuitions to listen to you.

Yet sometimes you must say something when the honor of God is at stake and when silence seems to signal agreement. Unbelievers must be challenged regarding their beliefs. Also, there might be other Christians in the class less capable than you in



discerning truth from error, and in resisting the onslaughts of unbelief – they are quietly suffocating under the abuse. A comment from you, or even an innocent-sounding question that serves to undermine an anti-biblical statement, might serve to bring hope and refreshment to their weary souls.

One thing you can do is to take the long-term approach, to plant seeds in the form of simple statements and questions – here a little, there a little – as you find opportunities to instill doubt against the non-Christian view and to incite interest in the Christian faith. Without saying too much about it, you might even mention the name of an author or a book that addresses the topic from a Christian perspective. But do this sparingly. The temperaments of the students and professors vary, so wisdom must dictate what you should say in each situation. Be patient, and persist in prayer, and it might be that one day you will have the opportunity to speak in greater detail on the matter in class, or more likely, you will have an audience with the students and even the professors outside of the classroom.

Assignments and examinations present another difficulty to a Christian student. Depending on the professor, although some materials are up for debate, others are affirmed as well-established facts. They are assumed to be true when assignments and examinations are given, and the student is expected to affirm and apply them.

For assignments and examinations, a biology professor is unlikely to ask questions that permit doubt regarding the theory of evolution, but he is going to ask questions whose answer depend on the assumption that evolution is true. Similarly, a physics professor will ask questions that assume his own view of the origin and operation of the universe. Both of these professors, of course, will assume the rational validity of the scientific method and scientific reasoning.

Therefore, the challenge for the Christian is to maximize his performance in such a setting while standing firm in the faith and refusing to compromise. He must demonstrate that he understands the course materials without even hinting at the idea that he agrees with any of it.

Part of the solution includes the careful and deliberate use of language. When you know what answer the professor expects in an exam question, but the correct answer is contrary to your faith, you must not state it as fact. But you can show that you understand what the professor is looking for by attributing the answer to the appropriate source in the context of the course.

So, instead of just stating the expected answer, say, "According to Darwin," or "According to the textbook (or the author of the textbook)," or state your professor's name. If appropriate, you might mention that not every expert in the field agrees with this expected answer. This makes it even more clear that you are not necessarily in agreement with what has been taught. However, there is no need to write a full-length rebuttal unless this is what the question asks from you or allows you to do.

It will require some skill to prevent the prose from becoming too predictable, but when this is done properly, a Christian student can demonstrate competence with the course materials and at the same time avoid compromising his faith. As long as your language refuses to embrace the anti-Christian teachings, you are leaving room for further disagreement and discussion.

In all my years in school, there was only one course in which my answers affected my grade in a negative way. Greatly vexed by shoddy anti-Christian scholarship throughout the semester, I was more blatant than usual, and in an exam question even used several biblical invectives against one of the professor's heroes. Anyway, the lower grade had no effect on my future, and I can look back and affirm that I did not betray the Lord, although there was a small price to pay.

This advice would not solve all your problems. For example, it is harder to get around multiple choice questions. College courses tend to use fewer of them, but otherwise, your general speech and behavior in class and how you answer essay questions become much more important. You must make it clear that you do not necessarily agree with what is being taught. Nevertheless, what I have said about the use of language can help you begin thinking about how best to handle your own circumstances.

Again, keep in mind that you are not in fact dealing with assignments and examinations but people – your work will be graded by professors and their teaching assistants. These people regard their own expertise with great esteem, and if you insult their work or even their entire field of study, there might be a price to pay. Therefore, do your best to avoid unnecessary persecution, but never compromise.

We have been using science to illustrate how you will encounter anti-Christian ideas in the university and how you might deal with them, but anti-Christian ideas can come in connection with any subject in the curriculum. Many of them are less obvious, but they exist even in courses in mathematics and foreign languages. After all, we are dealing with not only numbers and sounds, but with depraved people. How about classes in philosophy, religion, politics, and economics?

It is impossible to provide illustrations and suggestions for the whole curriculum, so we will conclude the chapter by making a brief note about literature, or fiction in particular. Keep in mind that at this time we are interested in only those texts that contain anti-Christian ideas.

Assuming that the author has at least a minimal level of competence, when he presents an argument in non-fiction prose, his purpose and position will tend to be relatively clear. First, the reader will realize that he is reading an argument, and he will find it easy to locate and understand the conclusion that the author is asserting. Then, the premises that support and lead to such a conclusion should be obvious also.

Now, since the asserted conclusion is so clear, right away the reader notices whether it is something that he accepts or rejects. And if it is something that he rejects, he puts up a

resistance against it. But because the premises are clear as well, the soundness of the argument and the validity of the reasoning process are easily examined. The reader must either be persuaded by the argument, or he must point out its flaws. Since the argument is so plain and direct, to reject its conclusion without finding any fault with it would expose one's irrational prejudice. In other words, when presented in this fashion, the substance of an argument resembles its appearance.

Things are not so clear when an opinion or argument is presented through fiction. This is because the conclusion is often unstated, and if there are supporting premises at all, they are also hidden, or described rather than explicitly stated. A person might not get the impression that the author is arguing for anything at all, but he might notice either an approving or unsettling feeling after reading the story. The author is indeed making a point, although he is doing this indirectly, in a way that bypasses the analysis and resistance of careless readers.

This is not to say that the author is always trying to deceive, or that his conclusion is necessarily false, but it is to point out that only gullible individuals are directly affected by fictional stories, when they communicate their points indirectly. Instead of speaking to our beliefs first, they attempt to generate certain feelings in us, which in turn might influence our beliefs.

What readers often forget is that the author possesses omnipotence in the context of his story – he can make anyone do or say whatever he wants. If he desires to make a character appear heroic, he can make him perform heroic deeds. And if he wishes to generate hatred toward a character, he can make this character do all kinds of despicable things. The readers must never lose sight of the fact that all details in a fictional story are given by the author – he made up everything – and as he does this he is not necessarily reflecting reality, but only how he perceives the world.

Therefore, when dealing with a piece of fiction, you must become a more active reader and thinker, taking an extra step to translate it into an argument. You must find the conclusion that the author is trying to assert and the premises that he uses to support it. If you confuse fiction with non-fiction, then you will tend to apply what happens in the fictional story to the world outside of the story. The author wants you to ask, "Given this is what happens in the story, what should I think about the world outside of the story?" But instead you should ask, "Why does the author make this happen in the story? Why does he make this character do such a thing? What is the author's agenda?" Once you have made the story into something direct and explicit, you have also made it something that you can confront and refute.

With stories that advance anti-Christian ideas, you might read of preachers and believers that act as despicable hypocrites, committing murder, theft, and adultery behind the scenes, while presenting a holy front for all to see. Of course it is true that many professing believers are hypocrites, but here we are also dealing with fictional stories, in which the author can make anything happen.

And what does this say about Christianity anyway? Does the Bible deny that some professing believers are not believers at all? And does the Bible say that true believers are perfect and sinless? A story about Christian hypocrites produces ill feelings toward Christians, and that is all there is to it. In any case, for every preacher who commits adultery in fiction, I can make an atheist pillage fifty villages, murder two hundred thousand children, and rape five million women. One story is just as easy to write as the other, and neither one proves anything.

### Questions and Exercises

- Besides the students and professors, what other groups of people do you have to deal with as a Christian? How do you preach and defend the gospel to them? How does your presentation or strategy differ? Why?
- From the standpoint of intellectual competence, it is impossible to underestimate non-Christians, since no estimation can be lower than the one that Scripture gives them. But is it possible to overestimate ourselves? If so, in what ways, and why? What are some of the problems that may arise from thus overestimating ourselves? And what can we do to regain a proper estimation of ourselves?
- What does it mean to have "informal and extended" conversations with our peers about Christ? What are the advantages to this approach? Are there disadvantages? Have you ever had one such conversation or series of conversations with anyone? If so, how did you perform? Did you maintain the right tone, intensity, and depth throughout the discussion?
- Many conversations in the Bible can be read in several seconds, but did any of them really last only several seconds, or did they last much longer? Consider John 4. How long did Jesus speak with the Samaritan woman? One can read from verse 7 to 26 in two minutes, but were the disciples away for only a hundred and twenty seconds (see v. 8 and 27)? Then, the woman went back to town, told the people about the conversation, and the people went out of town to see Jesus (v. 28-30), who then stayed another two days (v. 40).
- Provide biblical examples in which the characters involved spent hours or even days discussing the Christian faith. Consider Luke 24:13-35 and Acts 24:25-27, among many other examples. What implications can you derive from the realization that many biblical conversations lasted from hours to even years? I would suggest the principle that if you have the time, then take the time. Be slow and thorough. Do you agree?
- What is meant by the "hit-and-run" approach to evangelism or apologetics? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this approach? Have you ever successfully deployed such a method? Cite biblical examples that demonstrate this approach, but make sure that they indeed describe encounters that lasted no more than several

minutes. Note the details described. Just because you can read a passage in several seconds does not mean that the actual conversation did not take several hours.

- Have you ever initiated a conversation about the Christian faith without a natural lead-in to the topic? Cite examples from your experience in street evangelism or from your personal relationships. What did you say to bring up the topic? What did you do when the other person showed no interest, or tried to end the discussion? What did you do to continue? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this "brute force" approach? Are you good at it?
- Initiate a conversation about the Christian faith with any person you choose using the brute force approach. Preach the gospel, refute arguments, answer objections. Note everything that is significant about the process and outcome. Prepare to use this approach whenever necessary in the future.
- What does it mean to pray for and anticipate "natural opportunities" to begin conversations about the Christian faith? Are these opportunities rare, or do you fail to take advantage of them because they are not always obvious? But whenever you managed to recognize these opportunities and started conversations with them, did you notice any difference in the length, depth, and intensity of the discussions as compared to conversations that you initiated by brute force?
- Begin to watch for natural opportunities to begin conversations about the Christian faith in your daily interactions with people, especially with your peers. Choose several of these opportunities and redirect the conversations to the Christian faith. Note everything that is significant about the process and outcome. Prepare to use this approach again in the future.
- Without mentioning that you are a Christian, and without making the conversation about Christianity (at least at first), find a number of non-Christians who claim to base their own beliefs and their rejection of religion on science.

Then, without helping them, (1) ask them to list the assumptions behind the scientific method, (2) ask them to list every step in the scientific method, (3) ask them to show how one step leads to the next step in the scientific method, and (4) ask them to defend the idea that this method can discover anything about reality at all. You may find that, among those who adamantly insist on their reliance on science, very few if any of them can answer even the first or the second question. And none of them can answer the third and fourth.

Now it is obvious that they cannot defend their reliance on science, or even show that they understand science, ask them if they are going to doubt their beliefs or change their beliefs about anything. What do they say? Do they behave in a rational manner? Are these intelligent people?

- If possible, initiate a conversation with a professor who specializes in a scientific subject, preferably biology or physics. Repeat the above exercise. You will find that his answers are more convoluted than those that the students gave you, and he might be able to answer questions (1) and (2). But you will find that he is also unable to answer questions (3) and (4). Again, are these rational people? Are they intelligent?
- From any college text book, look up an explanation of the scientific method. Refute it. It should take no longer than 3 to 10 seconds.
- From any college textbook, look up a description of an experiment performed using the scientific method. Refute it. It should take no longer than 3 to 10 seconds.
- From any college textbook, look up the explanation and proof of a scientific theory. This can be any recorded scientific theory from any period of human history, but preferably one that is considered well-established. Refute it. It should take no longer than 3 to 10 seconds. Repeat this exercise as many times as you wish. What does this demonstrate about science? And what does this say about the people who rely on it as the way to understand reality?
- Pick any undergraduate student and ask him to tell you his position about an issue that he cares about. It can be his opinion on religion, politics, science, history, or anything at all. Then, ask him to give you an argument to support his opinion. But make him show his work – ask him to prove his conclusion step-by-step, showing how each premise is true and how it leads to the next, and then finally to the conclusion.

For example, if he contends that a certain scientific theory is true, do not let him get away with saying, "Because the evidence supports it." Ask him to cite one piece of evidence from which he could validly infer the conclusion. If he refers to an experiment that allegedly proves the theory, without even mentioning the problems with the scientific method, ask him to specify each step of the experiment, including the assumptions behind the experiment, the reasons for choosing each variable, and so on, and describe how the experiment proves the conclusion.

Unless you chance upon an especially conscientious young man or woman, my guess is that you might have to ask several hundred students before one can even come close to doing what I have just described. In many cases, you will find that they cannot tell you how the evidences and experiments that they cite are even relevant to the conclusions that they wish to assert. Yet they appear confident, and consider themselves intelligent. This will only make their failure so much more obvious when confronted by a skillful biblical apologist.

- Besides the disadvantages of evidentialism mentioned in a previous chapter, what are the additional disadvantages of evidentialism when dealing with a professor?

- Have you ever argued with a professor in class because he made anti-Christian assertions? Did the debate become hostile? What was the students' attitude toward you? Were they intrigued, irritated, or what? In any case, did you win? Sometimes people say that they do not want to "win the argument, but lose the convert." Why is this a stupid statement? What might be the true reason why these people do not want to argue for the faith? What is wrong with them?
- What is the correct interpretation and application of 1 Peter 3:15? How is this verse usually misused? Cite at least one example from a book on Christian apologetics. Besides the spiritual crime of distorting Scripture, what damage does an abuse of this verse do to the practice of apologetics? Why is the verse relevant to the relationship between student and professor? How can you apply this verse to your situation? In other words, how does this affect how you argue for the faith before a professor?
- Have you silently endured while a professor attacked the Christian faith in class? If so, did your conscience rebuke you for not speaking up? What could you have done? What would it mean to be "wise as a serpent" in such a situation? In other words, how can you stand up for the faith without being foolish about it or inciting unnecessary persecution?
- Discuss with other Christian students on how they handle attacks against the Christian faith in class. Do they have a method? Do they consider it a problem at all? Do they endure silently, retort recklessly, or what? Are their approaches biblical? And what outcomes do their methods produce?
- When it comes to assignments and examinations, how do you show that you understand the course materials without expressing agreement to the anti-Christian ideas? Do you have a biblical and consistent approach? Share it with other Christian students.
- Find an example in which an author uses non-fiction to advance an argument. Identify his agenda and the conclusion that he asserts. Locate the premises that supposedly lead to his conclusion. Refute every part of the argument. Repeat the exercise as many times as desired.
- Find an example in which an author uses fiction to advance an argument. Identify his agenda and the conclusion that he asserts. Locate the premises that supposedly lead to his conclusion. Refute every part of the argument. Repeat the exercise as many times as desired.

## PART 6

Although a large part of college life has to do with academics, the student has other concerns as well. Accordingly, a Christian in an university lives his life before God and bears witness not only in his intellectual integrity and defense of the faith, but also in other ways.

But before we proceed to that, we must complete our discussion on apologetics by addressing one of the most common errors promoted by Christian leaders. This is the teaching that a believer's holy life is a necessary part of his apologetic, and that it is even the most prominent and effective aspect of defending the faith. Thus in materials on written on the subject, we frequently find statements like, "Love is the most powerful apologetic," and "The greatest argument for the gospel is a holy life." These are often asserted under the broad principle that "actions speak louder than words."

However, love or holiness is not a more powerful apologetic than rational discourse. In fact, since an apologetic is *by definition* a verbal rational discourse to advance one's cause or to answer opposition, strictly speaking, love and holiness are not any part of an apologetic at all. They do, as we will point out, provide materials for an apologetic. As for actions, not only do they not speak louder than words, but they do not speak at all. Actions require words to speak for them, explaining their origins and implications, or else they remain silent.

Paul said to the elders at Ephesus:

"You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus...."

"Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:18-21, 32-35)



If love or holiness is the most powerful apologetic, then why did Paul need to describe his attitude and behavior in such a coherent manner in order to make his point? His love or holiness should have already made the point for him. And if actions speak louder than words, then why did Paul need to say anything about them? Why did he use a weaker means to draw attention to his actions? He himself reminded the elders that they already knew about his actions.

Likewise, when Jesus said, "Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?" (John 8:46), it would have been an unnecessary and even inferior means of drawing attention to his own holiness and integrity if his actions were indeed louder than his words. But it was the other way around – he needed words to draw attention to his actions, which remained totally silent by themselves.<sup>7</sup>

An apologetic is an argument or explanation that you verbally advance. It should not require unbelievers to infer your defense for you from your actions! Indeed, you may appeal to your actions in your verbal discourse to show that your lifestyle is consistent with your message, but it is not an apologetic to close your mouth and expect the unbelievers to convince themselves that the gospel is true because of your love and holy lifestyle.

And without establishing a proper moral standard by verbal argument, why would they infer what you want from your actions? You can exhibit compassion, and they will infer nosiness. You can demonstrate humility, and they will infer weakness. You can value truth, and they will infer bigotry. The problem with non-Christians is not only that they lack compassion, humility, truth, and so on, but that they do not even know how to think about these things. Their minds are so thoroughly corrupt and feeble that if there is any significance in your holy actions, you must explain it to them. Therefore, although our actions can be related to our apologetic, in themselves they do not constitute any part of an apologetic.

The above carries two implications for evangelism and apologetics.

First, there is no such thing as evangelism or apologetics without a verbal rational discourse, or without the use of language. There are Christians who say, "I do not preach or argue – I bear witness about Christ by my life." Those who say this often do not have very impressive lives in the first place, but more relevant is the fact that such an approach cannot bear witness about Christ at all.

Even if unbelievers notice them, perhaps they will think that these people were born this way, predisposed to pure and holy living, and thus their lives produce nothing but praise for themselves. Maybe some unbelievers will think that these Christians are in fact Buddhists or adherents of some other system of thought, and so their holy actions will

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<sup>7</sup> Biblical passages like Matthew 5:13-16, John 13:34-35, James 2:18, and 1 Peter 3:1-6 cannot be used to say that holy actions convey information apart from the preaching of the word of God. Still less do they assert that love and holiness provide a more powerful apologetic than rational argument. See Vincent Cheung, *The Sermon on the Mount, Commentary on First Peter*, and *The Light of Our Minds*.

end up inciting others to seek out some religion or philosophy that might or might not have anything to do with Christianity.

Second, the above implies that non-Christians are not excused from believing the gospel just because there are many professing believers who turn out to be hypocrites, or who behave in ways that are inconsistent with biblical teachings. The truth is in the message and not in the lifestyle. Although the imperfection and the hypocrisy of Christians indeed cause many to stumble, those who stumble are not excused, since there is no direct rational relationship between whether the gospel of Christ is true and whether believers behave consistently with it.

In fact, whether we are talking about believers or unbelievers, those who stumble over other people's moral failures must be incredibly stupid people. Why is the gospel discredited when a believer steals from his employer? And when a pastor commits adultery, what does it have anything to do with the truth concerning Jesus Christ? The gospel never claims to produce perfect people in this life, and these individuals might or might not be genuine believers in the first place. Then, so what if Catholics priests sexually molest hundreds of children? What does that have to do with us? We do not even acknowledge that Catholicism is Christianity, or that Catholics are Christians, and so this is what we expect of them. We would be surprised if they do not molest the children.

So what is the problem? The only explanation is that those who stumble like this are stupid. We might say that it is a moral issue, that they are trying to find any reason to escape from the claims of the gospel. But still, the fact that they think they can get away with such a poor excuse must mean that these people are astonishingly stupid.

They are not only stupid, but spineless as well. A renowned Christian leader falls into sin, and they stop going to their own churches, when their pastors have done nothing wrong. A church scandal breaks out in another part of the world far away, and these people stop giving to their own churches, when these churches have nothing to do with the scandal. Rather than clinging close to the Lord, and resolve by the grace and power of God to do better than those who have fallen, and even to help restore them, they will use anything as an excuse to stop serving God and doing what he requires of them.

Preachers often say, "If you do not practice what you preach, then no one would believe you when you talk about the gospel." But statements like this amount to an attack against the inherent intellectual perfection of the gospel as well as the work of the Holy Spirit. The truth is that if you *never* practice *anything* that you preach, or if you *always* do the *opposite*, as long as the content of your preaching is biblical, everyone *should* still believe you, and many will. You are not excused from your sins, but God's truth and power, and his entire plan of redemption, do not hinge on your holiness.

Hypocrisy among Christians must be harshly condemned, but it provides no excuse for others to fall from their profession of faith or to remain in unbelief. If no one believes the gospel, you believe the gospel! If no one practices holiness, you practice holiness! What

feeble intellect and character a person must have, to turn from Christ just because someone else does! Rather than laboring to counteract the problem, with his eyes wide opened he becomes a part of the problem. One is almost tempted to have more sympathy with the one who causes the stumbling than the one who stumbles.

In summary, it is wrong to say that actions speak louder than words, or that love or holiness is the most powerful apologetic, for the reason that actions do not speak, and love or holiness is not an apologetic. The hypocrisy and moral failure of some Christians are irrelevant to God's claim upon every person, and therefore provide no excuse for unbelievers and professing believers to stumble, to reject the faith, or to turn away from it. We emphasize this in order to neutralize some of the problems caused by the false view, which gives our performance before the world a place that it should not possess, and that only God's word possesses.

That said, there are reasons to insist that love, holiness, virtue, good works, and performing actions consistent with our profession are of the utmost importance. First, although in themselves they are excluded from apologetics, they provide materials for some of what we might say when defending the faith. Second, although they excuse no one, it is true that our moral failure, hypocrisy, and inconsistency often become stumbling blocks to others. Instead of providing occasions for them to stumble, we must do all that we can by the grace of God to contribute to their conversion and progress. Third, the most important reason, we practice love and holiness because this is God's command, and this is our true nature as regenerated people. We live our lives before God's presence, and therefore holiness is essential even if our failures would never lead anyone to stumble, or even when no one would know about them.

As we mentioned at the beginning, the university *is* the real world, that is, a part of it. And as part of the real world, it fosters temptations that are common to adults in other circumstances, although they might present themselves in different forms. Spiritual failures and tragedies can happen here just as readily as in a working environment, at the church, or in the home. And the consequences can be just as dire. But then, spiritual triumphs are just as possible and meaningful. Therefore, even without further comment, you can apply all that you have learned from Scripture about our spiritual resources and responsibilities, and the enemies and trials that we face in this world.

At this time, many of you have no need to concern yourself about raising a family or even making a living, but even so, now is the time to practice what Scripture teaches about covetousness, worry, diligence, labor, overspending, saving, and for some, even investment. As an unmarried person, the sin of adultery is not possible for you in the fullest sense, but sexual temptations are very strong at this age and in this setting. Now is the time to learn about the biblical view on sex, to maintain sexual purity, and to prepare your thinking and your character for marriage.

Other common temptations are easy to name.

Even if there are no future applications, academic integrity is important now – again, you are in the real world already, and what you do matters. But there are indeed future applications. We often hear about plagiarism in novels, in non-fiction works, in scientific reports, and so on. Questionable business practices are common, and sometimes become major corporate scandals. People are people – they get more complicated, but they do not always get better or smarter. Sin plagues all of humanity, and thus the need for the power of Christ is universal.

Cases of drug and alcohol abuse are of course widespread in the university environment. You would think that college material would have better sense, but as I stated, college students are not intelligent, and the fact that they think they are just makes them even more stupid. It would seem that anyone who has enough going on in his mind would do anything to avoid intoxication, or any unnecessary suspension of clear thinking and sober judgment. But when there is nothing much going on in there, self-destruction becomes a form of entertainment.

These are the typical issues that people mention, but it seems that some sins never quite get the attention that they deserve. For example, the Bible stresses speech that is clean, sober, and honest. Read through the Book of Proverbs, and you will see that this is one of the most important lessons Scripture wishes to teach the youngster. Yet the opposite is modeled by parents, friends, television and movies, and popular music. How you talk matters. In fact, even if you are not confronted with other temptations every day, you still need to talk to people, so that holiness in the area of speech should be your constant concern.

Let no dishonesty, vulgarity, and malice come from your mouth. And let a holy terror prevent you from saying anything that implies irreverence toward God, or that can be construed as irreverent. How about gossip? It is also a sin. And it is better to be silent or humorless than to tell coarse jokes, or to be entertained by them. Jokes about God, biblical doctrines, and moral principles are to be avoided.

Some Christians go to great lengths to avoid appearing prudish to unbelievers. To truly accomplish this, however, the Christians must show that they can live just like unbelievers, or that they can have what even unbelievers would call "fun." But this would destroy our own faith and witness rather than contribute to the conversion of others. The truth is that some believers simply wish to indulge in their old lusts, and they use this excuse to appear spiritual and even self-sacrificial at the same time.

Christianity will never be acceptable or interesting to the unregenerate man, and we might as well confront unbelief from this standpoint. That is, instead of trying to show that Christianity is not prudish, it is more productive just to condemn the unbelievers for their licentiousness. In the university, and among young unbelievers, this will mean that Christian students ought to display such moral distinction and superiority that they will at times be mocked and ostracized, if not something more severe. But in exchange, you will be able to speak with a spiritual authority that comes from another world, and that is worthy of the people's attention.

## Questions and Exercises

- What is the definition of apologetics? By definition, what must apologetics include? What does it exclude? Why do we say that holiness is not a part of apologetics *as such*?
- Why do the unbelievers say that actions speak louder than words, and why are they wrong about this? But why do so many believers accept this absurd idea?
- Preacher frequently say, "If you do not practice what you preach, then no one will believe you when you preach the gospel?" Why is this statement false? Why does it even amount to an attack on God, his Spirit, and the gospel? How does this teaching grant unbiblical warrant to the non-Christians to blaspheme the Lord and remain in their unbelief?
- Then, some Christians assert, "We should not argue with people. We should just preach the gospel and then let our actions bear witness to its truth." But if someone is allegedly prevented from faith because of his belief in evolution, how is our holy conduct going to overcome this? Is it even relevant, or is the relevance clear?
- List some of the biblical passages that have been construed to support the idea that actions speak louder than words, or that they speak at all. What are the popular interpretations and applications of these passages, and why are they mistaken? Read them in context. They certainly teach that holy living is important. But do they teach that our holy living *replaces* proclamation – if holiness speaks and speaks *louder*, then it should render preaching unnecessary – or is proclamation so necessary that it is always assumed? The content of proclamation is what defines and judges our actions in the first place.
- If holiness is not an integral or necessary part of apologetics, does it have anything to do with apologetics at all? If so, what is its role? How does holiness contribute to evangelism and apologetics?
- Are hypocrites always wrong in what they affirm? If a person affirms "1 + 1 = 2" but does not act like this is true, then are we to reject the math? Likewise, if hypocrites affirm and preach the gospel, do they discredit the gospel? How are the two things even relevant to each other? Or is the truth of the gospel dependent on man instead of on God?
- It is likely that some people will misunderstand and think that we are undermining the importance of walking in holiness, or ignoring the biblical teaching on providing a model of godly example before Christians and non-Christians. But is this what we are doing? How does this accusation miss the point? And what is our point?

- When you hear of a church scandal, or news that a church leader has fallen into sin, what thoughts and feelings arise from within you? Are these thoughts and feelings biblical and rational? Does the Bible teach that these things will never happen, so that when they do, they undermine Christianity? But if the Bible says that we should expect these things, then why is it a problem when they happen?
- Sometimes the blame is even more irrelevant, or at least irrelevant in other ways. Catholic priests are exposed, and the revenue in Baptist churches would fall. A scandal breaks out with a Charismatic leader, and Presbyterian churches suffer in attendance. A problem occurs with a church down the street, and members of another congregation stops giving to their own church. Why does this happen? What is wrong with the people? Should we work on eliminating hypocrisy, or condemning irrational and sinful reactions against hypocrisy? I suggest that we should do both. Do you agree?
- But just because our moral failures give no excuse to the unbelievers does not mean that we are in turn excused when we cause others to stumble. We acknowledge what the Bible teaches on the subject, but stop short of making unwarranted inferences from it. Have you ever contributed to another person's spiritual stumbling? What does the Bible say about that?
- What temptations do you face as a student? List some of the most prominent ones. How do you deal with them? Do you frequently succumb? Why? What can you do about them? How do your Christian friends deal with them? Do you put yourself in situations where these temptations occur?
- What are some of the neglected sins that frequently occur? The chapter mentions sinful speech. Do you often sin in how you speak and what you say? Give examples, and consider ways to overcome sinful patterns.
- What about sexual integrity and dating in the university? Is dating biblical? What is dating? Do you only date someone you plan to marry? If not, you are deliberately pursuing a temporary romantic relationship with someone else's future spouse. Does this change how you approach the situation?
- Much of the inefficiencies in the office environment are caused by slothful and incompetent people, who have carried over these characteristics from their lives as students. Note the poor work ethic and incompetence of your peers, especially as you work on group projects. How do you deal with problem partners now? Consider what it means to have a godly work ethic. List details and examples.
- Do you think that Christianity is prudish, or can it be fun? Fun according to what standard? And is this how the Bible describe Christianity? Is it more biblical to make our faith appear consistent with the non-Christian standard of fun, or to condemn the

non-Christian standard of fun? What does the Bible do in this regard? What do Christians tend to do today? Why do they do it?

## CONCLUSION

We began by noting that, although the university is a place of preparation for what comes after, it is not only a place of preparation. What students do there can have immediate, significant, and sometimes permanent ramifications. This also means that the university is not a place for spiritual experimentation, or trial and error. It is a place not only for learning, but for doing. You must not only practice, but you must perform. It is not just a place where you learn to do things right, but where you must actually do things right. This is "real" life. A conversion is just as real when it happens in the university as when it happens elsewhere. And the same can be said of apostasy. Positively, this imparts significance and meaning to all that you do even though you are still a student. Negatively, it means that there is no excuse for failure, and that when it happens, there is a price to pay.

We also mentioned that major transitions in our lives force us to reevaluate our priorities. Those who are short-sighted and earthly-minded give preeminence to the new challenges that come into their lives when these transitions occur. Old habits, even good ones, are sometimes abandoned for new ones that we consider expedient. This is one reason why professing believers sometimes backslide from the faith when they enter college, the workforce, or new relationships. However, if our faith is the one constant that we maintain at the center of our lives, then whatever changes occur around it will not affect our priorities, but we will immediately evaluate them in relation to our faith, and consider how our faith can advance in the midst of these new circumstances.

This brings us to another important point. We should not focus on merely maintaining our faith in the university, or in any other situation in which God places us. Our purpose must be to glorify God, to grow in faith, and to advance the kingdom. It is not enough to resist the negative influences of the university, but we must seek to influence it by the wisdom and power of Christ. To do this, we must take aggressive measures to undermine its anti-Christian foundation and introduce to it the light of the gospel. Like many other institutions, the university has a well-established social and political structure, but that is its only strength. It possesses no spiritual or intellectual power by which it can resist Christian ideas.

The same can be said about any other environment. A Christian in the workplace is not just an employee trying to stay a Christian. No, he is a Christian assigned to infiltrate the workplace both to promote his own spiritual growth and to advance the cause of Christ. This is no less true for the Christian housewife. After all, the housewife is in the "real" world, and what she does matters.

Finally, although we have focused on only a few things, the changes that occur for a student include more than the obvious points concerning spirituality and academics. He must also consider his relationships, finances, health, diet, sleep, and so on. As we cannot



cover every area here, we must refer the reader to our other materials, encourage his own study and reflection, and commend him to the grace of God.