The Light
of Our Minds

Vincent Cheung

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PREFACE TO 2004 EDITION

Anti-intellectualism prevails in modern evangelical Christianity. Books and sermons advocate a mystical and irrational faith, and many who claim to be God's people "love to have it so" (Jeremiah 5:31). The trend is so pervasive that some people closely associate anti-intellectualism with Christianity, affirming a self-imposed disjunction between faith and reason, so that it requires an irrational "leap of faith" for one to embrace the Christian worldview.

However, this "faith" is not the Christian faith. Far from favoring irrational thinking, the biblical worldview rescues, preserves, and exalts the intellect, more so than any other worldview. Made in the image of God, the mind of man is the part of him that has fallen in sin, and it is the part of him that is renewed and reconstructed at conversion. The subsequent process of sanctification likewise involves the development of the intellect in conformity to the content of biblical teaching, which is "the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). Paul writes that one who has undergone regeneration "is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Colossians 3:10). Through the prophet Jeremiah, God says that the "shepherds after my own heart" are those who will lead his people "with knowledge and understanding" (Jeremiah 3:15).

The essays in this book share at least two common themes – namely, the biblical emphasis on the mind and the monopoly of the Christian worldview over the intellectual realm. Christianity preserves rationality, and provides the precondition of intelligibility. Together, these chapters serve as a reminder for the Christian to love God with all his mind (Matthew 22:37), and at the same time illustrate an effective strategy for Christian apologetics.

1. ARGUE TO WIN

Oxford professor Alister McGrath has made a most misleading statement in his awkwardly titled book, *Intellectuals Don't Need God and Other Modern Myths*. He says, "Apologetics is not about winning arguments – it is about winning people."[1] In connection with this, the book has as one of its central theses that many, or even most, individuals reject Christianity not mainly because of any insuperable intellectual objections, but because of other factors such as existential applicability. Thus he writes, "Christianity must commend itself in terms of its relevance to life, not just its inherent rationality."[2]

The rest of his book, also laden with problems, attempts to justify and develop this assumption and its ramifications in the practice of apologetics. I contend that his assertion is misleading, false, and dangerous for Christians who wish to conduct faithful and biblical apologetics; nevertheless, his assertion represents not only a minority view, but rather a popular notion of what apologetics should strive to accomplish.

To repeat, McGrath writes, "Apologetics is not about winning arguments – it is about winning people." When winning *arguments* is contrasted with winning *people*, most people would not wish to immediately disagree even if they sense that there is something wrong with the statement, since to disagree might imply that they care more about winning arguments than about winning people. That is, if we define apologetics as concerned mainly with winning arguments against unbelievers, then it may seem to some people that we have been distracted from what is supposedly our main objective, which is winning people to Christ.

McGrath's statement is misleading because it implies that you can lose an argument against the non-Christian, and in connection with losing the argument, still win him to Christ; it implies that there is no positive connection between winning arguments and winning people. But if there is no positive connection between the two, then this means that in a debate an unbeliever can show that Christianity is false, and then proceed to repent and believe the gospel anyway.

Of course, the Holy Spirit can and often does convict the mind of the elect regardless of your failures in argumentation, but this is different from denying a definite positive relationship between winning arguments and winning people. I may say, "Apologetics is not about hitting people in the face, but about winning people to Christ," would it then be true that I may hit people in the face, and in connection with hitting them in the face, still lead them to Christ? On other hand, refraining from hitting people in the face is one of

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[1] Alister McGrath, *Intellectuals Don't Need God and Other Modern Myths*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993; p. 12.
[2] Ibid., p. 9.

the things that is conducive to winning people to Christ, making it preferable and almost necessary.

One of McGrath's errors is in confusing apologetics with evangelism. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines the word *apologetics* as a "systematic argumentative discourse in defense (as of a doctrine); a branch of theology devoted to the defense of the divine origin and authority of Christianity."[3] On the other hand, *evangelism* is "the winning or revival of personal commitment to Christ."[4] These definitions reflect common usage, and the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* agrees with them. It defines *apologetics* as "a systematic, argumentative discourse in defense of the divine origin and the authority of the Christian faith,"[5] and *evangelism* as "The proclamation of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ with a view to bringing about the reconciliation of the sinner to God the Father through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit."[6]

Given these definitions, it is evident that apologetics is not the same as evangelism, however they may be related, but McGrath has confused the two. It would be more accurate to say, "Evangelism is not *only* about winning arguments, it is *also* about winning people to Christ; nevertheless, defeating unbelievers in argumentation may be the means by which God converts them." Since apologetics is *by definition* about argumentation, McGrath's statement is tantamount to saying, "Our *arguments* with unbelievers is not about winning arguments, but winning people," or "Apologetics is not about apologetics, but evangelism." But this is self-contradictory and false by definition. By replacing the meaning of apologetics with that of evangelism, there is no longer a word for expressing the meaning of what is properly called apologetics.

Another statement in the book brings up another common misconception about apologetics. Referring to the unbeliever's mindset when hearing the gospel message, he writes, "The gospel is being evaluated, not on the basis of its ideas, but on the basis of its effects on people and institutions."[7] To McGrath, this is supposed to count against the idea that apologetics is "to demonstrate the rationality of the Christian faith."[8] A similar objection against the proper definition of apologetics is that many people reject the Christian faith not because they think that it is false, but because they have certain personal needs that they think the gospel cannot satisfy, whether these needs are psychological, social, financial, and so forth. Therefore, the objection goes, apologetics (or even evangelism) should focus on how the gospel addresses these needs rather than God's command to the unbeliever to renounce his sins and affirm the truth of the gospel.

It is often true that, as McGrath says, "The gospel is being evaluated, not on the basis of its ideas, but on the basis of its effects on people and institutions." However, this is precisely what is wrong with many unbelievers, and it is precisely about this that the

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[3] *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition*; Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2001; "apologetics."

[4] Ibid., "evangelism."

[5] *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1984; "apologetics."

[6] Ibid., "evangelism."

[7] McGrath, p. 68.

[8] Ibid., p. 68.

Christian apologist must confront them. That the Christian faith is not evaluated according to its truth or falsity, but how well it "works" or makes one feels, is a lapse in rationality or even denial of rationality. Instead of adapting our approach to accommodate the unbelievers, it is our duty to confront and correct them on this.

What if people reject the gospel, not because they think that it is false, but because it will make them unpopular with many people? Should we then modify our approach to show them that Christianity will in fact make them popular, or should we instead argue that this is the wrong way to judge a worldview? If pragmatism is the predominate philosophy in a given society, must we then show that Christianity is the most practical of all religions and worldviews? Why not instead show that pragmatism is wrong? Rather than trying to show that Christianity is true according to the unbelievers' false standard of judgment, we should show that their very standard of judgment is false, and that Christianity is true according to a true standard of judgment, and that this true standard judgment is God's revelation to us. This is biblical apologetics.

There are so many false converts in churches today precisely because we have not been performing evangelism by preaching and defending the truth, but rather by satisfying the audience's personal needs and wants, when the biblical gospel commands them to deny precisely those personal needs and wants. This same error explains why it appears as if the gospel's "effects on people and institutions" have not been altogether positive. We must insist that if people refuse to come to Christ by the right message and for the right reasons, then they should not come to Christ at all, since those who profess Christ under these conditions are really making a false profession, and there are already too many false Christians in our churches to accommodate more of them. Neither apologetics nor evangelism is to "win people" at all costs – certainly not at the expense of the truth.

Having made the statement cited as an attempt to correct the traditional aim of apologetics, even McGrath proceeds to say:

> It is the intractability of human sin, rather than any deficiency in the gospel, that underlies the fact that there are bad Christians. Sadly, sin is so pervasive that the Christian church tends to obscure Christ as much as she reveals him. It is only by the grace of God that the attraction of Christ and his gospel breaks through the tainted witness of the institutional church. That there are Christians who are not especially good is a testimony to the reality and power of human sin; that there are Christians who are especially good is a testimony to the reality and power of divine grace.[9]

This is at least a decent attempt at answering the problem McGrath brings up in his book, that the gospel does not seem to "work" as well as professing believers claims. We may also add that many, or even most, who claim to be Christians in our day are in fact false Christians, and thus the seemingly ineffectiveness of the gospel in their lives – they have never been Christians in the first place. In addition, even when we are referring to real

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[9] Ibid., p. 71.

Christians, McGrath's answer shows that Christian theology is not contradicted by the fact that Christians still sin, so that our message is still true despite what the unbelievers observe. That is, Scripture never claims that Christians would be perfect in this life, only that they have been radically changed by God's grace and power.

So, McGrath still uses a rational argument here, and one that refutes one of the unbeliever's reasons for rejecting the gospel. But then, what is the difference between what McGrath does here, and the agenda of traditional apologetics? In light of what he has written above, it is difficult to explain how McGrath could disparage traditional apologetics as giving "the impression that Christianity is a set of ideas that some people accept and others reject."[10] Instead, what McGrath has written shows his implicit acknowledgment that Christianity is indeed a set of ideas, or a worldview, that we claim as true and commend to the unbeliever as something that he must accept.

McGrath continues, "Yet Christianity is about ideas incarnated in history, about the embodiment of values in real life,"[11] but this adds nothing to the discussion, and does not excuse his inconsistency. His statement acknowledges that, whether they are "incarnated in history," Christianity is still "about ideas," and whether they are "embodied in real life" (whatever that means), "values" are still intellectual ideas and concepts. It appears that McGrath wants to distance himself from an intellectualistic apologetics, but he cannot seem to shake away from it, especially in his better and wiser moments.

Therefore, the premise that it is wrong or insufficient to think of apologetics as primarily concerned with winning arguments is baseless nonsense. Having correctly defined our terms, we have also established that we can distinguish between apologetics and evangelism without completely separating the two. Although many people are converted without extensive arguments, God often uses our arguments as the means by which he converts sinners. Apologetics often serves evangelism, but the two are not identical.

The aim of biblical apologetics is to demonstrate Christianity's intellectual superiority over all non-Christian worldviews by using arguments, and this aim often (but not always) subsists under the broader purpose of evangelism. On some occasions, it may be the Christian's main aim to defend Christianity's intellectual credibility against the criticisms of unbelievers. That is, on some occasions, the primary focus may be on winning the debates themselves, and not on converting sinners, although God certainly can and will use some of these debates as occasions through which he converts some of his chosen ones.

We should remember that even evangelism itself serves the broader purpose of maturing the elect. That is, our primary task has *never* been evangelism; rather, our primary task is to bring the elect to maturity, and evangelism is only the first step in accomplishing this primary task. Thus apologetics is mainly about winning arguments; evangelism is a broader category that is mainly about winning people to Christ, which often involves

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[10] Ibid., p. 68.
[11] Ibid., p. 68.

apologetics; then, discipleship is a still broader category that is mainly about bringing people to maturity in Christ, which often involves evangelism.[12]

Scripture teaches that apologetics has as its end the total refutation of non-Christian intellectual ideas, besides providing an invincible rational presentation and defense of its own position. Given our above definitions for apologetics and evangelism, biblical examples do not always present them as separate procedures, but that they may occur at the same time. This is consistent with what we have stated, that we often perform apologetics in the context of and for the purpose for evangelism. But what we have established is that it is possible to distinguish between the two so that, despite their close relationship, we can separately discuss them. Therefore, apologetics is about winning arguments, and evangelism is about winning people to Christ. The relationship between them consists in the fact that winning arguments against the unbelievers is often the means by which God "presses home" the reality and truth of his revelation to sinners, and thus converting their minds by his sovereign grace.

Regarding Paul's missionary work to the Thessalonians, Luke writes, "As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures" (Acts 17:2). The expression, "as his custom was," follows the same grammatical construction as "as was his custom" in Luke 4:16, where Luke describes Jesus' habit of synagogue attendance. Here Paul "reasoned with them from the Scriptures." The English word translated "reasoned" (*dialegomai*) signifies a verbal presentation and intellectual interaction for the purpose of arriving at a logical conclusion. A.T. Robertson confirms that the word means, "to select, distinguish, then to resolve in the mind, to converse, then to teach in the Socratic method of question and answer…then simply to discourse, but always with the idea of intellectual stimulus."[13]

Thus J. B. Phillips translates, "On three Sabbath days he *argued* with them from the scriptures, explaining and quoting passages to prove the necessity for the death of Christ and his rising again from the dead. 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you,' he concluded, 'is God's Christ!'" (Acts 17:2-3).[14] Similarly, Richmond Lattimore's translation says that Paul "*lectured* to them on the scriptures," and that he did this by "*demonstrating* and *proving* that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead" (Acts 17:2-3).[15]

Paul carries out his ministry by *lecturing* and *arguing*, although these are precisely the two things that many modern Christians say that we must not do. They should be ashamed of how far they have departed from scriptural methods, and those of us who affirm the Scripture should harshly rebuke them for their apostasy. True Christians will remain faithful to the Scripture, so that instead of moving away from lecturing and

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[12] I say "often" and not "always" because God does not always convert the sinner through what we call "evangelism," since he can and does convert sinners "directly" through the Scripture.

[13] A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. 3*; Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1930; p. 267.

[14] J.B. Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English*; New York: Touchstone, 1988.

[15] Richmond Lattimore, *The New Testament*; New York: Bryn Mawr Trust Company, 1996.

arguing, we must get back to lecturing and arguing. In this age when most people misunderstand and malign the Christian faith, we must lecture about and argue for the gospel more than ever before. This is the strategy of the apostles, vehemently opposed by today's apostates.

Paul's preaching involves reasoning, arguing, and lecturing – all of which are highly intellectual activities. Arguing is an integral part of his evangelistic strategy. Moreover, rather than arguing for the gospel's existential value – its ability to satisfy the unbelievers' "felt-needs" or creaturely longings – he argues for the gospel's central propositions, such as God's revelation and judgment, and Christ's incarnation and resurrection. He presents the gospel as something that people must believe because it is true, rather than focusing on its power to deliver them from such things as depression, loneliness, or meaninglessness. This is what it means to do apologetics – it honors the gospel and converts the elect by persuasively arguing that Christianity is true, and therefore must be believed. Paul says, "Now [God] commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). God imposes a moral obligation on humanity to believe all that the Scripture teaches, including Christ's incarnation, atonement, and resurrection, so that no one can reject the gospel with impunity.

By their examples, the early Christians does not commend to us the modern anti-intellectual approach characterized by emotional appeals, with much drama and fanfare, but rather the highly intellectualistic strategy of academic lectures and rational arguments. This is the way to both reach unbelievers with the gospel and educate believers in the faith. Many people try to make the case that other evangelistic programs appear to be more effective, but since these are non-biblical or even anti-biblical methods, they can succeed only in generating false converts. If people are not converted by and to the true gospel, then they are not converted in any Christian sense at all; rather, they remain under the wrath of God, unsaved, and heading toward destruction.

Of course, our confrontations with unbelievers vary in degrees of formality. Sometimes we must defend the faith against professional academics, but more often the confrontations occur in our daily conversations with friends and associates. Whatever the case may be, the rational presentation of the gospel's claims must always be present. People must believe the gospel not because they think that it will make them feel good or alleviate any personal inconvenience, but because they have come to believe that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5).

Let us now deal with one popular biblical passage, from which many people derive support for deviating from the biblical pattern, and into their own anti-intellectual and so-called "creative" outreach strategies:

> Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to
> everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a
> Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one
> under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win
> those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one

not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

For now, we need to observe only one point to present the type of misuse under discussion. Paul says, "To those not having the law I became like one not having the law." Why? "So as to win those not having the law." But in the middle of his sentence, Paul adds, "though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law." Although Paul is sensitive to the culture and background of those he tries to reach, he never compromises his Christian commitment or doctrine. He explains that although he "became *like* one not having the law," he was in fact "*not free* from God's law." Paul never changes the content or the presentation of the gospel; he merely adapts to the non-essential cultural conditions that do not compromise the gospel. You must not become a drug addict to reach drug addicts, and you must not become a prostitute to reach prostitutes. Instead, following the apostles, you must lecture at and argue with them for the gospel, accommodating your hearers only on non-essential matters.

It is true that different people have different objections against the gospel, and in this sense, we adapt our message so that our presentation can have a direct effect on the audience. However, it remains that our response to any objection consists of rational arguments, and the object of faith proposed to them is still the ideas and propositions of the Christian faith. Therefore, all modifications in our presentation are only superficial – we may adjust the frame of our presentation, but not the essential content or approach.

For example, a person who claims to reject the gospel because of a scientific objection needs a different answer than a person who rejects Christianity because of a prior commitment to a false religion. But in either case, we use intellectual arguments to counter their resistance, and what we tell them to believe remains the same. Moreover, in the biblical or presuppositional system of apologetics, we can successfully refute both types of objections with similar arguments with only slight and superficial adjustments.[16]

There are many things that we can and should do to prevent cultural differences from hindering the gospel without compromising our commitment to pure doctrine in the process, as Paul indicates in this passage. Saying that we should "become all things to all men" as an argument against the intellectualistic view of apologetics and evangelism is pointless and irrelevant. Christians can be sensitive to the audience's culture and background, but that does not result in any essential change in our approach and message.

Acts 17:1-3, cited earlier, refers to Paul's evangelistic ministry to Thessalonica. Then, referring to his later ministry to Corinth, the Bible says, "Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4). This verse again describes his approach to both the Jews and the Greeks. Against those who disregard the

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[16] See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions* and *Presuppositional Confrontations*.

importance of winning arguments, Paul consistently argues for the Christian faith as a true and coherent system of thought. Luke writes that Paul "reasoned" (argued, discussed, lectured) with his audience, with the express intent to "persuade" (Thayer: "to induce one by words to believe") all types of hearers.

Some people say that we must not argue with the young people of our day, since their culture is so adverse to intellectual discourse that they would completely disregard our message if we attempt to reason with them. In addition, since the people of our image-oriented television generation have an attention span of only several minutes, it is unrealistic to expect congregations to endure an hour-long lecture-like sermon filled with theological and philosophical information and arguments.

In reply, we first note that it is the biblical way to preach and teach the word of God through intellectual presentations and arguments, and therefore this approach is our only hope. Second, the people's anti-intellectualism is itself an unbiblical and sinful attitude that we must rebuke and correct – by biblical and intellectual means. Third, whether they know it or not, their aversion to deep thinking about the ultimate questions is in itself an intellectual conclusion drawn from unjustified and unbiblical premises that they have implicitly accepted. These premises will surface as we press them to explain and justify their anti-intellectual and unbiblical mindset, quickly turning the situation into an intellectual confrontation. In short, the very belief that intellectual discourse is futile is an intellectual position that the Christian must challenge.

It is impossible to destroy anti-intellectualism by surrendering to it – to abandon doctrinal preaching and theological lectures so that we may give place to music, drama, dancing, and socializing only serves to foster the problem. We must not give the people what they desire, since they desire the wrong things; rather, we must tell them what the Scripture commands them to desire.

We must not throw down our weapon, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17), just because deluded believers and hostile unbelievers tell us that this weapon is no longer effective. Instead, we affirm that "the word of God is living and active" (Hebrews 4:12), penetrating deeply into the hearts of men. Against any type of anti-Christian reasoning, including self-contradictory arguments saying that we should not argue, we can apply God's word, which will certainly succeed by God's power (Isaiah 55:11).

When preaching, we should not encourage the people to become or to remain imbeciles, incapable of grasping even the most basic theological sermon or lecture. We may need to accommodate their untrained intellect by preaching simply at first, but we must always preach biblically, and the law of God will make wise the simple (Psalm 19:7). Although we must allow time for the people to progress, we must not hold back forever, but we must declare to them "the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:27, NASB). To do anything less is to perpetuate the spiritual famine in our churches today; it is impossible to gain biblical results while defying biblical methods.

Paul argues against unbelieving ideas all the time; it is an integral part of his evangelistic strategy, and it is part of what it means to preach. Similarly, concerning Apollos, Luke writes, "Apollos, a native of Alexandria…was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures" (Acts 18:24), and "he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ" (v. 28). Alexandria was the hub of Jewish-Hellenistic learning, and had library and university. Apollos, who was Jewish, was educated in such a setting of academic and philosophical rigor. He puts his education to good use in verse 28 by refuting the Jews in public debate, proving that Jesus was the Messiah. As with Paul, instead of disparaging his enthusiasm to argue, Luke casts Apollos in a positive light precisely because of his intellectual prowess and his ability to refute the opponents of Christianity.

Jesus also argued to defend his ministry and his message, and he argued so skillfully that Scripture says, "None of them could answer him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day to question him any more" (Matthew 22:46).[17] You should take time to read through the verses preceding this, especially verses 15-45. In them, Jesus proves himself a brilliant exegete (v. 23-33) and systematic theologian (v. 34-40); he resolves a doctrinal dilemma that the Pharisees raised against him (v. 15-22), while posing one of his own that can be resolved only by acknowledging that the Messiah was to be God and man, and that he is the one who fits the description (v. 41-45). He was a master of argument and debate.

Reading the Gospels with an anti-intellectual mindset, one easily misses the subtlety and precision with which Christ argues with his opponents on numerous occasions. Do we suppose that the guards were mesmerized by some sort of mystical power or non-intellectual charisma emanating from his person when they said, "No one ever spoke the way this man does" (John 7:46)? No, people believed because of the intellectual content that he words conveyed: "And because of his words many more became believers" (John 4:41; also Mark 6:2, Luke 19:48, John 7:15). In the Bible, effective ministry is never attributed to some sort of mystical presence or non-intellectual charisma, which many today erroneously call the "anointing," but it attributes effective ministry to sound doctrine communicated through faithful preaching, rendered effective by the Spirit's power.

More than several biblical passages command Christians, and especially ministers, to refute Christianity's opponents. Paul spells out the nature of this conflict:

> The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

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[17] Lattimore, *New Testament*.

According to Paul, we are out to destroy every anti-Christian idea, thought, pretension, and argument. He is clearly describing an intellectual battlefield, where ideas are pitted against one another.

Many people suppose that the conflict is non-intellectual, but precisely the reverse is true – our conflict with unbelievers is mainly a war between worldviews, that is, the networks of intellectual ideas that structure our way of understanding and organizing all of our thoughts and perceptions. Christianity is a worldview – its gospel is an intellectual message that demands people's assent, and that at the same time contradicts all non-Christian worldviews.

Paul's language depicts a military campaign, with believers storming the gates of the enemy. We are involved in a war of ideas, and we are to advance God's kingdom by intellectual communication, whether in speaking or in writing (Ephesians 6:19; John 20:31). Paul asks for his readers to pray for him, so that his preaching would be effective (Colossians 4:3-4); there is no alternative or backup strategy. We preach sound doctrine "whether the time is favorable or unfavorable" (2 Timothy 4:2, NRSV), and not just when doctrinal preaching is in vogue or acceptable to our audience. Preaching sound doctrine is the only program for advancing God's kingdom and promoting Christian growth. Professing believers are made impotent when they misunderstand the biblical gospel or reject the biblical method for communicating it.

Paul teaches that "an overseer" of God's people must be able to teach biblical doctrine and refute error: "Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work...He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:7-9). In our theological terms, a minister must excel in both theology and apologetics. The foundation for his theology and apologetics must be "the trustworthy message as it has been taught" – he must affirm and defend the biblical gospel.

However, the Bible does not only command the minister to excel in apologetics – it also commands all believers to learn how to defend their faith. Peter writes, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). The command is to be able to answer "*everyone* who asks" about Christianity – that is, you must learn to answer or refute every person who asks about or even attacks your faith from any perspective, whether his question or objection is theological, philosophical, ethical, historical, or scientific. The necessitates considerable training in biblical theology and apologetics, which is every believer's duty to pursue and every minister's duty to provide.

As a Christian, you should know how to respond when unbelievers say, "Christians are hypocrites!"; "Christianity is narrow-minded!"; "Prove to me that God exists!"; "How can you believe in God when there is so much evil in this world?"; "How can a loving God send people to hell forever?"; "Why do you believe in the biblical miracles?"; "Why do you believe in creation as opposed to evolution?"; or, "What evidence is there for Christ's

resurrection?" When unbelievers challenge you with these and other objections, it is your duty to argue and win.[18]

Many Christians are extremely vulnerable to intellectual assaults from unbelievers because their ministers have not been teaching them theology and apologetics, and these Christians are not diligently pursuing such knowledge, either. And because many believers are so intellectually vulnerable, unbelievers no longer consider the Christian faith as having any intellectual credibility.

One reason behind people's reluctance to define the aim of apologetics as winning arguments is the lack of confidence that they can indeed decisively win every debate against the unbelievers. If they know that they can indeed win every argument, then perhaps they would not be as anti-intellectualistic as they are when it comes to apologetics. Nevertheless, we must begin by giving believers a sound theological foundation, for if God's people are constantly "tossed here and there by…every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14, NASB), then effectively apologetics would be impossible. You cannot defend the faith without first knowing about the faith.

Thayer rightly defines the word translated "an answer" (*apologia*) in 1 Peter 3:15 as "a reasoned statement or an argument; verbal defense, speech in defense." Accordingly, Wuest translates the verse, "…always being those who are ready to present a verbal defense to everyone who asks you for a logical explanation concerning the hope which is in all of you."[19] This is in harmony with our contention that apologetics is indeed about winning arguments by a verbal presentation of intellectual ideas.

Doing biblical apologetics does not mean that we woo the unbeliever into faith in Christ by promising him existential benefits, as if that is possible in the first place; rather, we confront the unbeliever with the truth of the gospel, and demand that he submits to it. Over and over again, the Scripture calls us to win arguments against unbelievers with the intention to totally annihilate their systems of thought, and that by this God might sovereignly convert some of them. Those who say that apologetics is not about winning arguments, or that the Christian life has no place for arguing with our opponents, have allowed contemporary concepts of social etiquette and religious tolerance to color their reading of the Bible. To state it bluntly, modern ideas of right and wrong have caused these people to reject the Bible.

Then, Jude writes, "Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (v. 3). This apostle was eager to discuss soteriology, or the doctrine of salvation, but the urgency of the situation demands that he exhorts his readers to "contend for the faith," that is, to do apologetics. The word translated "contend" (*epagonizomai*) carries the meaning of intense struggling or striving. "The faith" refers

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[18] For additional instructions on defending the faith besides what is contained in this book, see Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology*, *Ultimate Questions* and *Presuppositional Confrontations*.
[19] Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961.

not to subjective belief, but the object that must be believed, namely, the Christian system of doctrine "that was once for all entrusted to the saints."

Since the content of the faith has been "once for all" delivered to us, this necessarily means that it cannot be changed at a later time. This in turn means that those who attempt to "update" the content of our faith cannot at the same time claim to have a Christian heritage or to be friends of Christianity; rather, they are false prophets and damnable heretics. The gospel never becomes obsolete, nor does it "evolve." Any effort to "update" or "modernize" it is just another disguised attempt to subvert the faith. There are false religions that claim to follow the Christian tradition, but since the true gospel has been established by the apostles "once for all," it is not subject to change in the slightest degree; those who say otherwise have no real affiliation with Christianity. This means that we must denounce all liberal theologians along with all religions and denominations that falsely claim to be Christian, such as Catholicism and Mormonism. Paul writes, "As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" (Galatians 1:9). Anyone who preaches a gospel different from Paul's will suffer the ultimate punishment.

Many people hesitate to accept the biblical meaning of apologetics because they think that it is somehow unkind, and therefore "unchristian" to argue. However, although the interactions between intellectual opponents can sometimes become quite heated, it does not follow that all debates are conducted in an overly contentious manner. Peter teaches us to do apologetics "with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15), but this is so that by our sound reasoning and good behavior, our opponents "may be *ashamed* of their slander" (v. 16). Likewise, Paul writes, "In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be *ashamed* because they have nothing bad to say about us" (Titus 2:7-8). By proper conduct, cogent arguments, and "soundness of speech," we put hostile unbelievers to shame. Therefore, the Bible's instruction to act kindly toward others does not exclude arguing against them, but it is given as a way by which we may embarrass our unbelieving opponents.

Many people assume that being kind and polite means that we must not embarrass unbelievers by exposing their stupidity, and much less should we sharply reprimand them for their false beliefs and wicked behavior. However, the Bible explicitly permits both:

> Better is open rebuke than hidden love. (Proverbs 27:5)

> When [Jesus] said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing. (Luke 13:17)

> Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds

of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?" (Acts 13:9-10)

Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning. (1 Timothy 5:20)

Even one of their own prophets has said, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith…These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you. (Titus 1:12-13, 2:15)

The Bible never says that those who walk in love must always be soft-spoken or non-threatening. Sharp rebuke can help some people become "sound in the faith." One who contends for the faith with intellectual ruthlessness before a hostile audience shows his love for God and for the hearers. In contrast, the prophet Jonah ran from his mandate when God commanded him to call Ninevah to repentance.

Therefore, I exhort you by the authority of divine revelation: Argue! Maintain your Christian character while you argue, but argue with wisdom and with force; argue uncompromisingly and unrelentingly; argue to destroy every unjustified premise and demolish every unbelieving thought; argue to expose the intellectual bankruptcy of every non-Christian worldview. Do not let fools, cowards, and heretics dissuade you from your biblical mandate. Argue well, and argue to win.

2. BY WORD AND DEED

Before Jesus ascended to heaven to be with his Father, he told the disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit to be poured out upon them, granting them power to be his witnesses. Acts 1:8 says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The outworking of this promise in the days of the apostles is recorded for us in the Acts of the Apostles.

Some preachers misuse Acts 1:8 to promote a strategy of evangelism that emphasizes exhibiting our moral example more than preaching the gospel message. According to them, Jesus teaches that we are not "*to* witness" (as in through our speech), but that we should rather "*be* witnesses" (as in through our behavior), and thus they infer that the verse teaches that we should commend the gospel by our good and moral examples more than, if not rather than, our gospel preaching.

Although I affirm the role of good works in providing outsiders with an attractive representation of what God accomplishes in the elect through the gospel, we cannot "evangelize" through our godly lifestyles without a verbal message. In fact, there is no evangelism at all without a verbal message, and the effectiveness of our godly conduct in influencing outsiders presupposes a strong verbal presentation of the gospel in the first place. The anti-intellectual mindset that has gained a foothold among unbelievers has also permeated much of the church. Whereas many years ago, Christians used to be accused of being "too intellectual," nowadays they take pride in being seen as irrational and self-contradictory, although these are not the characteristics of the biblical faith.

First, let us see that a verbal message from God alone is enough to establish moral obligation. In other words, even if it is not accompanied by a consistent behavioral representation, an intellectual communication of the will of God provides a sufficient and authoritative basis on which moral responsibility is now demanded from the hearer. That is, since God possesses ultimate authority, if the content of a message comes from God, then the hearer is obligated to obey it whether the messenger lives up to the message that he delivers or not. Knowledge of the divine commands immediately creates a moral obligation on the one who gains such knowledge. Even those who have never heard the gospel are held accountable for the innate knowledge that they possess about God and his moral laws (Romans 1-3). Since God now "commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30), anyone who hears the gospel message ought to "obey the gospel of God" (1 Peter 4:17). This is true whether or not the Christian who preaches demonstrate holiness and righteousness in his conduct. Therefore, the pivotal issue in the evangelism is not the lifestyle of the believer, but the content and clarity of his preaching.

Of course, this is not to endorse or encourage hypocrisy among believers, but to make clear that the speaker's moral failure does not negate the hearer's moral obligation,

provided that the message preached comes from God. Thus we are not saying that the believer may live inconsistently with the faith that he professes. As James reminds us, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead" (James 2:26). Rather, we are saying that, (1) The verbal message of the gospel *logically* precedes the moral example that accentuates its attractiveness and credibility even if in some cases the moral example *chronologically* precedes the verbal presentation; (2) The sinner has no excuse for rejecting the gospel even if the Christian fails to live up to what he preaches. As long as the message is true to biblical revelation, it is God's word to the hearer, carrying an authority that does not need the consistent conduct of the Christian to substantiate.

It is true that a Christian sins when he disobeys God's commands, and his poor behavior may create a stumbling block for the sinner. Indeed, the moral failure of some ministers and believers, and sometimes even just their lack of excellence, causes many people to become disillusioned and disgusted with the Christian faith. However, this is not because the moral failure of some professing Christians somehow disproves the Christian faith, since the Christian faith itself affirms that Christians will continue to sin after conversion, although they should indeed exhibit a radically transformed lifestyle. The real problem is that the sinner irrationally concludes that just because some who claim to be Christians fail to live up to the Christian faith, this somehow makes the Christian faith less credible. The conclusion just does not follow from the premises.

Therefore, rather than allowing all the blame to fall upon the Christians, even the hypocritical ones, we must expose the fact that unbelievers are stupid for reasoning the way they do. The sinner is never exempt from believing and obeying the gospel message, since in rejecting it he sins by defying God's word – the hypocrisy of those who claim to be Christians (whether these are real Christians or not) is logically irrelevant. The preaching of the gospel alone provides a sufficient basis for faith, and makes the hearer responsible for accepting it. It is often effective as well – there are those who, having been regenerated by God, perceive that the gospel is true despite the evil behavior of some professing Christians, and who then come readily to repentance and faith in Christ.

On the other hand, we cannot say the same thing about a moral example alone, although many people falsely believe that one may win others to Christ without giving priority to a verbal message filled with relevant information. The common misconception that one may be a witness for Christ primarily through his moral lifestyle does not originate from a careful exegetical study of Scripture, but rather reflects the infiltration of non-Christian philosophies in the church.

Winfried Corduan relates the following in his book, *No Doubt About It*:

> Our college and career group had adopted the habit of getting together after Sunday night service in a restaurant…One week the conversation turned to evangelism. Some of us shared how we had attempted to present others with the gospel and the usual mix of success or lack thereof. Linda had been quiet up to now, apparently

more absorbed in her strawberry ice cream cake than in the conversation. In a moment of silence she broke in, "I don't witness with words; I try to share my testimony through my life…"[1]

Many professing Christians think in a similar way, it is possible or even preferable to be a witness for Christ by their lives *instead* of by verbal proclamation. As Corduan writes:

I have always been puzzled by folks like Linda who say these things (and she is not alone). For one thing, I do not know how many people lead such obviously Christian lives that everyone else can unequivocally see Jesus in them. That does not mean that our lives ought not to be clear witnesses for Christ (they should)…but I am amazed at the refusal of some people to give even minimal verbal witness to Christ…[2]

A non-verbal witness is also an unbiblical witness, because the very meaning of the word "witness" in Acts 1:8 refers to one who verbally testifies of his personal knowledge about objective reality, as in a court of law. The first disciples were direct witnesses of Christ's life, teachings, transfiguration, death, and resurrection. Peter writes that they were "eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16).[3] Similarly, John says:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:1-3)

What he has seen and heard, John says that he *proclaims* to us – that is, in the form of a verbal testimony, and not in his lifestyle, although his lifestyle was consistent with his message.

Therefore, to be a witness for Christ primarily means to provide verbal testimony about him by the complete gospel message. For example, Paul writes:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the

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[1] Winfried Corduan, *No Doubt About It*; Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997; p. 25.

[2] Ibid., p. 43.

[3] *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991; "Testify/Witness/Testimony." *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; "martyreō."

Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.
After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at
the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have
fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,
and last of all he appeared to me also. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

Keeping in mind that our function as witnesses is mainly to offer verbal testimony, there is also a place, as in a court of law, for providing corresponding evidence for our testimony, and this may include our moral example. However, our moral example at best functions as supporting evidence for the gospel message – it cannot convey the message itself.

A non-verbal evangelistic strategy is not only unbiblical, but it is impossible. There is no such thing as non-verbal evangelism. The gospel message is such that it must be spoken or proclaimed, and not merely "lived out." Action does not speak louder than words. In fact, action never speaks at all; rather, the one who performs the action must explain it, or the one who perceives the action must interpret it. Some people seem to think that action inherently exhibits meaning and purpose, but this is because they fail to notice that they have already presupposed certain premises by which they are interpreting the situation.

For example, suppose that you observe that a man takes an old woman's arm, and together they walk across the street. By itself, the observation offers no information about the man, the woman, the intention of the man, the nature of the action (whether he is helping or kidnapping the woman), the morality of the action (whether it is good or bad), whether the man is a Christian, or whether the man is performing the action *as* a Christian. None of these items can be validly inferred from observing the action.

Nevertheless, you may make certain assumptions about these items anyway. For example, upon observing the action, you may immediately assume that the man is helping the woman cross the street out of compassion. However, the idea that he is *helping* and that he is doing it out of *compassion* cannot be inferred from the observation – you have assumed these things without strict and proper warrant. You have imported into the act of observation assumptions and categories of thought that the observation itself does not yield.

The point is that no action or observation of the action is meaningful until it is interpreted, and the direction that the interpretation takes is controlled by the assumptions imported into the situation by the interpreter. If these assumptions are wrong, then the interpretation will be wrong, and the proper assumptions can never come from the observation itself. How does the observer know that the man is not trying to kidnap the woman? It does not help to say that the man is gentle with the woman, since this only exposes two assumptions that the observation itself cannot yield, namely: (1) The observer has assumed a definition and standard of gentleness not gained by the observation itself, and (2) The observer has assumed that kidnappers are not gentle when abducting their victims. These assumptions do not come from the action or the

observation of the action; rather they are imported by the observer to "assist" in giving meaning to what he sees.

God has created all men in his own image, and the unbeliever is no exception. Having been created in the image of God, the unbeliever possesses innate knowledge about God and his moral laws. Thus he is potentially able to recognize moral actions and godly habits when he perceives them; however, being sinful and depraved, he has suppressed this knowledge, so that he opposes what he innately knows to be true. In addition, his innate knowledge is insufficient for salvation. Therefore, it is necessary for the Christian to verbally articulate, whether in speech or in writing, the message of salvation, making explicit the biblical information about God, Christ, man, sin, and salvation. If the Holy Spirit sovereignly illuminates the sinner's mind, then he will come to see the Christian's moral example through the correct mental framework, and thus acknowledge it as an attestation to the gospel's truth and power.

In other words, an action in itself carries no meaning, but it must be interpreted based on what resides in the observer's mind. If the person who observes the action possesses false assumptions relevant to the situation, he will form an erroneous interpretation. The Bible teaches that God has given everyone true innate knowledge about himself and his moral commands. For this reason, the sinner is potentially able to correctly interpret Christian miracles and conduct – and indeed all of creation – as giving support to the gospel; however, through his wickedness and depraved mind, he has suppressed this knowledge. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary for the Christian to verbally proclaim the gospel.

What could the people infer from observing that Peter pulled a crippled man to his feet, and that the man was healed (Acts 3:1-10)? Absolutely nothing – that is, unless and until the observers knew that Peter did what he did as a Christian, in the name of Jesus, and that he credited this miracle to the mercy of God and the power of Jesus Christ. However, the miracle in itself conveyed no such information (v. 11-12), and Peter had to preach the gospel to the observers (v. 13-26). Since all the information was conveyed by preaching, the preaching alone would have provided sufficient information for salvation, although it pleased God to use the healing miracle in this instance as a means by which to get the people to hear and accept the message. The same applies to a Christian's moral example – by itself, it cannot convey any information or convert anyone; but the Christian must proclaim a verbal message sooner or later. Whereas a moral example alone cannot convert a sinner, the preaching of the gospel alone can do so; therefore, the believer should always give primary emphasis to giving a verbal message.

Against this, some people may mention a biblical passage like 1 Peter 3:1-2 as the basis for an objection: "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives" (1 Peter 3:1-2). This passage says that unbelieving husbands may be "won over *without words*," but this describes the wives' reverent conduct, which receives the emphasis only after it has been established that the husbands "do not believe the word." If we know that these husbands

"do not believe *the word*," then it means that "the word" has already been preached to them!

Since the word has already been preached to them, this means that the husbands are fully aware that the "purity and reverence" of their wives are exhibited *as Christians*. Unless the word of God is preached to them, it would be impossible for the husbands to associate the good behavior of their wives to the Christian faith. Peter is indeed saying that godly behavior may sometimes be instrumental in conversion, but he presupposes the necessity of a verbal message. The reverent conduct of the wives is only the means by which God may use to cause some of the elect husbands to reconsider and then accept "the word" that they must believe to be saved.

The Westminster Confession of Faith states, "The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word" (XIV.1). On this section of the Confession, one theologian writes, "This work of God in our minds, causing us to believe, is ordinarily, one might say always, accomplished by means of the Word….Since saving faith comes only through the Word of God, one can easily understand why we place such great emphasis on the Word and on its being preached."[4] To say that faith is "ordinarily" generated through the word means just that, "We do not deny that God can regenerate an imbecile, an insane person, or a dying infant. In these cases the person is mentally incapable of the activity of faith so that he must be saved apart from an understanding of the Word.[5] But this is not so where the usual mental operations are not impeded. A sane man must believe the Gospel."[6]

To recapitulate, even when unaccompanied by our moral example, gospel preaching alone is authoritative and often effective in evangelism; in contrast, without gospel preaching, our moral example alone is never authoritative, effective, or meaningful. The gospel message by itself without our moral example has inherent in it the power to save and is sufficient as the object of belief for the hearer. For our moral example to be meaningful and instrumental in leading people to Christ, we must give primary emphasis to preaching the gospel.

Although the above is true, the biblical pattern is that we present ourselves as people whom God has sovereignly regenerated and converted, and thus given the disposition toward holiness and righteousness. Yet, for this reality to count in representing Christ to the lost, we must either first present the gospel message, or present it once we gain the people's attention by a biblically endorsed manner. Whatever the order of presentation, the verbal and intellectual aspects of evangelism are preeminent. As Paul writes, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the

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[4] Gordon H. Clark, *What Do Presbyterians Believe?*; Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1965; p. 144.

[5] This does not mean that all insane persons and infants are regenerated, but all *elect* insane persons and infants.

[6] Clark, p. 144.

one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Romans 10:14).

Paul writes that learning the contents of the gospel is "of first importance" (1 Corinthians 15:3). At the same time, Jesus commands, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). But how will people know that we perform our good deeds as Christians, and that they should praise our Father in heaven unless we tell them? Whereas a lack of our moral example never renders belief impossible for the unbelievers, a failure to present the gospel indeed makes belief impossible for them, since then they would have nothing to believe at all.

Another implication is that to be faithful and effective witnesses for Jesus Christ, we must first gain a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the Christian faith. We must become proficient in theological and biblical matters, and be able to convey our knowledge to the unbelievers in an intelligible and orderly manner. We must also be able to provide justification for what we believe, for as Peter says, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). But we must also commit ourselves to a kind of life characterized by holiness and righteousness, so that "those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander" (v. 16).

3. THE LIGHT OF OUR MINDS

An important aspect of many religious traditions and of occult teaching has to do with attaining spiritual enlightenment. The Bible is not silent on the subject, and upon examination, we discover that when it comes to the nature and source of spiritual enlightenment, there are marked contradictions between the biblical worldview and all non-biblical worldviews, and even much of what claims to be evangelical theology today deviates from biblical revelation. Christian must learn what Scripture has to say on the subject, so that they may firmly cling to its teaching, and not be misled by the doctrines of demons cloaked in garbs of counterfeit wisdom and virtue.

From 2 Corinthians 4:4-6, we will derive several points about true spiritual enlightenment, especially as it relates to the gospel message. In the process, we will also take the opportunity to clarify the nature and content of the gospel itself:

> The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.[1]

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[1] Although many commentators assume that the "god of this age" (*ho theos tou aiōnos toutou*) refers to Satan, it is not as straightforward as it first seems. The exact phrase does not appear anywhere else in Paul's writings, and it is customary for this apostle to refer to God with *ho theos*. Moreover, some see evidence for the use of this expression in reference to God in Daniel 5:23 of the Septuagint and Tobit 14:6 of the Apocrypha (*ton theon tou aionos*).

Many people would assert the "god of this age" here must refer to Satan just because of their presupposition that God would never hinder anyone from grasping spiritual truths; however, if they think this way, they would be imposing their unjustified theological bias into the text. Scripture indicates that God indeed withholds spiritual sight from many people. Quoting from Isaiah 29:10, Paul writes, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day" (Romans 11:8). And Jesus himself says, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children" (Matthew 11:25).

On the other hand, although there are no exact parallels in reference to Satan to the expression in question, Scripture indicates elsewhere that Satan is the "ruler" of those who disbelieve: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient" (Ephesians 2:1-2). In addition, the view that Satan is "the god of this age" gains some support from appealing to early extra-biblical writings such as that of Ignatius and certain rabbinical documents. As for "the rulers of this age" in 1 Corinthians 2:6, 8, the expression refers to the leaders responsible for Christ's crucifixion (or those of whom they are a type; v. 8b) and other respectable men of the time (as judged by worldly standards; 1:25-30), and does not refer to Satan or demonic spirits.

THE INTELLECTUAL MESSAGE

Paul writes that the god of this age blinds *the minds* of the unbelievers – this means that the nature of spiritual blindness is *intellectual*. Nowadays, when even professing Christians have succumbed to extreme anti-intellectualism many people assume that spiritual blindness is non-intellectual; rather, the problem lies in some undefined "spiritual" aspect in man. Accordingly, they consider conversion to be some sort of supra-rational event, if not an altogether sub-rational or anti-rational one. However, they fail to see that Scripture never distinguishes the spiritual and the intellectual in this manner.

When Scripture refers to something as "spiritual," it is often only emphasizing the spiritual nature of the intellectual concepts and activities – that is, it is only referring to the *topic* of the intellectual concepts and activities. Instead of dealing with intellectual concepts relating to, say, physics or history, we are dealing with spiritual concepts; nevertheless, the nature of these concepts remains intellectual. For example, we may say that chemistry is a scientific subject and that religion is a spiritual subject, but this does not mean that we deal with these subjects using two separate parts of our being. Rather, we use our *minds* to deal with both chemistry and religion; both scientific and spiritual subjects are *intellectual* subjects.

Romans 8:5 says, "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires." To live in the spirit does not mean to live through the "spirit" as a part of man distinct from the intellect, but it means that the mind would focus on and conform to God's precepts. The popular notion of man as a trichotomy consisting of spirit, soul, and body (and that the spirit is different from the soul) should be replaced with the biblical notion of man as a dichotomy or duality consisting of a material or corporeal aspect (body) and an immaterial or incorporeal aspect (soul or spirit).

Paul consistently attributes spiritual blindness to the mind: "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21); "They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts" (Ephesians 4:18). Therefore, blindness to spiritual things only means an intellectual blindness about spiritual things, and its elimination involves and requires a supernatural operation on the mind. If it is the mind that is

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One should not reject either interpretation at the outset. For our purpose, we will assume that "the god of this age" is Satan, while keeping in mind the teaching of Scripture, that even Satan's activities are under God's complete and sovereign control. Therefore, whatever Satan does is done only as a secondary agent to fulfill God's sovereign decrees, and this includes blinding the minds of men. In addition, even if the expression really refers to Satan in this passage, the Bible still teaches that God can and does blind (and also open) the minds of men to spiritual truth as he wills. As Romans 9:18 says, "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden." Without conclusively settling the meaning of the expression, we will proceed to examine the nature of spiritual blindness itself.

blinded, then it is also the mind that God operates on when he works to change the sinner's evil disposition so that he may see the truth of the gospel, and be converted.

By saying that spiritual problems are *intellectual* problems, we are not suggesting that spiritual problems are *academic* problems, or that spiritual blindness is caused purely by a lack of education or information. We do not mean that one can learn the gospel only in an academic setting, or that only the educated can know to accept or reject it. Rather, by "intellectual," we mean only "of or pertaining to the mind"; that is, spiritual blindness is a problem of and in the mind, and that the gospel message is directed to, understood by, and accepted or rejected by the mind, as opposed to other (real or imagined) parts or aspects of the human person. We are articulating from 2 Corinthians 4:4-6 the location and nature of spiritual blindness, emphasizing that the pivotal point is the mind, thus making clear that the rejection of the gospel is an act of the intellect. According to Scripture, resistance against the gospel proceeds from a dark, wicked, and twisted mind.

If they explicitly admit a concept of evil at all, some humanists and false religions teach that evil is cause solely by a lack of education or information, and correspondingly, the solution to evil is education. However, Christians cannot accept this false explanation, since their definition of evil is unbiblical (they do not see evil as disobedience to divine precepts), and their "education" does not refer to the knowledge of God through the Scripture.

In contrast, the Bible teaches that man's problems involve more than just a lack of education or information, but that there is an evil disposition in the unbeliever's mind that prevents him from seeing the truth and glory of the gospel, even when someone presents it to him with ample information and arguments. In other words, the unbeliever is "stupid" in the worst sense of the word; the non-Christian is a complete moron, and incurable by human power. Because his problem is not only a lack of information, but also a lack of intelligence,[2] God must cure his mind before he can correctly process the spiritual information necessary for his salvation, that is, the gospel.

Although spiritual blindness is intellectual, and although we may properly see preaching as a form of education, regeneration and conversion cannot occur by education alone because the unbeliever cannot see the "light" in the information (the gospel) we present before him. It remains that the blindness is intellectual, but the point is that besides our preaching, God must operate on the sinner by his power, so as to eliminate his blindness and alter his disposition, and thus to convert him.

That spiritual blindness is intellectual necessarily implies that its opposite is also intellectual. By this understanding of spiritual blindness, we can more accurately understand the commission that Jesus gave to Paul: "I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them

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[2] Some people will object that many non-Christians are very intelligent; however, they are using unbiblical standards of measurement. Scripture says that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10), and that those unbelievers who claim to be wise are in fact fools (Romans 1:22). Thus God infallibly declares that all non-Christians are stupid.

from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:17-18). To "open their eyes," that is, to cure their spiritual blindness, is to "turn them from darkness to light," and thus to grant them understanding. In connection to our discussion of 2 Corinthians 4:4, this means that Paul's ministry would bring intellectual enlightenment about salvation to those who were spiritually blind and ignorant.

The above necessarily implies that no non-Christian is wise or enlightened from God's perspective. According to Scripture, all unbelievers are intellectually defective and blind. Since God determines and knows all of reality, his thoughts and perceptions are certainly real and true, so that what God thinks about the unbelievers infallibly reflects the truth about them. Therefore, from a biblical perspective, all non-Christians are stupid and evil.

Even some professing Christians who have been influenced by an anti-biblical worldview may resist such a low estimation of sinful humanity, but Paul states that unbelievers are indeed those who "suppress the truth by their wickedness" (Romans 1:18). Their thinking is futile, and their foolish hearts are darkened (v. 21); although they consider themselves wise, they are fools (v. 22). These are "without excuse" (v. 20), so that the wrath of God is revealed against them (v. 18).

Some Christian scholars try to soften the Bible's language, and state that the minds of non-Christians are defective only in the moral sense – that is, although they are intelligent, their evil dispositions compel them to draw false conclusions. But this is not what Scripture says; rather, Scripture affirms that non-Christians are defective in *both* a moral and an intellectual sense – that is, unbelievers do not act stupid and evil only because they are evil, but they act stupid and evil because they are both stupid and evil. Only God can change a person like this by regeneration. As Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3).

In our passage, since Paul is describing the unbelievers' spiritual blindness toward the gospel, since spiritual blindness is intellectual, and since spiritual enlightenment is intellectual, it necessarily follows that the gospel, which the blind rejects and the enlightened accepts – is also intellectual. The gospel is not mystical, experiential, supra-rational, sub-rational, or irrational. Of course it is spiritual, but this only means that it is an intellectual message about a spiritual topic, in the sense that chemistry is scientific. Since Paul states that those who reject the gospel reject it by the mind, those who accept it do so also by the mind. Since the gospel is intellectual, this means that when we preach the gospel, we are directing the message to the mind.

True spiritual enlightenment involves an enhancement of the intellect and an increase in understanding. Paul says to the elect that God has "lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding" (Ephesians 1:8). When God saves a man, the part of him that is affected is also the part that is in God's image, namely, the mind. Thus Colossians 3:10 says that the "new self…is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."

In addition, only true spiritual information can bring true spiritual enlightenment. Embracing false doctrines with the mind is not enlightenment, but spiritual deception. Therefore, we reject the notion that God is pleased with inaccurate but "sincere" preaching. Moreover, since spiritual enlightenment is intellectual, it necessarily follows that the information with which the mind is enlightened is propositional; otherwise, the information would be meaningless and unintelligible. This contradicts those who say that spiritual knowledge or enlightenment can come through experience, mystical or otherwise, but it remains that since spiritual enlightenment is intellectual in nature, the information with which it is enlightened must be in a form that the mind can define and grasp.

By itself, an experience can offer no information. In the first place, for any experience to have meaning, one must interpret it, and one cannot avoid using the presuppositions and categories already present in his mind to interpret any experience. Therefore, not everyone interprets an experience the same way. If this is the case, what is the experience meant to convey? This can never be settled by appealing to the experience itself. In any case, once a person derives meaning from such an experience, this knowledge becomes propositional. To avoid this, one must not interpret the experience at all, in which case it will mean nothing, so that it fails to convey any information that can enlighten the mind.

In summary, to say that spiritual blindness and enlightenment are intellectual means that our gospel preaching must be intelligible in presentation, cogent in argumentation, coherent in organization, and accurate in formulation. Our preaching must consist of coherently arranged propositions, clearly presented to the minds of our hearers. Whether for evangelization or edification, sound doctrinal preaching can never be replaced by experiences, prayer, music, fellowship, or rituals.

THE CHRISTOLOGICAL MESSAGE

Whereas 2 Corinthians 4:4 shows that the gospel is intellectual, verses 5 and 6 add that the gospel is christological: "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake…to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

From our earlier discussion, we understand that the "knowledge" in verse 6 is not some mystical or otherwise non-intellectual apprehension of truth; rather, it is an intellectual grasp of and assent to the gospel, and since this knowledge is intellectual, it is also propositional.

The "light" of this knowledge of "the glory of God" is found "in the face of Christ." As we will further emphasize in what follows, God is the source of all spiritual knowledge, but he grants such knowledge only through Jesus Christ. Jesus himself insists, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

There are not numerous ways to God – there is only one way, and Jesus calls himself "the way." Truth is not relative or changing – there is only one eternal and unchanging truth,

and Jesus calls himself "the truth." The New Testament writers identify him as the *logos*, that is, the eternal unchanging principle of order in the universe (John 1:1; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:1-3, 13:8). Since this is true, only Jesus Christ is "the life," whereas all other ways inevitably lead to everlasting death and torment. Jesus says, "No one comes to the Father except through me." No one can reject Jesus Christ and at the same time find God and life. Apart from Christ, there is only despair, death, and damnation.

In another place, Jesus declares, "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters" (Matthew 12:30). Jesus states that there is no neutral ground – what is not explicitly Christian is in fact anti-Christian. Thus we must not only condemn all anti-christological religions and philosophies, but we must also condemn those that appear to be merely non-christological.

Paul writes that we are to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and…take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."(2 Corinthians 10:5). Of course, this does not mean that every statement that one makes must explicitly mention Christ. However, it remains that we must forcibly subdue (by divine power) every statement or thought, that does not at least implicitly acknowledge the ultimate authority of Christ. The divine power to accomplish this does not manifest through physical violence, since "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4). We triumph over competing religions and worldviews through rational argumentation, wholly founded on biblical revelation, and energized by the Holy Spirit.

Referring to Paul's missionary work to the Thessalonians, Luke writes, "As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures" (Acts 17:2), and later at Corinth, "Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4). Likewise, Apollos "vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 18:28). Our intellectual and christological message is also an invincible message.

Any message that is not christological in the biblical sense is in reality anti-Christian. For a message to be christological in the biblical sense, it must not advocate a merely abstract concept of "Christ" as an example of morality or mystical enlightenment. The message must either implicitly or preferably explicitly acknowledge the complete and unadulterated Christ. This includes Christ's pre-existence and deity, virgin birth, incarnation and humanity, earthly life and ministry, atonement through his substitutionary suffering and death, his physical resurrection, and his future return as the judge of all.

The Christ of Scripture is God manifested in human flesh. He is fully God and fully man. John testifies, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). He also warns against any distortion or denial of Christ's incarnation: "This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that

Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world" (1 John 4:2-3).

The true Christ is the historical Jesus of Nazareth. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, Paul summarizes at least part of the gospel message he preached, placing great emphasis on the historical nature of Christ's redemptive work:

> Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Paul indicates that a clear conception of and faith in the historical Jesus and his work of redemption is of "first importance." He states that it is "by this gospel you are saved," and if we fail to "hold firmly" to it, then "you have believed in vain." The biblical Christ is not a mystical or ideological Christ, that is, he is not just an idea or an example, but he is the second person of the Triune God manifested in history. His incarnation, life, ministry, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension really happened in history; they were not symbolic or mythological events.

Peter says, "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16). As Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, the angels said to his disciples, "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). It is the same Jesus of Nazareth who will return, and he will return "in the same way."

Christians must understand and affirm the historical nature of our christological message because there has been a resurgence of false doctrines in which Christ is presented as little more than an ideological symbol or moral example. But we have noted that any message that is not christological in the biblical and historical sense is of the antichrist. A symbolic Christ who is nothing more than an idea and who has performed no redemptive work in history cannot save anyone. The object of faith in such a distorted message is not the biblical Christ at all.

A christological message does not just accurately present the biblical Christ, but it also upholds the supremacy of Christ. Unlike the false prophets of false religions, it will never

make oneself the latest and greatest revelation or prophet from God to mankind, as in Islam, Mormonism, and Baha'ism, and it will not usurp the authority that belongs to Christ, as in Catholicism. Paul writes, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5).

Contrary to this, a number of false religions are founded on the very claim that their prophets were the latest and greatest prophets from God, even ones who superseded the authority of Christ, and who had the mandate and the authority to add to what has been permanently revealed in Scripture. Of course, others subsequently arose and declared the previous "prophets" obsolete, and that they were now the authoritative voice of God to humanity, that they were the truly enlightened ones, although some of those who went before had already claimed to be the final prophets. In contrast, 2 Corinthians 4:5 says, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." A true messenger from God preaches Jesus Christ "as Lord," that is, he declares the supremacy of Christ instead of exalting himself.

To the Colossians, Paul writes:

> My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge…For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him. (Colossians 2:2-3, 1:19)

In Christ "are hidden *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. " Of course, since Jesus is the omniscient God, it necessarily follows that he possesses all wisdom and knowledge, and he "has become for us wisdom from God" (1 Corinthians 1:30).

None of the prophets before Christ was the very incarnation of God, and none of them had "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." As Hebrews 1:1-3 says:

> In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

God spoke through the prophets in the past, but now he had spoken through Christ, in whom are "hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Christ is also the divine agent by which the Godhead created and even now sustains the universe. Therefore, the biblical Christ has complete and superior knowledge of all things.

We must understand what is being said here so that we can perceive what implications necessarily follow. Since Christ is God and in him are all (not just some) wisdom and knowledge, then unlike the prophets before him, Christ was the full and final revelation of God to mankind. It was Christ that the previous prophets spoke about in the first place (Luke 24:44; John 5:39) – that is, their message was christological in content and focus. And since Christ is the complete expression of God (Hebrews 1:3), there is nothing else that anyone after him can reveal that is not already in Christ.

Since this is true, there is no one after Christ who can rightly claim to be his equal or superior, nor can anyone offer revelations that contradict, update, or supersede the Christian revelation as recorded in Scripture. This being the case, you would expect one who claims to supercede Christ to first refute Christianity, but on the contrary, they claim to honor Christ as a true prophet of God. But they cannot have it both ways – they must either honor Christ as a true prophet, which prohibits further revelation that is not already found in Christ, or they must first refute Christianity before asserting their own alleged revelations. Jesus says, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). He is the perfect and complete revelation of God since he is himself deity. Thus there can never be a greater or more current and relevant messenger or revelation from God.

If one affirms that Christianity is true, then he must also affirm that all other religions and worldviews are false; otherwise, he is not really affirming that Christianity is true, since Christianity insists on its own exclusivity – that it alone is true, and that it alone can save. On the other hand, if one claims that Christianity is false, then this generates a collision of worldviews between Christianity and the worldview by which this person declares Christianity to be false, and this gives the informed Christian the opportunity to totally annihilate his opponent's beliefs in argumentation and to make him a public example.

There is no way around it – Christianity is either true or false. If Christianity is true, then its own claim that all other religions and worldviews are false is also true, and thus if Christianity is true, then all other religions and worldviews are indeed false. But if one claims that Christianity is false, then he must defeat us in the battlefield of rational argumentation.

Since Christianity claims to be wholly true in every aspect and detail, any claim saying that Christianity is only partially true or even mostly true is tantamount to saying that Christianity is false. In Christ is all wisdom and knowledge.

It is a cowardly compromise to say that there is some truth in every religion, so that one should not hold to his own religion to the total exclusion of others, and that one should always respect another person's religion. Even some professing Christians consider this compromise a legitimate option, but this reflects their feeble or even non-existent commitment to Christ. Since Christianity itself does not allow this compromise, to affirm this position is also tantamount to saying that Christianity is false.

Now, if a worldview consists of both true and false propositions, one will not be able to identify the true from the false on the basis of that same worldview. If one is indeed able

to distinguish the true from the false, this only means that he has already presupposed another worldview that he knows or assumes to be wholly correct, and by which he now evaluates the worldview presented to him. Since this is the case, this means that he does not learn anything from the worldview under scrutiny, because he has already adopted one that he assumes to be true in its entirety. But if the worldview he has presupposed is not entirely true, then again we have the epistemological problem of identifying the true from the false within the worldview.

For example, a person who tests a truth-claim with the "scientific method" presupposes a worldview that assumes the scientific method to be reliable for testing truth-claims. However, if the worldview based on which he makes this assumption is not wholly true, then how does he know whether the scientific method is reliable in the first place? It may be that his assumption about the reliability of the scientific method is precisely one of the things about his worldview that is false. Unless he somehow knows that his worldview is entirely correct, he would have no way to test or confirm whether the scientific method is reliable. Therefore, a worldview that is only partially true is also a worthless one. It logically collapses into total skepticism about reality, and no knowledge is attainable.

The Christian claim is that all of the Bible is true. Now, this same Bible says that Christ has all wisdom and knowledge; in addition, since he has created and even now sustains all that exists, this means that he is the divine agent by which anyone knows anything at all. Then, it necessarily follows that *even if* there is anything true at all in other religions, it can only mean that they have learned (or stolen) the information from Christ and Christianity without acknowledging the source.

From the human perspective, this makes them at least plagiarists, hypocrites, and frauds, but from the biblical perspective (that is, God's perspective), their guilt is inexcusable. As Paul writes:

> The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them…For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools. (Romans 1:18-19, 21-22)

Paul states that God has given all men some knowledge about himself, but unbelievers refuse to acknowledge him. They refuse to acknowledge this giver of knowledge as God, and they refuse to give him thanks. Instead, they credit their knowledge to another source, and worship this as their God. "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator…" (Romans 1:25).

Therefore, to say that non-Christian religions possess some truth only serves to utterly condemn them, and does not lend support to their credibility or usefulness at all. And

even if false religions contain several true ideas does not mean that we must respect them, but it only means that we have caught them "red-handed" in their crime of spiritual robbery against God. They have received from God, but they deny him.

They have set up what amounts to their "golden calves" and loudly declare to others, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (Exodus 32:4)! However, God has said, "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols" (Isaiah 42:8). Rather than worshiping the true God, who has verbally revealed himself only through the Christian Scripture, unbelievers suppress their knowledge of this true God, and worship idols instead. Therefore, adherents to non-Christian religions are "without excuse" (Romans 1:20).

God "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). Not all who bask in the sun's warmth and light are good, and not all who receive rain are righteous. An idol worshiper does not receive rain from his idol, since his idol is really nothing; rather, he receives rain from the Christian God – the problem is that he fails to give glory to whom glory is due. Although God has given him sufficient knowledge about himself, the unbeliever suppresses the truth about God through wickedness (Romans 1:18), and chooses to honor an idol instead (Romans 1:21).

Since Christ possesses all wisdom and all knowledge, then the fact that a non-Christian can know $1 + 1 = 2$ means that Christ has given him this knowledge, since Christ is "the true light that gives light to every man" (John 1:9). This knowledge does not originate from, follow from, or reside in the unbeliever's non-Christian worldview, but it is rather an integral part of the Christian system. If the unbeliever does not then give thanks to the Christian God, then he would be guilty of spiritual and intellectual robbery in failing to give credit to whom credit is due.

On the other hand, Christians freely receive knowledge from the one they worship: "It is because of [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God" (1 Corinthians 1:30). Since Christ has a monopoly on truth, any person who knows anything at all owes his knowledge to him, and a failure to worship Christ and give him thanks is a sin that deserves the ultimate punishment.

Therefore, it also follows that it is sinful for Christians to say that they can learn truths from other religions. Suppose that another religion has within it a piece of true information about God. Based on the biblical premise that Christ is the possessor of all wisdom and knowledge, this piece of information must necessarily be a "Christian" truth – that is, it belongs to Christianity alone – and therefore it is exclusively a part of the Christian revelation. How foolish it would be for a person to learn what belongs to Christianity (that is, any and all truths) from a non-Christian source, and a source that for certain presents even truth in a mixed and distorted fashion? And if a religious system is only partially true but not entirely true, how can a person distinguish the true from the false? Christians who say that other religions contain some truths are able to recognize

these truths for what they are precisely because they have already learned them from the Christian worldview; otherwise, there is no way to tell the true from the false.[3]

Suppose a given system of thought includes the following propositions: (1) X is a man, and (2) X is an accountant. If, in reality, (1) is true but (2) is false, how will a person know to affirm (1) and deny (2), unless he is already acquainted with X? Unless the system is completely true (or false), there is no way to tell which proposition is true (or false) without importing knowledge from outside of the system, and if one imports knowledge from outside of the system, then he would be evaluating the system in question by the second system from which he has gained the knowledge to evaluate the first.

That is, if worldview A is not complete true or false, then there is nothing within worldview A by which we can accurately judge a particular proposition within worldview A as true or false. If we bring in something that we know from worldview B by which we judge something within worldview A, then we are making worldview B to stand in judgment over worldview A. But if one has already obtained knowledge that is accurate, relevant, and extensive enough from worldview B by which to evaluate worldview A, then he cannot meaningfully learn anything from worldview A. He is judging it, not learning from it.

In other words, if a worldview is not completely true, then on the basis of the same worldview, there is no way to tell whether a given proposition within the same worldview is true or false. But if you already know enough from another worldview to judge the propositions within this first worldview, then there is nothing you can really learn from it, since you already know what it can offer you and more. Of course, the worldview by which you judge another worldview must itself be completely true; otherwise, you will have the same problem again. Any worldview that is not completely true collapses into skepticism, so that it can know nothing at all.

Therefore, there is nothing to learn from a religious system that is not completely true. You can only learn from a system of thought that is completely true, and then use what you have learned from this worldview to evaluate another worldview, but never to learn from it. Thus to say that a given religion has "some truth" even though it is not completely true is to condemn it as utterly worthless, and not to praise or honor it, or to give it a place in society.

No non-Christian religion can teach any true information that is not already explicitly stated or implicitly assumed in the Christian worldview. There is nothing true that any

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[3] In a sense, there is no truth at all in non-Christian religions and worldviews, since even what appears to be a true proposition would mean different things within a non-Christian worldview as opposed to the Christian worldview. This is because all propositions are related to many other propositions, and even if a non-Christian affirms a proposition that appears to be true, the propositions that describe the relationship of the proposition in question to other propositions would be very different in a non-Christian worldview as opposed to the Christian worldview. Thus Christians and non-Christians would have (*should* have) very different understandings of even "1 + 1 = 2" – Christians consider all numbers in relation to the Christian God and the Christian Scripture, but the non-Christians do not.

non-Christian religion can teach that is not already part of the Christian system. To say otherwise would be to deny our basic premise that all wisdom and knowledge are in Christ, in which case we will question whether the one making the denial is a Christian in the first place. If not, then this again generates a confrontation of worldviews, and the informed Christian is guaranteed victory.[4]

Therefore, we conclude that there is nothing that Christians can learn from non-Christians that is not already included or implied in the Christian worldview, only that Scripture reveals these truths without distortion, impurity, or mixture, and that it reveals these truths in a way that is comprehensive and coherent. So *even if* there are true propositions in non-Christian religions, there is absolutely no reason to learn these truths from them. As we have established, *even if* non-Christian religions contain some truths, since these religions are not completely true, you will have to already know these truths before you can recognize them and distinguish them from the false propositions within these religions. And if you already know them, then you are not learning them from these non-Christian religions. Therefore, for me to say that other religions may have "some truth" in them is to insult them – I am implying that their prophets and adherents are wicked thieves and complete morons, certainly not worthy of anyone's trust and respect.

Paul writes, "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 3:10). God intends for the church to glorify him by manifesting his wisdom in the context of proclaiming an exclusively christological message. He certainly does not intend for the church to praise non-Christian religions for the wisdom and knowledge that they have stolen from us and then regurgitated in distorted form, and still less for the church to acknowledge even the falsehoods in other religions as truths.

It is difficult to justify how a "Christian" who has *anything* good to say about non-Christian religions can deserve anything less than excommunication, still less should we ordain them as ministers of the gospel! A minister must promote the Christian faith and denounce all non-Christian religions, not to advocate a truce or fellowship with demons.

Although we have been focusing on non-Christian religions, the same points apply to worldviews that claim to be non-religious. For example, Christians can learn nothing from an atheistic worldview unless it is completely true. The atheist can know nothing at all if not for Christ the *logos*, who gives light to every man, so that there is nothing in the non-Christian worldview that can offer any truth to the Christian that is not already in the Christian worldview.

We may draw an analogy from the physical world. A Christian may obtain a drink of water from an atheist, who has it to offer by collecting rain. But the source of rain does not come from and cannot ultimately be explained by anything inherent in the atheist's worldview; rather, rain comes from the God who has verbally revealed himself only in the Christian Scripture. The difference is that the Christian gives thanks to God for the

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[4] See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions* and *Presuppositional Confrontations*.

water, but the atheist does not, and in failing to acknowledge the true God who is the ultimate source of rain, the atheist sins and commits his soul to damnation.

Likewise, a Christian may appear to learn that "1 + 1 = 2" from an atheist, but this piece of information belongs to Christ, who has all wisdom and knowledge. The atheist is just teaching the Christian something that is inherent in the Christian's worldview (and that is in fact incompatible with the atheist's first principle), which he has learned from Christ the *logos* without giving due thanks to him. On the other hand, the Christian should acknowledge that all knowledge belongs to Christ, and show gratitude to God for obtaining this piece of information.

In other words, all true propositions are in fact "Christian" propositions – they are the property of Christ – and therefore are much more appropriately and accurately expressed within the context of the Christian worldview. Thus to say that Christians can in fact appear to learn true information from non-Christians, such as "1 + 1 = 2," does not mean that it is desirable to do so. And it does not mean that the non-Christian can accurately present any true piece of information, because his false presuppositions will inevitably distort anything that he teaches.

For example, in a non-Christian worldview, one cannot even give an explanation as to why a certain number must mean the same thing from day to day. But on the basis of the biblical worldview, we understand that the universe has been created and is even now being sustained by a being whose eternal, rational, and omniscient mind gives meaning and stability to the laws of thought and logic. The number "2" (not the symbol, but the concept that it represents) will mean the same thing tomorrow as it does today not because of human convention, but because it remains the same in the mind of God, and we pattern our thoughts after him as those made in his image.

No non-Christian worldview, including the religious ones, can give a more satisfying answer to this question, since we have established that any worldview must be wholly true in order to be meaningful and relevant. A religion that posits a "God" who holds the meanings of numbers constant, but cannot defend the other claims integral to its worldview, ultimately collapses into epistemological skepticism, since there is no way to tell the true from the false. We would not know which beliefs within a given worldview is true or false if even one of them is false.

Even the seemingly non-religious propositions, such as those regarding astronomy and economics, are best expressed and taught within an explicitly Christian context. For example, since God is the ruler and planner of history, a textbook on Western civilizations that fails to mention divine providence is not good history at all, since it neglects the very defining factor of historical events and progress. In fact, an accurate history book must be completely dominated by its teaching on divine providence. We may say similar things about physics, literature, music, and even sports.

Since God is as he has revealed himself through the Scripture, no intellectual discipline can afford to ignore him. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"

(Genesis 1:1) is a superior explanation to the universe's existence than any sophisticated system of cosmology that fails to acknowledge him as the first and sustaining cause of all that exists (Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3). One who insists on reasoning independently from God must first refute the challenge presented by the Christian worldview.

Christianity is not just one option among many. The message of salvation is either exclusively christological, and that only in the biblical sense and with a historical basis, or it is no gospel at all. Unless a system of thought is truly christological, with the historical and divine Jesus Christ of Nazareth as the object of faith and worship, it has no power to save – not the one who hears it, nor the one who preaches it. On the other hand, Paul writes, "the holy Scriptures…are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). There is salvation only in the biblical, and therefore christological, gospel.

Unbelievers often accuse the exclusive stance of Christians as unloving, but the Bible teaches that true love "does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:6). Non-Christians have no authority to define divine love for us. Intellectual cowards take what seems to be the easy way out by saying that Christians reject non-Christians ideas and beliefs because they are narrow-minded, hateful, and bigoted – but on their worldview, they cannot even *authoritatively* tell us why it is wrong to be narrow-minded, hateful, and bigoted. Rather, we reject all non-Christian worldviews, religious or otherwise, because they are false. An "open-mindedness" that would accept the lie just as quickly as it assents to the truth is an indication of a foolish, depraved, and twisted mind – not a sign of intellectual acuity or moral progress.

Therefore, let us seriously consider the apostolic declaration: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" (Galatians 1:8-9). True Christians dare not and wish not disagree with the apostle – thus may anyone who advocates a non-Christian religion or worldview be condemned to endless torment in hell.

All true Christians must insist that Christianity has a monopoly on truth, and that all non-Christian worldviews are false, because this belief is an integral and necessary part of the biblical worldview, so that to reject it is to reject Christianity. Whether one finds this doctrine of exclusivity repugnant or satisfying does not affect its truth, but if one disagrees with it, then he must refute it. Christianity is the sole possessor of truth, and what appears to be truths in other worldviews are nothing more than stolen goods, and all claims to divine revelation in other religions are false. No name-calling against the Christian, saying that he is advocating hate and bigotry, can change the truth of this claim. Anyone who denies the Christian's claim to exclusivity must be ready to confront the Christian worldview with his own non-Christian worldview.

Christianity dares to declare itself as having a monopoly on truth and expect others to comply, and it is willing and eager to demonstrate its superiority in argumentation. But of

course, non-Christians are intellectually dishonest and morally despicable, and those who are the non-elect will remain resistant to the Christian worldview, including its claim to exclusivity, even after the Christian has triumphed in argumentation. At the same time, many professing Christians have succumbed to the cowardly appeal of the unbelievers for "tolerance," so that they have stopped obeying the biblical mandate to confront false religions and worldviews. Although Christians may be courteous toward unbelievers on a social level, those who are sympathetic to non-Christians on a theological or ideological level commit treason against Christ and his kingdom.

Colossians 2:9-10 says, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority." If "all the fullness of Deity" is in Jesus Christ, then there is nothing left to be revealed by another prophet that is not already in Christ, which in turn means that no prophet after Christ can be greater than he, so that those who claim to be greater must be false prophets. Since Christ is "the head over every power and authority," no one after him can supersede him. If we "have been given fullness in Christ," who in turn has "all the fullness of the Deity," then there is nothing to learn from non-Christian religions and worldviews. Since Christ is not merely a messenger or manifestation of God, but God himself, no prophet may add to, change, update, or contradict the Christian revelation. Those who do are impostors and liars.

Those who claim to profess faith in Christ should understand to whom and to what they have committed themselves. Those who call themselves Christians but who at the same time experience great difficulty with Christianity's exclusive claims should reconsider if they are really Christians (2 Corinthians 13:5), or whether they had greatly misunderstood the gospel message, and thus had undergone a false conversion. If they understand Christianity's exclusive claims, but still deny that Christ is the only way to salvation, and that all non-Christians are condemned to hell, then by what definition are they Christians? In what sense can a person be a Christian who at the same time declares that Christ is just one option among many, and that Christ's own claims to exclusive authority and truth are mistaken (Matthew 28:18; John 14:6)?

They should understand that to affirm Christianity is to condemn all non-Christian religions, philosophies, and worldviews, and to affirm that all non-Christians are condemned to endless torment in hell. Since this is what Christ himself teaches, a person who rejects this has no legitimate basis on which he can claim to be a Christian; rather, he should be honest and admit that he has never been a Christian, and that he is still a non-Christian.

Besides defending our faith against the questions and accusations from unbelievers, we must press them to provide justification for what they believe. But with no less urgency, we must confront the indecisive professing Christians within the church, demanding that they choose once for all whom they will serve (Joshua 24:15), and cease being double-minded, or "between two opinions" (1 Kings 18:21). If Christianity is true, then all non-Christian religions and worldviews are false; if any other religion or worldview is true, then Christianity cannot at the same time be true.

Many professing believers who uncompromisingly condemn theft, adultery, and murder, would at the same time encourage non-confrontational dialogues or exchanges with non-Christian religions as if there is something to learn from them, and as if idolatry is less sinful or serious than theft, adultery, and murder. But murder is not a greater sin than idolatry. Jesus says that "the first and greatest commandment" is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37-38), and relegates loving other people as the second greatest commandment (v. 39). Nevertheless, it seems that most professing Christians react to theft and murder much more strongly than idolatry, and this is not right. The attitude of most professing Christians toward false worship fails to reflect the Scripture's extreme denunciation against it, and to the extent that our thoughts disagree with God's, we make him out to be a liar, and sin against him.

Those who claim to be Christians must make up their minds – if they profess Jesus Christ as Lord, then they must immediately and permanently give up their idolatrous and syncretistic mindset. They must affirm that the knowledge necessary for salvation is found in the Scripture alone, that God's redemptive work is appropriated through Christ alone, and that it is applied to the individual by faith alone.

The appeal for tolerance or to be theologically inclusive is often an excuse to avoid dealing with the numerous and irreconcilable contradictions between worldviews. The non-Christian (and many who claim to be Christians) should stop being an intellectual coward, face reality, and admit that because of these contradictory claims, not every worldview can be true.

Indeed, one who rejects Christianity's exclusivity is already practicing exclusivity in saying that it is exclusively true that no religion may make exclusive claims, that all exclusive religions are to be excluded from acceptance. What gives the "tolerant" people the right or justification to be intolerant of Christianity's exclusive claims? If they are truly tolerant, then why not endure our criticisms without fighting back? But they do fight back, and they attack Christianity with a vengeance.

Although easy targets such as Buddhism, Mormonism, and Baha'ism also make strong exclusive claims, they are not attacked nearly as often, if at all. This is not just a case of ignorance about comparative religion, but it is a case of selective prejudice amounting to a global spiritual conspiracy with Satan behind it. Why do unbelievers focus their efforts on attacking Christianity? Numerous things may go on in their twisted and depraved minds, but there are at least two reasons. First, only the Christian worldview poses an intellectual threat – all the other religions are obviously nonsense. Second, in reality there are only two sides or groups – Christians and non-Christians; those who reject the Christian faith – whether they are atheists, Buddhists, or Mormons – are really all on the same side. Ultimately, the battle rages between truth (Christianity) against a variety of falsehoods (atheism, Mormonism, etc.), and not a number of worthy worldviews competing for dominance.

Appeals for theological and ideological tolerance often betray a "Please don't hurt me" mentality, amounting to a tacit admission of intellectual incompetence, and an admission that non-Christian worldviews just cannot contend with the Christian worldview on the battlefield of ideas. Many people claim that intolerance of other people's ideas is a result of ignorance – that is easy to say, but I can just as easily say that they are just afraid that the Christian will completely annihilate their most precious pagan beliefs in debate, and they are desperately begging us not to humiliate them, without wanting to sound weak and stupid.

In the first place, I demand to know *exactly* what "intolerant" people are ignorant of; that is, those who claim that ignorance breeds intolerance must tell me exactly what piece of information these intolerant people lack.[5] Then, I would demand justification that ignorance indeed breeds intolerance,[6] that the intolerant people indeed lack the information that the tolerant people claim that they lack,[7] that the intolerant people are indeed intolerant *because* they lack the information that the tolerant people claim that they lack,[8] that intolerant people would become tolerant upon gaining the information that they supposedly lack,[9] that the information that they supposedly lack is true or factual,[10] and that tolerance is a good thing in the first place. I am confident that no advocate of "tolerance" can successfully establish *any* of these points in debate.

The truth is that even those who claim that intolerance results from ignorance reject certain claims as false based on what they claim to know, and not what they do not know. For example, they may reject the idea that the earth is flat because they claim to know that the earth is not flat, or they may reject the idea that homosexuality is morally wrong because they claim to know that sexual orientation is genetically determined. Whether their alleged knowledge is true or relevant is not the point; rather, the point is that they reject certain claims because of some knowledge that they claim they have, and not because of ignorance.

This shows that, even by their own practice, intolerance of other people's beliefs is often a result of knowledge or at least a claim to knowledge, whereas tolerance may often be a mark of ignorance – that is, if you do not know what is true or false, you have no basis from which to reject any position. Intellectual intolerance comes from the knowledge that the various worldviews contradict one another, so that they cannot all be correct. Intolerance on an ideological level comes from the knowledge that the existing worldviews make contradictory claims. On the other hand, intellectual tolerance implies ignorance, indecision, and cowardice.

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[5] That is, if intolerant people are ignorant of X, then what is X? I grant that when it comes to "intolerance" about different things, the alleged X will probably vary; nevertheless, my challenge remains relevant in each area and instance of "intolerance."

[6] That is, ignorance of X breeds intolerance.

[7] That is, the so-called intolerant people are indeed ignorant of X.

[8] That is, the intolerant people are intolerant *because* they are ignorant of X.

[9] That is, once these intolerant people know X, they would stop being intolerant.

[10] That is, that X is true in the first place.

However, if the unbeliever or if the "tolerant" people challenge the Christian's claim to knowledge, saying that what the Christian claims to know is in fact false, then these people are in fact being intellectually intolerant of the Christian's claim, and they are intolerant because of something that they claim to know. Thus, again, intolerance comes from knowledge, or a claim to knowledge. What results is another clash between the Christian and the non-Christian worldview, giving the Christian another opportunity to crush his opponent in debate. Tolerance is a sham – those who advocate tolerance cannot defend it, and they do not practice it.

The Christian position is that we must never tolerate falsehood, but we must rather destroy it; nevertheless, we destroy false ideas not by physical violence, but by intellectual persuasion and argumentation. We encourage intellectual violence against non-Christian ideas and religions, and not physical or military violence. Honest and courageous people should encourage various worldviews to clash in private and public debate, and decide beforehand that they should abandon the beliefs that cannot withstand intense scrutiny. Christianity will be the only one left standing when the dust settles.

THE REVELATIONAL MESSAGE

Besides its implication for christological preaching, 2 Corinthians 4:6 also sets forth the revelational nature of the gospel: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

The verse contains an allusion to the Genesis creation account that carries an important implication for the subject of spiritual enlightenment and the nature of the gospel message – namely, emphasis is given to God's initiative in creation and the power of his sovereign decrees: "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Genesis 1:2-3). Of course, Paul does not say that a sinner's conversion results from God's decree in creating physical light, or that he performs the two acts in exactly the same way; rather, he alludes to the Genesis account as an appropriate analogy.

We have established that the "darkness" in the sinner is intellectual (Romans 13:12; Ephesians 5:11) – that is, he rejects the gospel because his *mind* has been blinded. Paul explains, "They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts" (Ephesians 4:18). Therefore, the "light" with which God breaks through the darkness in the sinner is also intellectual. 2 Corinthians 4:6 itself indicates that this light is the light of "the knowledge" of the glory of God. In more than several places, Scripture also uses "light" to denote intellectual understanding. For example, the parallel structure of Psalm 119:130 equates "light" to "understanding": "The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple." Prophecy says that Christ's work would grant his people "the knowledge of salvation" (Luke 1:77).

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Anti-intellectuals detest the idea that conversion is an intellectual transformation, but this is what Scripture teaches. Non-Christians are intellectually blind, and their minds are filled with darkness. Conversion occurs when God sovereignly causes the light of the gospel to break into their impoverished souls, to give their feeble minds "understanding," so that they may "know him who is true" (1 John 5:20).

Paul's allusion to the Genesis creation account also illustrates that it is solely because of God's sovereign choice and initiative, and not because of the sinner's own choice and initiative, that the unbeliever's blindness is removed, and so that the light of the knowledge of God might shine brightly in his mind. Being blind to the light of the gospel, the unbeliever will not and cannot simply decide to receive the gospel. If he is willing and able to do so, he would not be blind in the first place, but the Bible calls him blind.

Paul writes, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). The gospel is "veiled" to those who are perishing, since their minds have been blinded. To dispel this intellectual darkness in his chosen ones, God sovereignly causes intellectual light to shine in their minds, similar to what he did at the time of creation, when he said, "Let light shine out of darkness" (v. 6).

It is God who causes this to happen, not the sinner himself. It is not even done at the sinner's request, since being intellectually blind to spiritual things, the sinner would not make such a request in the first place. Thus Scripture says, "There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God" (Romans 3:11). There is no one who seeks God who has not been first "apprehended" (Philippians 3:12; KJV) by God solely because of his sovereign will and pleasure. Regeneration and conversion do not come by man's will or works (Romans 9:16), but only by God's will and mercy (Romans 9:15; John 1:12-13). We love God only "because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Although the Bible unmistakably asserts God's absolute sovereignty in salvation, without spiritual enlightenment, man's ancient sinful desire for autonomy (Genesis 3:1-7) seizes his thinking and controls his theology. Thus many professing Christians greatly emphasize man's "free will," although Scripture teaches that man has no free will. The will of man exists as a function of the mind, but it is not free in the sense of being autonomous, or immune from influences apart from the man. It may seem that a person chooses according to his desires and dispositions, but even these desires and dispositions have not been freely chosen by the man himself.

In contrast to the pagan "free will" theology, Scripture teaches that God possesses unrestrained power and liberty to control man's thoughts, desires, and choices: "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases" (Proverbs 21:1); "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:13). This is a controversial topic, but it is controversial not because Scripture is obscure, but because of man's ferocious desire for intellectual and

behavioral independence – the seed of rebellion implanted in him by the "ancient serpent" (Revelation 19:2).

Non-Christians prefer to think that they control their own lives, but informed Christians realize that only God has control, and those who love God would not have it any other way. As Jeremiah says, "I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23; also Luke 12:19-20, James 4:13-15). What we call Arminianism is the theological fruit of the devil's work in sinners; what we call Calvinism is the theological fruit of God's work in the elect.

From this, we will proceed to examine the role of God's revelation in conversion, and in constructing the Christian worldview. The Bible teaches that God is the one who chooses those whom he will enlighten, that is, to give the "light" of the knowledge of Christ, so that they may be converted:

> To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God; but those who are outside get everything in parables, in order that while seeing, they may see and not perceive; and while hearing, they may hear and not understand lest they return and be forgiven. (Mark 4:11-12, NASB)
>
> He has blinded their eyes, and He hardened their heart; lest they see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart, and be converted, and I heal them. (John 12:40, NASB)
>
> At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.'" (Luke 10:21)

After saying to Nicodemus, "You must be born again" (John 3:7), Jesus continues to explain, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (v. 8). It is God who decides on who will undergo regeneration, and not the individuals themselves, just as "the wind blows wherever it pleases," and is not subject to our control.

We have already established that the gospel message is exclusively christological, and that "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Jesus is the only way to God, but at the same time, Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws [literally, compels or drags] him" (John 6:44). Without the prior regenerating work of God, a person's mind remains in darkness, and he will never come to Christ on his own.

By saying that the gospel message is revelational, part of what is meant is that it is God who initiates a person's faith in Christ, and not his own will or desire. No preacher can

cause the light of the gospel to break through the darkness in his hearer's mind – it must be a creative and sovereign work of God. In this sense, true spiritual enlightenment is revelational. When Peter says to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus answers, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (Matthew 16:16-17).

Man is unable to turn the darkness within another person's mind into light. Nevertheless, God uses means by which he enlightens those whom he has chosen, so that he commands Christians to "preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15), and Paul's ministry is one that opens people's eyes and turns them "from darkness to light" (Acts 26:18). Of course, the power to do this "is from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (Romans 9:18).

Therefore, a person does not receive spiritual enlightenment through an ascetic lifestyle, prolonged meditation, prescribed prayers, chanting meaningless syllables, performing ridiculous ceremonies, or other strange and foolish means. The foundation of the Christian life is not self-effort; rather, true spirituality begins as God rescues a person from his complete spiritual helplessness. "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Salvation is "the gift of God…not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). We recognize that we have been saved solely due to God's mercy, and not because of anything good inherent in us. All that is good in us, we have received from God (1 Corinthians 4:7), and there is no place for boasting. Since all good things come from God, and since he is limitless, the Christian life is one characterized by an "ever-increasing glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18), whereas non-Christian worldviews cannot even begin to offer true spirituality, but rather, they lead their followers from despair, to death, and to damnation. In contrast, the Christian's glory is that which "comes from the Lord" (v. 18), and will last forever (v. 11).

Just as only God could overcome the initial physical darkness by his creative power, only he can grant true enlightenment to a person by his sovereign decree. All attempts by people to reach God amount to a rebellious effort to construct a spiritual and intellectual Babel. "Let us unite and build an edifice tall and strong enough to reach the heavens!" But God has "made foolish the wisdom of the world" (1 Corinthians 1:20). They are ignorant of the fact that, in digging the foundation of self-effort on which to construct their building of spiritual enlightenment, they are in reality digging their own graves. All of their "righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6), for apart from the Christian revelation, there is no salvation, no righteousness, no hope, and no future.

If even Christians cannot do anything without Christ (John 15:5), then non-Christians are truly insignificant "nobodies," living futile and meaningless lives. It is time that professing believers begin seeing things this way, and realize how great a salvation (Hebrews 2:3) the Lord Jesus Christ has purchased for his elect with his own blood, and

thus give thanks! The difference between the Christian and the non-Christian is not trivial, but it is as great as the gap between light and darkness, Christ and Belial, and the temple of God and idols (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

Because divine revelation is the source of the Christian worldview, this means that it is not constructed upon man's futile speculation or his deductions from false first principles; instead, the entire Christian worldview comes from God's verbal communication to mankind, which is the Scripture. Paul warns, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ" (Colossians 2:8). A "philosophy" or worldview founded on mere tradition, human convention, or non-biblical presuppositions is "hollow and deceptive." It promises much, but fails to deliver. It appears intelligent and sophisticated on the surface (at least to some people), but it is easily exposed as foolish and absurd. It claims to be an accurate representation of reality, but instead distorts and misrepresents what is in fact the case. It claims to provide certainty, but collapses into total skepticism under the weight of its own false presuppositions.

Instead of being taken captive by such a false philosophy, Paul says that our worldview should wholly depend on Christ. We must contemplate the ultimate questions from the biblical perspective, controlled by biblical principles and presuppositions. Christian teaching provides the only authoritative and accurate basis for a comprehensive philosophy, because all the fullness of deity resides in Christ (Colossians 2:9) – he is the all-sufficient foundation for all of life and thought. Moreover, Christians "have been given fullness in Christ" (v. 10), so that we know we have access to his fullness and sufficiency. And since Christ is "the head over every power and authority" (v. 10), we can be certain that no true revelation or prophet will contradict or supersede him.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In one of his letters to the Corinthians, Paul writes:

> But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. (2 Corinthians 11:3-4)

As Eve was deceived by Satan, many have been "led astray from [a] sincere and pure devotion to Christ." Why were the Corinthians easily deceived? Paul says that they were willing to "put up with" a different Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel. In other words, they practiced "tolerance."

Thus Christians must impose a zero tolerance policy against heresies and false philosophies. To continue having a "sincere and pure devotion to Christ" necessitates building our immunity against non-Christian ideas. We may show courtesy and kindness

to adherents of other religions and worldviews, but intellectually speaking, we must not sympathize with anything that does not agree with Scripture. In Revelation 2, Jesus praises the church in Ephesus, saying, "I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false" (v. 2).

Jude writes, "I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (v. 3). Our faith has been "once for all entrusted to the saints"; therefore, it does not need to be updated, and it is not subject to revision. The biblical gospel as set forth in Scripture allows no subsequent revelation to supersede or even supplement it. This faith has been permanently established in its fullness by Jesus Christ and his apostles, and it is this faith that we must believe and defend.

We have learned from 2 Corinthians 4:4-6 that the gospel is intellectual in nature, christological in content, and revelational in source. Spiritual enlightenment leading to eternal life through faith in Christ comes only from the Christian revelation. Such a gospel message is ultimately also an invincible message, with which no other message or worldview can compete or compare. Its bold declaration by believers is the means by which God accomplishes his purposes and plans for humanity, whether it is the salvation of his elect, or the damnation of the reprobates. Jesus Christ is the light of our minds, and everyone who rejects him remains in darkness and death.

4. THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

One of the most popular but overrated objections against Christianity is the so-called "problem of evil." The objection claims that what Christianity affirms about God is logically irreconcilable with the existence of evil. Those who make this objection claim they know for certain that evil exists, and since this is incompatible with the Christian God, then it follows that there is no God, or it at least shows that what Christianity affirms about God is false.

Using the problem of evil, unbelievers have managed to confound more than a few professing Christians, and it seems that many of those who claim to be Christians are themselves disturbed by the existence of evil, or the amount of evil in this world. Some believers manage to provide plausible answers that are not altogether compelling, whereas many others simply call the existence of evil a mystery. However, to the extent that Scripture addresses the topic, so that it is something that has been revealed, Christians have no right to call it a mystery in the sense of something that is hidden. Just because we may not understand everything about the existence of evil does not mean that we must ignore what the Scripture plainly reveals about it.

On the other hand, merely plausible answers are insufficient when the Bible provides an infallible answer and an invincible defense. In what follows, we will see that the existence of evil poses no challenge to the Christian concept of God, or to any aspect of Christianity. Instead, it is the non-Christian worldviews that cannot make sense of the existence of evil, if they can have a concept of evil at all.

THE PROBLEM

Christians affirm that God is omnipotent (all-powerful) and omnibenevolent (all-loving). Our opponents reason that if God is all-powerful, then he possesses the ability to terminate evil, and if he is all-loving, then he wishes to terminate evil;[1] however, since evil still exists, this means that God does not exist, or at least it means that the things that Christians affirm about him are false. That is, even if God exists, since evil also exists, he cannot be both all-powerful and all-loving, but Christians insist that he is both all-powerful and all-loving; therefore, Christianity must be false.

Those who use this argument against Christianity may formulate it in different ways, but regardless of the precise form that the argument takes, the point is that Christians cannot affirm all the biblical divine attributes, because to do so would be logically incompatible with the existence of evil. And if this is the case, then Christianity is false.

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[1] Sometimes the argument includes the fact that Christians affirm that God is also omniscient (all-knowing) – if God knows everything, then he knows how to destroy evil.

Although Christians have agonized over this so-called "problem of evil" for centuries, the argument is extremely easy to refute; it is one of the most stupid objections that I have ever seen, and even as a child I thought it was a foolish argument. Many people have trouble with the existence of evil not because it poses any logical challenge to Christianity, but because they are overwhelmed by the emotions that the topic generates, and these strong emotions effectively disable the minimal level of judgment and intelligence that they normally exhibit.

Now, since the opponents of Christianity claim that the problem of evil is a *logical* argument against Christianity, in response we only need to show that the existence of evil does not *logically* contradict what Christianity teaches about God. Although Scripture also sufficiently answers the emotional aspects of this topic, it is not our responsibility to present and defend these answers within the context of logical debate. In fact, the emotional problems that people have with the existence of evil and their lack of answers to these problems are thoroughly consistent with what Scripture teaches. Thus we will focus on responding to the existence of evil as a logical challenge.

FREE WILL

Many professing Christians favor the "free will defense" in answering the problem of evil. In the context of biblical narratives, this approach states that when God created man, he wanted to grant him free will – a power to make independent decisions, even to rebel against his maker. Of course, God was aware that man would sin, but this is the price of granting man free will. By creating man with free will, God also created the potential for evil, but as the free will defense goes, since man is truly free, the actualization of this potential for evil can be blamed only on man himself. Those who use the free will defense would add that the potential or even the actualization of evil is not too high a price for granting man genuine free will.

Although many professing Christians use the free will defense, and to some people the explanation may sound reasonable, it is an irrational and unbiblical theodicy – it fails to answer the problem of evil, and it contradicts Scripture. First, this approach only postpones addressing the problem, in that it transforms the debate from why evil exists in God's universe to why God created a universe with the potential for such great evil. Second, Christians affirm that God is omniscient, so that he did not create the universe and humankind realizing only that they had the potential to become evil; rather, he knew for certain that there would be evil. Thus either directly or indirectly, God created evil.[2]

We may distinguish between natural evil and moral evil – natural evil includes natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods, whereas moral evil refers to the wicked actions that rational creatures commit. Now, even if the free will defense provides a satisfactory explanation for moral evil, it fails to adequately address natural evil. Some Christians may claim that it is moral evil that leads to natural evil; however, only God has the power

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[2] The doctrine of "free will" is unbiblical and heretical, and some have even followed the doctrine to its next logical step in saying that if man were to be truly free, then God cannot really know for certain what man would do, thus denying the omniscience of God. But even then, God knew that it was possible for free will to produce extreme and horrendous evil, so that the same problem remains.

to create a relationship between the two, so that earthquakes and floods do not have any necessary connections with murder and theft unless God makes it so – that is, unless God decides to cause earthquakes and floods because of murder and theft committed by his creatures. Thus God again appears to be the ultimate cause of evil, whether natural or moral.

Even if Adam's sin had brought death and decay, not only to mankind but also to the animals, Scripture insists that not one sparrow can die apart from God's will (Matthew 10:29). That is, if there is any connection between moral evil and natural evil, the connection is not inherent (as if anything is inherent apart from God's will), but rather sovereignly imposed by God. Even the seemingly insignificant cannot occur without, not merely the permission, but the active will and decree of God. Christians are not deists – we do not believe that this universe operates by a set of natural laws that are independent from God. The Bible shows us that God is now actively running the universe, so that nothing can happen or continue apart from God's active power and decree (Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3). If we should use the term at all, what we call "natural laws" are only descriptions about how God regularly acts, although he is by no means bound to act in those ways.

Christians must reject the free will defense simply because Scripture rejects free will; rather, Scripture teaches that God is the only one who possesses free will. He says in Isaiah 46:10, "My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please." On the other hand, man's will is always enslaved either to sin or to righteousness: "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness" (Romans 6:17-18). Free will does not exist – it is a concept assumed by many professing Christians without biblical warrant.

Another popular assumption is that moral ability is the prerequisite of moral responsibility. In other words, the assumption is that if a person is unable to obey God's laws, then he should not be morally responsible for obeying these laws, and thus God should not and would not punish him for disobeying these laws. However, like the assumption that man has free will, this assumption that moral responsibility presupposes moral ability is also unbiblical and unjustified.

In reference to unbelievers, Paul writes, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Romans 8:7). If it is true that moral responsibility presupposes moral ability, and Paul states that the sinner lacks this ability, then it follows that no sinner is responsible for his sins. That is, if a sinner is only a sinner if he has the ability to obey but refuses to obey, since Paul says that the sinner indeed lacks the ability to obey, then it follows that a sinner is not a sinner. However, this is a contradiction, and it is a contradiction that the Bible never teaches.

The Bible teaches that the non-Christian is a sinner, and at the same time teaches that he lacks the ability to obey God. This means that man is morally responsible even if he lacks moral ability; that is, man must obey God even if he cannot obey God. It is sinful for a

person to disobey God whether or not he has the ability to do otherwise. Thus moral responsibility is not grounded on moral ability or on free will; rather, moral responsibility is grounded on God's sovereignty – man must obey God's commands because God says that man must obey, and whether or not he has the ability to obey is irrelevant.

In the first place, free will is logically impossible. If we picture the exercise of the will as a movement of the mind toward a certain direction, the question arises as to what moves the mind, and why it moves toward where it moves. To answer that the "self" moves the mind begs the question, since the mind *is* the self, and thus the same question remains.

Why does the mind move toward one direction instead of another? If we can trace the cause of its movement and direction to factors external to the mind itself, factors that impress themselves upon the consciousness from the outside and thus influencing or determining the decision, then how is this movement of the mind free? If we can trace the cause to the person's innate dispositions, then this movement of the will is still not free, since although these innate dispositions decisively influence the decision, the person himself has not freely chosen these innate dispositions in the first place.

The same problem remains if we say that a person's decisions are determined by a mixture of his innate dispositions and external influences. If the mind makes decisions based on factors not chosen by the mind, then these choices are never free in the sense that they are not made apart from God's sovereign control – they are not made free from God. Scripture teaches that God not only exercises immediate control over man's mind, but God also sovereignly determines all the innate dispositions and external factors related to man's will. It is God who forms a person in the womb, and it is he who arranges outward circumstances by his providence.

Therefore, although we may affirm that man has a will as a function of the mind, so that the mind indeed makes choices, these are never free choices, because everything that has to do with every decision is determined by God. Since the will is never free, we should never use the free will theodicy when addressing the problem of evil.

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

Many professing Christians are uncomfortable with the biblical teaching that man has no free will, since it appears to make God "responsible" for the existence and continuation of evil. So in this section, we will provide a brief exposition on what Scripture teaches on the topic, showing that to affirm Scripture is to reject free will.

Scripture teaches that God's will determines everything. Nothing exists or happens without God, not merely permitting, but actively willing it to exist or happen:

> I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times,
> what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all
> that I please. (Isaiah 46:10)

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. (Matthew 10:29)

God controls not only natural events, but he also controls all human affairs and decisions:

Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple. (Psalm 65:4)

The LORD works out everything for his own ends – even the wicked for a day of disaster. (Proverbs 16:4)

In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps. (Proverbs 16:9)

A man's steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand his own way? (Proverbs 20:24)

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases. (Proverbs 21:1)

Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed. (Job 14:5)

All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" (Daniel 4:35)

But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus. (Acts 18:21)

For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Philippians 2:13)

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." (James 4:13-15)

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." (Revelation 4:11)

If God indeed determines all natural events and human affairs, then it follows that he has also decreed the existence of evil. This is what the Bible explicitly teaches:

> The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" (Exodus 4:11)

> Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come? (Lamentations 3:37-38)

> I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things. (Isaiah 45:7)

> When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it? (Amos 3:6)

The greatest act of moral evil and injustice in human history is said to have been actively performed by God through secondary agents:

> Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. (Isaiah 53:10)

> Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. (Acts 4:27-28)

In any case, God decreed the death of Christ for a good reason, namely, the redemption of his elect. Likewise, his decree for the existence of evil is for the worthy purpose of his glory. The elect and reprobates are both created for this reason:

> I will say to the north, "Give them up!" and to the south, "Do not hold them back." Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made. (Isaiah 43:6-7)

> In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:11-12)

> And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD… (Exodus 14:4)

> For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory… (Romans 9:17, 22-23)

Based on the above passages, we come to the following conclusion. God controls everything that is and everything that happens. There is not one thing that happens that he has not actively decreed – not even a single thought in the mind of man. Since this is true, it follows that God has decreed the existence of evil, he has not merely permitted it, as if anything can originate and happen apart from his will and power. Since we have shown that no creature can make completely independent decisions, evil could never have started without God's active decree, and it cannot continue for one moment longer apart from God's will. God decreed evil ultimately for his own glory, although it is not necessary to know or to state this reason to defend Christianity from the problem of evil.

Those who see that it is impossible to altogether disassociate God from the origination and continuation of evil nevertheless try to distance God from evil by saying that God merely "permits" evil, and that he does not cause any of it. However, since Scripture itself states that God actively decrees everything, and that nothing can happen apart from his will and power, it makes no sense to say that he merely permits something – nothing happens by God's mere permission.

Since "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28), on a metaphysical level, it is impossible to do anything at all in independence from God. Without him, a person cannot even think or move. How, then, can evil be devised and committed in total independence from him? How can one even think evil apart from God's will and purpose? Instead of trying to "protect" God from something that he does not need protection from, we should happily acknowledge with the Bible that God has actively decreed evil, and then deal with the topic on this basis.

The census of Israel taken by David provides an example of evil decreed by God and performed through secondary agents:

> Again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go and take a census of Israel and Judah." (2 Samuel 24:1)

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> Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel. (1 Chronicles 21:1)

The two verses refer to the same incident. There is no contradiction if the view being presented here is true. God decreed that David would sin by taking the census, but he caused Satan to perform the temptation as a secondary agent.[3] Afterward, God punished David for committing this sin:

> David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O LORD, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing." Before David got up the next morning, the word of the LORD had come to Gad the prophet, David's seer: "Go and tell David, 'This is what the LORD says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.'" So Gad went to David and said to him, "Shall there come upon you three years of famine in your land? Or three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you? Or three days of plague in your land? Now then, think it over and decide how I should answer the one who sent me." David said to Gad, "I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men." (2 Samuel 24:10-14)

Although the evil we are speaking of is indeed negative, the ultimate end, which is the glory of God, is positive. God is the only one who possesses intrinsic worth, and if he decides that the existence of evil will ultimately serve to glorify him, then the decree is by definition good and justified. One who thinks that God's glory is not worth the death and suffering of billions of people has too high an opinion of himself and humanity. A creature's worth can only be derived from and given by his creator, and in light of the purpose for which the creator made him. Since God is the sole standard of measurement, if he thinks something is justified, then it is by definition justified. Christians should have no trouble affirming all of this, and those who find it difficult to accept what Scripture explicitly teaches should reconsider their spiritual commitment, to see if they are truly in the faith.

Many people will challenge God's right and justice in decreeing the existence of evil for his own glory and purpose. In discussing divine election, in which God chooses some for salvation and condemns all others, Paul anticipates a similar objection, and writes:

> One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make

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[3] Satan himself is a creature, and thus has no free will. All his actions and decisions are controlled by God.

out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and
some for common use? (Romans 9:19-21)

In effect, Paul is saying, "Of course the creator has the right to do whatever he wants with his creatures. And who are you to make such an objection in the first place?" Some people object that man is greater than a "lump of clay"; I have even seen one professing Christian writer make this futile objection. First, this is a biblical analogy, and a true Christian will not challenge it. But if one challenges it, then the debate becomes one of biblical infallibility, which must be settled first before returning to this analogy. Since I have established biblical infallibility elsewhere, denying biblical infallibility is not an option here. Second, if man is more than a lump of clay, then God is also more than a potter – he is infinitely greater than a potter. The analogy is proper when we understand it to say what it means, that is, God as creator has the right to do whatever he wishes with his creatures. "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (Romans 9:18).

For a person to have difficulty accepting that God would decree the existence of evil implies that he finds something "wrong" with God making such a decree. However, what is the standard of right and wrong by which this person judges God's actions? If there is a moral standard superior to God, to which God himself is accountable and by which God himself is judged, then this "God" is not God at all; rather, this higher standard would be God. However, the Christian concept of God refers to the highest being and standard, so there is by definition nothing higher. In other words, if there is something higher than the "God" that a person is arguing against, then this person is not really referring to the Christian God. Since this is the case, there is no standard higher than God to which God himself is accountable and by which God himself is judged. Therefore, it is logically impossible to accuse God of doing anything morally wrong.

Jesus says that only God is good (Luke 18:19), so that all "goodness" in other things can only be derivative. God's nature defines goodness itself, and since he "does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17), he is the sole and constant standard of goodness. No matter how moral I am, one cannot consider me the objective standard of goodness, since even the word "moral" is meaningless unless it is used relative to God's character. That is, how "moral" a person is refers to the degree of conformity of his character to God's character. To the degree that a person thinks and acts in accordance with God's nature and commands, he is moral. Otherwise, there is no moral difference between altruism and selfishness; virtue and vice are meaningless concepts; rape and murder are not crimes, but amoral events.

However, since God calls himself good, and since God has defined goodness for us by revealing his nature and commands, evil is thus defined as anything that is contrary to his nature and commands. Since God is good, and since he is the only definition of goodness, it is also good that he decreed the existence of evil. There is no standard of good and evil by which we can denounce his decree as wrong or evil. We are not affirming that evil is good – that would be a contradiction – but we are saying that God's decree for the existence of evil is good.

Hebrews 6:13 says, "When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself." In other words, there is no one to hold God accountable, and there is no court to which one may drag him in order to press charges against him. No one judges God; rather, every person is judged by him. Other relevant biblical passages include the following:

> Though one wished to dispute with him, he could not answer him one time out of a thousand. His wisdom is profound, his power is vast. Who has resisted him and come out unscathed? He moves mountains without their knowing it and overturns them in his anger. He shakes the earth from its place and makes its pillars tremble. He speaks to the sun and it does not shine; he seals off the light of the stars. He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea. He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the constellations of the south. He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. When he passes me, I cannot see him; when he goes by, I cannot perceive him. If he snatches away, who can stop him? Who can say to him, "What are you doing?" (Job 9:3-12)

> "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!" Then Job answered the LORD: "I am unworthy – how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer – twice, but I will say no more." Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm: "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?" (Job 40:2-8)

> Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker, to him who is but a potsherd among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, "What are you making?" Does your work say, "He has no hands?" Woe to him who says to his father, "What have you begotten?" or to his mother, "What have you brought to birth?" This is what the LORD says – the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, or give me orders about the work of my hands? (Isaiah 45:9-11)

> Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)

Since we derive our very concept and definition of goodness from God, to accuse him of evil would be like saying that good is evil, which is a contradiction.

THE SOLUTION

Having demolished the popular but irrational and unbiblical free will defense, we will now examine the biblical answer to the problem of evil. Let us first repeat the unbeliever's argument:

1. The Christian God is all-powerful and all-loving.
2. If he is all-powerful, then he is able to end all evil.
3. If he is all-loving, then he wants to end all evil.
4. But evil still exists.
5. Therefore, the Christian God does not exist.[4]

The argument encounters an insuperable obstacle by the time we reach premise (3), namely, the non-Christian cannot find a definition of love that upholds this premise without destroying the argument. That is, by what definition of love do we know that an all-loving God would want to destroy evil? Or, by what definition of love do we know that an all-loving God would have already destroyed evil?

If this definition of love comes from outside of the Bible, then why must the biblical worldview answer to it? To form an argument using a non-biblical definition of love would make the argument irrelevant as a challenge to Christianity. On the other hand, if we take the definition of love from the Bible, then the one who uses this argument must show that the Bible itself defines love in a way that requires an all-loving God to destroy evil, or to have already destroyed evil. Unless the non-Christian can successfully defend premise (3), the argument from the problem of evil fails before we even finish reading it.

Now, if the non-Christian uses a non-biblical definition of love in premise (1), then the argument is a straw man fallacy from the start. But if the non-Christian uses the biblical definition of love in premise (1), and then substitutes a non-biblical definition of love in premise (3), then he commits the fallacy of equivocation. If so, then the most that his argument accomplishes is to point out that he has a non-biblical definition of love, but it would be completely irrelevant as a challenge to Christianity.

On the other hand, if he tries to use the biblical definition of love, then for his argument to be relevant, Scripture itself would have to define love in a way that requires God to destroy evil, or to have already destroyed evil. However, although Scripture teaches that God is loving, it also teaches that there is evil in this world, and that this evil is ultimately under God's complete and sovereign control. Therefore, Scripture itself denies that there is any contradiction between the love of God and the existence of evil.

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[4] Of course, different people may present different formulations of the problem of evil, but my refutation will apply to all of them.

For the argument from the problem of evil to stand, the non-Christian must establish the premise, "The love of God contradicts the existence of evil," or something to that effect. But Scripture itself does not affirm this premise, and if the non-Christian tries to argue for this premise with definitions of love and evil found in his own non-biblical worldview, then all he succeeds in showing is that the biblical worldview is different from the non-biblical worldview. We already know this, but what has become of the problem of evil? The non-Christian points to the scriptural teaching about God's love, then smuggles in a non-biblical definition of love that requires God to destroy evil, and after that stupidly boasts in the "contradiction" that he has produced.

If a person wants to challenge the Bible or hold the Bible accountable for what it says, then he must first let it define its own terms; otherwise, he might be only challenging what the Bible does *not* say, which makes the objection irrelevant. The non-Christian must demonstrate why God's love *necessarily* implies that he must or that he desires to destroy evil, or that it *necessarily* implies that he must have or that he desires to have already destroyed evil.

To answer with something like, "Because a loving God would want to relieve suffering," does not help at all, since it only restates the premise in different words, so that the same question remains. Why must a loving God desire to relieve suffering? How does one define suffering in the first place? If the non-Christian cannot define either love or suffering, or if he cannot logically impose his definitions on the Christian, then his premise amounts to saying that a God with an undefined attribute X must desire to destroy or to have destroyed an undefined Y. But if he can define neither X nor Y, then he has no intelligible premise from which to construct an intelligible argument against Christianity.

Another type of answer may say, "Because God would want to triumph over evil." Again, what is the definition of "triumph"? If God himself is the ultimate cause of evil, and if God exercises total and constant control over it, then in what sense is he *ever* "losing" to evil? So whatever the non-Christian says, he encounters the same problem, and it is impossible for him to establish that the love of God contradicts the existence of evil.

Rather, since the Bible teaches about both the love of God and the reality of suffering, it is legitimate to conclude that, from the biblical perspective, the love of God does not necessarily imply that he must destroy evil, or that he must have already destroyed it. Of course this may not be so from the non-biblical perspective, but again, this only shows that the biblical worldview disagrees with non-biblical worldviews, which we already know, and which is the reason for debate. But the non-Christian still has not given us a real and intelligible objection.

As long as the non-Christian fails to establish premise (3), that the love of God contradicts the existence of evil, the Christian is under no obligation to take seriously the problem of evil as an argument against Christianity. In fact, since the non-Christian fails to define some of the key terms, logically no one can even understand the argument – there is no argument, and there is no real objection to answer.

If we stop here, we will have already refuted the so-called problem of evil, having shown that there is no such problem at all. However, just so the discussion can continue, we will grant the premise for now; that is, for the sake of argument, we will assume that the love of God *somehow* contradicts the existence of evil, while keeping in mind that this is something that Scripture never teaches, and that non-Christians have never established.

Now, the non-Christian argues that given the existence of evil, the Christian God cannot logically exist. In response, we have already shown that the non-Christian cannot establish the premise that an all-loving God must necessarily destroy evil or desire to destroy evil. Having said that, we now proceed to point out that the premises of the argument do not *necessarily* lead to the non-Christian's conclusion in the first place; rather, very different conclusions are possible:

1. The Christian God is all-powerful and all-loving.
2. If he is all-powerful, then he is able to end all evil.
3. If he is all-loving, then he wants to end all evil.
4. But evil still exists.
5. Therefore, *God has a good purpose for evil*.

1. The Christian God is all-powerful and all-loving.
2. If he is all-powerful, then he is able to end all evil.
3. If he is all-loving, then he wants to end all evil.
4. But evil still exists.
5. Therefore, *God will eventually destroy evil*.

Without immediately stating whether or not we think the above two arguments are valid or invalid, the point is that in a valid argument, the premises must *necessarily* and *inevitably* lead to the conclusion. However, in the argument from the problem of evil, the premises by no means *necessarily* and *inevitably* lead to the conclusion. Therefore, the argument from the problem of evil is invalid.

Instead of using the reality of evil to deny the existence of God, the two revised versions above come to two different conclusions. Again, I have not said whether these two revised versions are good arguments, and I have not said that the premises necessarily and inevitably lead to these two conclusions; rather, all I am trying to show is that the premises do not necessarily and inevitably lead to the non-Christian's conclusion, and this is enough to show that his argument is invalid.

Some non-Christians say that if Christians claims that God has a good purpose for evil, then Christians must also state and defend this purpose. However, the non-Christians have never been able to show *why* the Christians must state and defend this purpose. The debate is about whether the given premises *necessarily* and *inevitably* lead to the non-Christian's conclusion. Whether or not there is a good purpose for evil, and whether or not the Christians can state and defend this purpose, is completely irrelevant. As it is,

Scripture indeed explains at least part of God's purpose for evil, but again, it is not logically necessarily or relevant to the debate.

There is more. Now, the non-Christian argues that God does not exist because evil exists, and by this point we have already refuted the argument. However, we can add that the existence of the Christian God is in fact the logical prerequisite for the existence of evil. That is, evil is meaningless and undefined without an objective and absolute standard of right and wrong, good and evil, and this standard can only be the Christian God.

When the non-Christian states that evil exists, what does he mean by "evil"? He may be referring to greed, hate, murder, rape, earthquakes, floods and the like. However, on what basis and by what standard does he call these things evil? Does he call these things evil just because he disapproves of them? Any definition or standard of evil that he gives without appealing to the Christian God and the Christian Scripture will be unsuccessful and easily defeated.

For example, if the non-Christian claims that murder is wrong because it violates the right to life of the victim, we only need to ask why the victim has any right to life? Who gives him this so-called right? The non-Christian? Who says that there is anything as a right in the first place? Non-Christians have tried many arguments, but all of them have been exposed as foolish and unjustified.[5]

On the other hand, the Christian affirms that murder is wrong, immoral, and evil because God forbids murder: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man" (Genesis 9:6); God explicitly disallows it when he says, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). It is consistent with the Christian worldview to say that murder is evil and that the murderer must be held accountable, but the non-Christian can never justify the same claim. He cannot even *authoritatively* define murder.[6]

The non-Christian claims that evil exists, and from that basis evaluates what Christianity says about God. He uses something that he claims to be obvious to refute something that he claims to be unobvious. However, the existence of evil is not obvious at all unless there is an absolute, objective, and universal moral standard, and that we somehow know this standard, so that we make evaluations with it. Since the non-Christian fails to establish such a standard, and since he fails to establish how he would know such a standard, his references to evil are meaningless and unintelligible, and his argument from the problem of evil has no effect against Christianity. In fact, on the basis of his worldview, he does not even know what his own argument means.

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[5] For more information, please see my writings on apologetics and ethics.
[6] For example, the non-Christian can never justify defining murder to include the killing of humans but exclude the killing of bacteria. Of course, some advocates of animal rights consider it murder to slaughter animals, but not bacteria; however, they can never justify the inclusion of animals or the exclusion of bacteria.

If a person denies the existence of God, he has no rational basis to affirm the existence of evil; by logical necessity, our recognition of God precedes our recognition of evil. Unless the Christian God is presupposed, evil remains undefined. When the non-Christian argues against Christianity using the problem of evil, he becomes an intellectual terrorist, so that he hijacks the moral absolute of Christianity in the process of arguing against Christianity. However, he cannot refer to any natural or moral evil without implicitly acknowledging a standard by which to judge something as evil. If he acknowledges the existence of evil, then he must first acknowledge the existence of God, but if he already acknowledges the existence of God, then the argument from the problem of evil is pointless.

Of course, the non-Christian may not immediately surrender at this point; rather, he will probably try to offer some workable definition of evil to rescue his argument. I cannot list all the possible definitions that he may try to propose, but I have provided enough information here so that anyone can refute any non-Christian definition proposed. If the Christian will consistently demand justification for the non-Christian's claims and definitions, he will always successfully frustrate any attempt to construct an argument against Christianity from the existence of evil.[7]

Some non-Christians have come to realize that the argument from the problem of evil is not strictly valid, so that although they continue to challenge Christianity based on the existence of evil, they have "softened" their claim. That is, they say that although the existence of evil does not logically contradict the existence of God, the existence of evil at least provides strong evidence against God's existence, or the probability of God's existence. Thus instead of calling their argument a logical case against God's existence, they call it an evidential case against God's existence.[8]

But this is nonsense – it is just a deceptive way of saying that they have no argument. In fact, all the problems that I have pointed out with the "logical" case remain in the "evidential" case. The argument still fails to establish that the love of God contradicts the existence of evil, or that the love of God requires him to destroy evil, or to have destroyed evil. It still fails to define the crucial terms. What is love? What is evil? In fact, the argument makes matters worse by adding the concept of "evidence" to the debate, since now I demand at least several additional things: a definition of evidence, a standard for determining what constitutes evidence toward or against something, a standard for determining the relevance and force of any alleged evidence, and an epistemology for discovering the things that are used as evidence.

Along with the "evidential" case, some people include the claim that there is too much "gratuitous" evil, and that this is evidence against God's existence. But again, what is evidence? And who decides what is "gratuitous"?[9] By what standard of necessity do we

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[7] The argument will ultimately become a broad presuppositional debate. For more information on this, see my *Presuppositional Confrontations*.

[8] Some people use different terms to make this same distinction.

[9] On this point, even some professional philosophers stoop to an appeal of popular opinion. That is, they claim that "everybody knows" that certain things are evil, and that certain things are gratuitous evil. In

decide that an evil event is unnecessary? And unnecessary for what? And why does it have to be necessary in the first place? In the biblical worldview, when God does something, it is justified by definition just because he has decided to do it. Thus the non-Christian cannot argue against Christianity by appealing to "unjustified" events, since he must first refute Christianity before he can show that these events are unjustified.

OTHER WORLDVIEWS

There is no reason for lengthy explanations or needless repetitions, since the matter is indeed as simple as it appears. The argument from the problem of evil *in any form* is one of the most irrational arguments ever devised, but it has deceived and troubled many people because of its emotional appeal. In response, the Christian must not only neutralize the argument, but he must take the offensive position on this topic against the non-Christian.

Perhaps because the problem of evil is most often used to challenge Christianity, many people forget to consider whether non-Christian worldviews and religions have adequate and coherent answers about the existence of evil. Can non-Christians provide an authoritative definition of evil? Does their definition of evil contradict what they claim about physics (natural evil) and psychology (moral evil)? Can they explain how and why evil began and continues? Can they suggest a solution for evil, and can they guarantee that this solution will succeed? No worldview except the Christian faith can even begin to answer these questions.

Next time a non-Christian challenges you with the problem of evil, instead of being pressed into a corner, you should be able to give an irrefutable answer, but then you should take the offensive and turn the argument against the non-Christian (2 Corinthians 10:5):

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another context, these same philosophers would probably blast such an appeal to popular opinion to establish a pivotal premise -- that they resort to this tactic here shows me that they are stupid and desperate. The most obvious response is that it is fallacious to think that something is true just because many or even most people think that it is true.

Some philosophers argue that if most people think that there is gratuitous evil, then the burden of proof falls on the Christian to show that there is no gratuitous evil. Although I disagree that the burden of proof falls on me just because I contradict popular opinion, even if it does, I have shown that any evil that God decrees is justified by definition, so that the burden of proof returns to the non-Christian, who must either refute this particular point or refute Christianity as a whole, and thus the focus of the debate shifts to a presuppositional one (see my *Presuppositional Confrontations*).

Moreover, even if the appeal to popular opinion is legitimate (although I deny this), I demand proof that it is indeed the popular opinion that there is gratuitous evil. How can the non-Christian establish this claim? Even if he can perform a global empirical survey, I have already refuted empiricism elsewhere. In addition, I demand justification that he should limit his survey to only the present generation. If he cannot do this, then he must also show that since the origin of mankind, it has been the popular opinion that there is gratuitous evil. He must also prove that this will continue to be the popular opinion in all future generations. If he fails to do this, then I have no reason to accept his claim that "everybody knows" there is evil, or gratuitous evil. He thinks that "everybody knows," but he does not know that "everybody knows"; it is his singular opinion about popular opinion.

"I am able to show that the existence of evil does not contradict the love of God or the existence of God. In fact, the very concept of evil presupposes the existence of the Christian God. This God decreed the existence of evil for his own glory, and every aspect and instance of evil is under his precise control, and there is no standard higher than God to judge this decree as wrong. One day he will banish all sinners to endless torment in hell, so that every instance of murder, theft, rape, and even every word that a man has spoken, will be accounted for. He will thus justly punish all sinners who have not trusted Christ for salvation, but his chosen ones will surely be saved.

"But how do you deal with evil? Given your worldview, how can you even have a meaningful and universal concept of evil? How do you explain its origin and continuation? Can you offer an effective or even guaranteed solution to defeat evil? Can you set forth universally applicable and binding reasons against such things as genocide and racism? How can your worldview make moral demands on someone that does not subscribe to it? Given your worldview, is there final and perfect justice for anyone? If not, what is your solution or explanation for that? How can you define justice in the first place? Why must a person from another nation or culture recognize your so-called rights?

"If you cannot give adequate answers to these and thousands of other questions on the basis of your worldview and intellectual commitments without self-contradiction, then it is evident that the existence of evil means the destruction of your worldview, whereas it poses no threat at all to mine. You are a hypocrite for even mentioning the problem as an objection to Christianity"

Although many people are fond of challenging Christians with the problem of evil, the truth is that Christianity is the only worldview in which the existence of evil does not create a logical problem. Nevertheless, many professing Christians are intimidated by non-Christian arguments. This is partly because they have not learned the logical refutations to these arguments, but also because they sometimes partly agree with the non-Christians, at least on the emotional level. But of course, just because something causes an emotional disturbance in some people does nothing to challenge the Christian faith itself.

Now, if the non-Christian is so disturbed over the existence of evil he can always ask a Christian on how to depend on Christ for salvation; otherwise he can commit himself to a psychiatric ward where he may remain miserable under professional care. As for Christians, Scripture provides the solution: "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you" (Isaiah 26:3). Psalm 73:16-17 says, "When I

tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny." Only by accepting the Christian worldview can a person come to a rational position about the existence of evil, and only by entering "the sanctuary of God," can the topic cease to be "oppressive." Only those who draw close to God can sufficiently understand the reality of evil and retain emotional stability. The Christian faith is true and is the only way to God and salvation. It is immune to intellectual attacks. It cannot be successfully challenged, but only studied and obeyed.