

# Presuppositional Apologetics: An Introduction

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## An Introduction

Apologetics is the defense and confirmation of the Christian Faith. Peter told his readers that they were to be “always ready to give an answer (apologia) for the hope which was within them.” (1 Pet. 3:15). He did not want believers to be caught napping. Their firm hope was not based upon “cunningly devised fables” (2 Pet. 1:16), but came about as a result of their reception of the truth about Christ and His world. Peter stated that the first step in Christians giving a reasoned defense was to, “sanctify the Lord Christ in [their] hearts.” He did not mean that the Lord was to be acknowledged on the basis of some ‘warm fuzzy-feeling’ inside. That was certainly not what the apostle was referring to. Rather, by “the heart” (kardia) Peter was speaking of the thinking person – the innermost person. George Zemek calls the heart “man’s mission-control center.” In short, Peter urged his readers to adopt a fully Christian outlook on life. This mindset is to be brought to the apologetic task. Believers have “the mind of Christ,” (1 Cor. 2:16), and they are to utilize it in their daily lives – and, in particular, says Peter, in their apologetics.

When one spells this out in plain terms, it means that Christians must not abandon their Bibles at the crucial moment when their Faith is assailed. Instead, they are to assert confidently and intelligently the Biblical perspective about God, about man, and about the fallen world in which we live. What is called “Presuppositional” Apologetics attempts to do just that. It does not ask the Christian to step backwards in time and employ his unsanctified reason, and then to argue back to God. It refuses to re-enter the darkness of unbelieving thinking, and to grant that somehow “man by searching” can now “find out God.” (cf. Job 11:7). Rather, it picks up the light of the Creator (cf. Psa. 36:9b; Matt. 5:14-16; Eph. 5:8), and shines it upon the unbeliever’s rebellious heart, showing him the truth about his rebellion and his sinning against his better knowledge. Thus, presuppositionalism takes a self-consciously theological approach to the defense of the truth of Christianity.

This of course means that the division between theology and apologetics is one of emphasis, and it demands a different approach to apologetic thinking, since the door is wide open to theologizing right away. In this first article the focus will mainly be upon presuppositions; those heart commitments that govern the way people view things, both Christians and non-Christians. A Biblical apologetic is nothing if not a clash of worlds. With that in mind we begin with God and His Word.

## 1. God and Scripture.

The Presuppositional Argument for God’s existence takes into account (as it should) the basic assumptions of the believer and the unbeliever. It asserts that

the fundamental aspects of the world of human experience are only intelligible within a Biblical-theistic framework. Propounding this as it does, it does not accept the autonomy of human reasoning, but, instead, holds to a “revelational epistemology” – a perspective on knowledge that is anchored in Scripture. All the standard theistic arguments are defeasible in character, which is to say, they cannot come to certainty, but must admit the possibility of being overturned. This is not the way the Bible presents God (e.g. Gen. 1:1ff.; Psa. 53:1; Jn. 1:1-14; Acts 2:36; 9:22; Rom. 1:1ff.). Why, then, should it be ours?

### **1a. Nobody Can Hide From The One True God.**

Above everything else, believers should think Biblically. They are commanded to “do all things to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31), and this includes loving God with all their minds (Matt. 22:37). Paul told the Church at Colossae that in Christ, “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). Since, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7), and of wisdom (Prov. 9:10), Christianity – and everything else – is best defended from within a Christian point of view. After all, it is all very well for us to declare that the Bible is our final authority in all matters of faith and practice, but what use is such a profession if we lay it aside in apologetics? Are we supposed to rely upon our own understandings at the outset? (Prov. 3:5). Christians should not be concerned about proving to a skeptic that a god of some description exists. Mere “theism” is not the issue, and any acknowledgement of bare theism constitutes no apologetic victory. In two separate psalms we are told that, “the fool has said in his heart that there is no God.” (Pss.14:1; 53:1).

Unbelief is rooted in heart-rebellion. As D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once told the philosopher C.E.M. Joad, “God is not a subject for debate” (Gen. 1:1; Jn. 1:1). He is not one whom we may be honestly skeptical about. He is the ultimate reality. General revelation shows God to man (Rom. 1:18-20). To disbelieve in Him is to think as a fool in God’s world (Rom.1:22; 1 Cor. 2:6-16). To be sure, fallen men bury God’s clear revelation under an avalanche of brilliant excuses and shrewd reasoning. But it is false reasoning; sinful reasoning (Rom.1:21-22, 28).

The famed English writer G.K.Chesterton once said, “If a man does not believe in God, it is not that he will believe in nothing, but that he will believe in anything.” John Calvin, in his Institutes, began the book by saying that man cannot come to true knowledge unless he knows God and then knows himself before the face of God. These Biblical beliefs must find a conspicuous place in our approach to the defense of Christianity.

It is the universal teaching of both Testaments that God is God alone (Isa. 44:6; 45:5-6, 21). All Christians have historically believed in only one God (Jer. 10:10; 1 Thess. 1:9; Psa. 86:10; 1 Tim. 1:17; Jam. 2:19). There are not two or more competing gods (Exod. 20:3; Deut. 32:40). The Bible presents a God who is Almighty and solitary. He will brook no rivals. Deuteronomy 6:4 states; “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.” This verse is repeated by the Lord Jesus in

Mark 12:29. We also find the doctrine in John 14:9; Col. 1:15, and many other places. Further, we Christians assert, on the basis of Holy Scripture, that God “has not left Himself without a witness.” (Acts 14:17). The God of the Bible is the greatest Fact (cf. Exod. 3:13-14), a truth which some apologetic schools deny, believing as they do that God is not as obvious to men and women as many mundane things. But without the fact of God all other facts, as we shall see, are simply unintelligible.

The Christian-Biblical position says that whoever sees the world Biblically sees it truly – as it really is. Whoever rejects a Biblical worldview misinterprets the world (to the extent that he follows a false worldview). We must never forget that because reality is God-formed, even rank infidels see some things (e.g. principles of science, norms of ethics, etc.) in much the same way Christians do. But they do this by not following their worldview.

### **1b. Should Human Reason “Authorize” Scripture?**

Many Christian apologists begin without the Bible when trying to establish the existence of the one true God. Greg Bahnsen noted: “It is a common mistake among evangelicals to imagine that the authority of God and His Word is the basis for their theology and preaching, but the authority for defending this faith must be something other than God and His Word.” These apologists employ what is essentially a modified “Natural Theology” as the first step in their apologetic procedure. They attempt to get to God without taking into account what God has said about Himself. In establishing the theistic arguments on human reason alone, these men are doing four things that ought to give pause to Bible believers: 1. They set up human reason as the first (and therefore, ultimate) court of appeal. 2. They only deal in probabilities, never certainties. 3. They can only posit a deity, not the triune God of Scripture. 4. They hide their own Christian pre-commitments by their methodology, but they are forced to admit Christian concepts only. But is that what we ought to be satisfied with? Does the Scripture lead us to expect that the Christian assertion for the existence of God only cashes out in the currency of probability? And if, as many an atheist or agnostic will gleefully tell us, the arguments so often presented by these apologists are open to serious objections, does that mean that the unbeliever really does have sufficient reason to remain in his unbelief and rebellion?

### **1c. The Self-Attesting Scriptures.**

A person must have some authority: some ground upon which he stands and upon which he builds his outlook on life. If the authority is not the Bible, then perhaps it is naturalism, or the Koran, or even Oprah. Whichever authority is chosen, no one is neutral. Therefore, we as Christians should not be afraid to agree with Christian writer Brad Scott when he says, “orthodox Christianity is frankly presuppositional.” Every opinion is. So, then, there are lots of “foundations”, and conflicting authorities. Obviously, only one of these authorities

can be true. Only one can actually correspond with the way the world is. All the others will inevitably conflict with reality.

According to Jesus Christ, whoever builds his life upon His words builds upon a lasting and solid foundation. Whoever builds upon any other foundation, however splendid it may look, in truth builds upon a foundation of sand (Matt. 7:31-37). Obviously, Christ's words are found in the Bible. Thus, we are once more thrown upon Scripture (cf. Jn.10:35). Scripture was the ultimate authority for Jesus Christ. It therefore ought to be the ultimate authority for those of us who would be like Him. An ultimate authority (Scripture) cannot be brought before the bar of any secondary authority (like human reason). So presuppositionalists say that Scripture is self-attesting. As Graeme Goldsworthy has pointed out, *"By definition a final authority cannot be proven as an authority on the basis of some higher authority. The highest authority must be self-attesting."* Furthermore, says Goldsworthy, *"Either we work on the basis of a sovereign, self-proving God who speaks to us by a word that we accept as true simply because it is his word, or we work on the basis that man is the final judge of all truth. The Christian position, to be consistent, accepts the Bible is God's Word..."* Because the words of Christ are in the Bible, we can speak, like Cornelius Van Til often does, of the "Self-attesting Christ of Scripture." The Word of God, whether Incarnate or inscripturate, is not subject to the word of men.

#### **1d. The Self-Attesting Christ of Scripture.**

We have noticed that the Christian is to assume a Biblical mindset. He or she is said to have "the mind of Christ," so it would be a strange breed of Christian that would openly set that aside in any of its deliberations. A child of God is to bring "every thought captive to Christ." (2 Cor. 10:5). Van Til correctly asserted, *"Faith in the self-attesting Christ of the Scriptures is the beginning, not the conclusion, of wisdom."* The only Christ the Christian cares about is the Christ of the Bible – the Christ of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – the Word who gave the Book. Any other Christ is an imposter who carries no authority. Our Christ calls us and we know His voice (Jn. 10:27), just as everyone that is of the truth hears His voice (Jn. 18:37). *"The Christian, therefore,"* adds Van Til, *"attempts to understand his world through the observation and logical ordering of facts in self-conscious subjection to the plan of the self-attesting Christ of Scripture."* A saint who consciously refuses to use the mind of Christ and its outlook until his own reason gives the go-ahead, is a Christian who believes it is right to think independently of God, at least for the time being. By contrast, Van Til declared, *"as Christians we must look at the world as Christ Himself looked at it and, in so far as any man does not, he views it falsely. Consequently the attempt to find God in the world without looking through the eyes of Christ is fruitless, not because the world does not reveal God (it continually shouts of the existence of God to men), but because men need new eyes!"* This immediately creates a tension between the demands laid upon us in Scripture, and our own unscriptural thinking. The NT says "if any man speak, let him speak as the Oracles of God." (1 Pet.4:11). But many of us want to argue for the truth of Christianity by deliberately not speaking

in the prescribed way. We know that the non-Christian will reject the Biblical worldview and the Bible's diagnosis of himself as a fallen creature, but he must be confronted with these facts and shown the folly of an unbelieving heart attitude.

## 2. No Neutrality, No Autonomy.

C.S. Lewis noted years ago, the unbeliever likes to place God on the witness stand while he takes a seat on the bench. This is the essence of his rebellion! The believer cannot allow this attitude to go unchallenged. Non-Christians are not dispassionate observers – never mind impartial judges! Neither are they in the right to assume that human beings should act as if God did not exist. All men are obligated to believe in God.

The Apostle teaches that the unbeliever denies his Creator, and in so doing has become “vain in his imaginations” (Rom.1:21). The natural man has his understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the [willful] ignorance that is in him, because of the blindness of his own heart (Eph. 4:18). Paul's view is expressed cogently in 1 Corinthians 1:20-21, 25:

*"Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God that by the [apparent] foolishness of preaching to save those who believe...For the foolishness of God is wiser than men..."*

Here we see a strategic difference between the thinking of the saved and the unsaved. To the unsaved, the preaching of the Cross of Christ (or, the Sovereignty of God, or, the Fall of mankind, or, the revelation of God, or, the Second Coming of Christ, etc.) is sheer tomfoolery. In his delusional state of seeing things, he does not need God and he does not want God. What, then, will he do with the evidences for God? He will treat them as our delusions!

Greg Bahnsen commented:

*"...God's revelation of Himself, whether in nature...or in the gospel... comes with such clear evidence and persuasive power that those who repudiate what He has revealed have their professed "wisdom" reduced to sheer folly and irrationality. They can only maneuver mentally to avoid...(without hope of success) their inescapable knowledge of God."*

The unbeliever's problem with the reality of God, then, is not primarily intellectual, it is moral. This is a crucial point. We are not saying that there is no intellectual common ground between believer and unbeliever. Just that the ethical dimension gets in the way. The carnal mind, which “is at enmity with God” (Rom. 8:7), wills not to know God as He really is. The fact of the matter is, as

Calvin said, that “after we rashly grasp some conception of divinity, straightway we fall back into the ravings or evil imaginings of our flesh, and corrupt by our vanity the pure truth of God.” If this is a proper understanding of the case then the non-Christian is not at all neutral. In fact, he is completely unqualified to adjudicate Truth, since he both distorts and lives in willful ignorance of the Source of Truth (cf. Jn. 18:37-38; Eph. 4:17-18). Now, if that is an accurate profile of “those that forget God,” is it correct to think that we as Christians ought to agree with unbelievers when they claim there is not enough plain and clear evidence that God exists? The Bible declares that it is foolish not to believe in God (Psa. 14:1; 53:1; Rom. 1:21-22). And we must humbly point this out to him, exactly as Paul did to the Athenians at Mars Hill in Acts 17.

In his presentation before the philosophers Paul emphasized seven things:

- 1). God is the Creator of all things, and is distinct from His Creation (Transcendence) (v 24).
- 2). He is also the Sustainer of life by His providence (v25). Further, He needs nothing (Aseity).
- 3). He rules over all nations (vv.26-27). He is not localized.
- 4). He is with and “in” every human being (Immanence) (vv.27-28).
- 5). Because of this God cannot be worshiped through an image (vv.28-29).
- 6). This one true God shall one day judge all mankind (vv. 30-31a).
- 7). God has given notice by the Resurrection that Paul is preaching (v.31b).

Notice that the first six points of Paul’s sermon are derived from Natural or General Revelation (albeit, it took the special interpretation of an Apostle to show it). We mustn’t assume that Paul is chiding them for not clearly seeing all this. He knows that sin distorts the picture. Nevertheless, he does appeal to the *sensus deitatis* that all humans have as God’s creatures. As Van Til expresses it:

*“To be sure, finite man cannot know all the wondrous works of God. But man can and does know that God, his Creator exists. Man can and does know that God is the living God who is not only the original Creator but also the controller and bountiful benefactor of mankind.”*

Van Til often used the illustration of a child slapping the face of the parent who carried it to show how even unbelievers must be “held” by God while insulting Him and questioning His existence. And that is why the classical arguments for God, and the evidences for the Bible’s veracity, ought not to be built upon mere probability, but upon the solid rock of the scriptural truth about man as the creature of God (cf. Acts 17:31).

Not only is the unbeliever not neutral in his approach to the truth of God, but the believer is not neutral either. Indeed, he is a believer (2 Tim. 1:12). He is made separate (sanctified) by “the Word of Truth.” (Jn. 17:17). He is for Christ, just as

the unbeliever is against Christ. For the Christian apologist to ignore all this in an effort to “reach” the unbeliever is to deny the teaching of the Scriptures he claims he is defending.

## **2a. The Truth About Man.**

It is an undeniable fact that if the God of the Bible exists then many supremely important conclusions about mankind must be drawn. Let me express them using Biblical phraseology:

**We Are Born Rebels:** All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good and sinneth not. We are God’s enemies: haters of God, and alienated from Him.

**We Are Depraved:** The sin within us is pervasive. It colors everything we do. Therefore, we do not like to retain God in our thoughts. This means that whatever we do we do not do it for God’s glory, and not to put God first in our thought is sin according to the First Commandment.

**God Is Our Maker:** It follows also that this world is God’s creation. We ourselves are made in the image of God. Not to acknowledge that fact is to despise our Maker.

**We Intuit A Coming Judgment:** Further, we know instinctively that a judgment is ahead, and we also know that we deserve condemnation. God originally made man upright but he has sought out many wicked devices. Those devices, or excuses he uses to deny the existence of God. Yet, according to the Bible, man has this nagging awareness that he will be judged, and he seeks to suppress that fact.

**All Sinners Need A Substitutionary Sacrifice:** Because we are all as an unclean thing, all of our deeds (even the “good” ones) are actually acts of rebellion. Even the plowing of the wicked is sin. Thus, all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. Who, then can save us? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean thing? Only God can save us by the sacrificial death of His Son.

What is important to realize is that this is not abstract information that can be slotted into some “hollow space” within our being. It is the truth about us. It is light in the darkness, wisdom over against ignorance. It is the true description of people as fallen creatures in a fallen world. God rules and His Word is final. Man does not ignore the Word of God because that is a valid option that is given him. He ignores it because he hates it. He rejects it because he wants to be independent of God’s jurisdiction over him. “As children of Adam,” says Van Til, “[men and women] have always made...the effort required to cover-up the truth about themselves and God. They see every fact as other than it really is. By means of their ...drama, poetry, philosophy – they try to prove to themselves that the world is not the estate of God and that they are not made in his image.” Thus, there exists a fundamental separation in outlook between Christians and unbelievers.

## 2b. Antithesis.

This brings us to the recognition of the concept of antithesis. “Antithesis” is one of those buzz-words of presuppositional apologetics which it is wise to retain. As presuppositionalists use it, the term connotes the mental and ethical standoff between believer and unbeliever. Believers have been born-anew into the kingdom of light (Col. 1:12-13), while non-Christians abide in the darkness precipitated and maintained by their unbelief. The minds of believers have been opened to see the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3, 5), but the minds of unbelievers imagine vain things (see Psa. 2:1). Christians know the Holy Scriptures to be the unique revelation of God, unbelievers, on the other hand, remain ignorant of the real significance of the Bible, and wrongly attempt to locate ultimate authority in themselves. In his book on epistemology, Van Til pointed out that, *“The Christian principle of interpretation is based upon the assumption of God as the final and self-contained reference point. The non-Christian principle of interpretation is that man as self-contained is the final reference point. It is this basic difference that has to be kept in mind all the time.”* If one believes the Bible then the picture of humanity resulting from its study is one that is completely at odds with the picture the world has. Bahnsen explains:

*“In terms of theoretical principle and eventual outworking, the unbeliever opposes the Christian faith with a whole antithetical system of thought, not simply with piecemeal criticisms. His attack is aimed, not at random points of Christian teaching, but at the very foundation of Christian thinking. The particular criticisms which are utilized by an unbeliever rest upon his basic, key assumptions which unify and inform all his thinking. And it is this presuppositional root which the apologist must aim to eradicate, if his defense of the faith is to be truly effective.”*

The unbeliever must be brought to see that a reality shaped and controlled by any other thing than the Triune God is an impossibility. He must be asked how the logic, science, or facts he is using to reject Jesus Christ are even explicable within his non-Christian worldview. If he were to fully adopt the principles with which he rejects Christianity he would not be able to see a single thing in Scripture to agree with. But the antithesis is not absolute. There is a lot of crossover due to the fact that believers do not adopt a completely Biblical viewpoint, and unbelievers do not (indeed, cannot) adopt a totally non-Christian viewpoint. The concept of antithesis thus acts as a guard upon the thought-life of the believer, warning him against forsaking a Christian outlook while also admonishing him not to think naively that unbelievers interpret things from within a Biblical framework. As John Frame says, the non-Christian,

*“is operating on a basic assumption or presupposition opposite to that of the Christian. And the unbeliever has strong motivation to interpret all of reality according to his own presupposition. Thus, when the*

*unbeliever finds in his own thinking some uncomfortable bit of Christian truth, his inclination will be somehow to twist it, suppress it, deny it, domesticate it, or simply change the subject."*

### **3. The Structure of Reality.**

It cannot be both ways. Reality is either what the Bible says it is, or it is not. If it is not, then Christianity is not only mistaken on one or two particulars, it is totally false.

Christianity has a certain view of the world as the creation of the Triune God. All the scientific laws discovered by men were discovered because, consciously or not, men thought God's thoughts after Him. As Bahnsen explained,

*"The bold defense of the faith offered by Van Til's presuppositionalism is that the unbeliever's worldview fails to provide an adequate or workable theory of knowledge in terms of which the non-Christian can intellectually challenge the truth of Christianity. His presuppositions preclude the unbeliever from making claims to know anything intelligible or meaningful."*

#### **3a. Creation Versus Chance.**

In drawing a distinction between the Biblical doctrine of creation and the evolutionary view of chance, we are not concerning ourselves with a study of origins as such. We believe that Creation Science is an important ingredient of Christian knowledge. Our present concern, however, is with the logical implications of the two views. The Bible teaches that God created all things. Modern humanistic science professes to know that Chaos brought about our ordered Cosmos. So what we are interested in is the explanatory power of the two systems. Where do the so-called natural laws come from? Is human freedom (however one may define it) possible in an evolutionary universe? Whence Good and Evil? the law of contradiction?, history?, etc. Creation and chance put forth very different explanations of these questions. In principle, they come up against each other in every area of life.

As we have seen, Scripture portrays the natural man as in rebellion to the God whom he knows exists and has created him. This rebellion is so deep-seated that people will go to great lengths in order to suppress the knowledge of creature-hood they have. The world did not get here accidentally; it was planned and made. When men try to make sense of this world without reference to God, they are sinning. This is a simple application of the doctrine of General Revelation. *"There is no area of impersonal relationships where the face of God the Creator and Judge does not confront man."* Therefore, Christians should not view the world in the same way that, for example, secularists look at "nature". We see the same sunset as the unbeliever, but he or she looks at it with the eyes of a philosophical materialist (or Hindu pantheist or Muslim Unitarian). They

convince themselves that the sunset is merely the diffusion of light-rays through a lowering angle as the Sun “goes down.” The believer, on the other hand, sees the hand of God in the world. It is unmistakable. God is the One who has designed the sunset. Moreover, He has given us the eyes and the aesthetic sensitivity to see and appreciate such things as sunsets. In short, we see the same things but we interpret them differently.

### **3b. The Creator/creature Distinction.**

Because of man’s finiteness and spiritual deadness (Eph. 2:1) it is not surprising that he seeks to comprehend everything in terms of the same essence, placing God and creation on the same level. Any conception of “God” will be thought of as belonging within this single sphere of existence. This would mean that God and the creation are related by being composed of the same “stuff.” Herman Bavinck reminds us that the Christian doctrine teaches that “the world is not a part of or emanation from the being of God. It has a being or existence of its own, one that is different and distinct from the essence of God.” The creation depends upon God for its existence, but it was not created out of God. It was created *ex nihilo* – out of nothing. Christians who would defend his faith against an array of unbelievers must keep this distinction between God and creation at the forefront of their thinking. It will constantly confront them. Bavinck wrote,

*“From the very first moment, true religion distinguishes itself from all other religions by the fact that it construes the relation between God and the world, including man, as that between the Creator and his creature. The idea of an existence apart and independently from God occurs nowhere in Scripture. God is the sole, unique, and absolute cause of all that exists.”*

So, for example, when a Christian thinks about the knowledge of God he is not to think of it as a mere magnification of his own knowledge. Any knowledge we may possess is wholly derived from, and, therefore, dependent upon, God as its Source. But God’s knowledge is essential to His nature – being what it is by virtue of the fact that God is all-knowing. As creatures we know bits of information, but we do not know anything comprehensively or exhaustively, and we can only relate any fact to another fact when considering them in relation to their Originator. But God knows everything intuitively by knowing Himself absolutely. God does not derive knowledge (or power or goodness, etc.) from anything beyond Himself. His creatures, on the other hand, know in a limited way by discovering the information that God has already put into the world, and which He has previously defined and interpreted. The creature, then, is dependent upon the independent Creator for its knowledge, its power, and so on. This is what gives rise to true worship.

*“Christians strive to see everything in light of creation’s dependence on God while the non-Christian tries to deny creation’s dependence... [E]very person who has not trusted in Christ...fails to account for the*

*Creator-creature distinction and somehow puts God and His creation in mutual dependence on each other and ascribes to creation a degree of independence. With all the diversity of opinion among non-Christians, this is one unifying factor: the Creator-creature distinction is denied."*

This fundamental truth, as Richard Pratt reminds us above, must inform us in all our encounters with unbelievers (cf. Rom.1:25).

#### **4. The Impossibility of the Contrary.**

We have seen that presuppositionalism challenges the non-Christian to give sound reasons for any assertion he wants to make about the world. It ought to be clear enough by now that without God telling us the truth about our environment and ourselves, and without the faith to embrace God's revelation, our understanding of reality will be awry.

The Bible places Christian epistemology squarely within the province of Divine revelation. We think this ought to be clear to anyone who studies their Bible (e.g. Gen. 1-3; Prov. 28:26 with 4:23; Psa. 36:9; 97:4; Rom. 11:36; Eph. 4:17-18; Col. 2:3). But this very thing is denied by "Reformed epistemologists" like Kelly James Clark. Clark writes, "I am dubious, however, about finding any ultimate or coercive support for epistemology in Scripture...The very idea of a biblical epistemology seems to me as misguided as the idea of a biblical meteorology." – Steven B. Cowan, General Editor, *Five Views on Apologetics*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 256. Since he can't find a Biblical epistemology anywhere, presumably Clark teaches a secular theory of knowledge to his students. Indeed, he must expect that Christians adopt a secular epistemology. How this squares with 2 Corinthians 10:5 we are scarcely able to say. While their contributions to apologetics are welcome, it does sometimes appear that this group is better versed in philosophy than in Scripture.

##### **4a. Borrowing From God.**

*"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."* This is more than a theological tenet. It is a statement about what is here and the reason it is here. Taking God out of the equation leaves a person, be he scientist or philosopher or farmer or banker, in an epistemological quandary. The only way for an unbeliever to extract themselves from this quandary is for them to illicitly utilize ideas from the Christian-theistic worldview – the very worldview they attempt to deny. Robert Knudsen comments, *"In regard to this transcendental orientation, one may remember Van Til's illustration about the unbeliever's use of borrowed capital. The unbeliever uses the good gifts of God, which are spread abroad in the creation and on which he depends in his thought and life, without giving God the glory. He is able to do what he does because he is using borrowed capital."* (Knudsen defines a transcendental argument this way: *"A transcendental*

*argument moves from what is to the conditions underlying its possibility”). No non-Christian can say anything true about the world unless they borrow certain foundational elements from the Biblical worldview. Frame puts it this way: “Indeed, there is a sense in which all of the unbeliever’s thinking is Christian. Christian presuppositions are the only way to think. The alternative is not thought, but meaninglessness.”*

This type of argument states that unless the Christian worldview is first presupposed – however covertly – one cannot give adequate grounds for saying anything about anything. Bahnsen sums up this distinctive approach in this way:

*“We can examine a worldview and ask whether its portrayal of nature, man, knowledge, etc., provide an outlook in terms of which logic, science and ethics can make sense. It does not comport with the practices of natural science to believe that all events are random and unpredictable, for instance. It does not comport with the demand for honesty in scientific research, if no moral principle expresses anything but a personal preference or feeling. Moreover, if there are internal contradictions in a person’s worldview, it does not provide the preconditions for making sense out of man’s experience. For instance, if one’s political dogmas respect the dignity of men to make their choices, while one’s psychological theories reject the free will of men, then there is an internal defect in that person’s worldview.*

*It is the Christian’s contention that all non-Christian worldviews are beset with internal contradictions, as well as with beliefs which do not render logic, science or ethics intelligible. On the other hand, the Christian worldview (taken from God’s self-revelation in Scripture) demands our intellectual commitment because it does provide the preconditions of intelligibility for man’s reasoning, experience, and dignity.”*

### **Summary.**

Presuppositional apologetics sees its task as part and parcel of the larger enterprise of Systematic Theology. If one is a Christian one should never speak as if Christianity is only probably true (unless, of course, one thinks the Gospel one has believed is only probably true!). It is the only ground of truth, and non-Christian systems have to surreptitiously “borrow” from the Christian worldview in order to say anything meaningful. In the words of “the father of presuppositionalism”:

*“Why seek truth where only a lie is to be found? Can the non-Christian tell us, and therefore the Christ Himself what the facts are and how they are related to each other, in what way they cohere, while yet excluding creation and providence? If he can, and if he can tell us*

*truly, then the Christian story simply is not true!"*