

APOLOGETICS AND EVANGELISM

Lesson # 4

Evaluating Different Apologetic Methods With the Bible

Apologetics addresses how Christians should communicate God’s Word, especially with unbelievers. I Pet. 3:15 is an anchor text for apologetics and says, *“but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”* The phrase *“make a defense”* uses the Greek word *“apologia”* where we get the word *“apologetics.”* It is usually translated *“defense”* and describes a reasoned argument defending one’s beliefs. When evangelizing the lost, Christians have to be ready to defend their faith to both ill-taught or deceived believers and unbelievers alike. The truth of God is always under attack.

How exactly is a Christian to *“make a defense”* for what they believe? How you answer that question is of the utmost importance. Shall we try to reason with people? Shall we argue with people? Shall we present them with scientific or empirical data to first convince them God exists and the Bible is the Word of God? Can an unbeliever objectively look at the truth? Remember in our first lesson we looked at the doctrine of man and sin. We learned that unconverted men have both internal and external barriers working against their salvation. We must consider which approach to apologetics is able to overcome all the barriers working against the salvation of sinners. These questions must be answered accurately from the Scriptures, or a great deal of effort will be wasted in trying to evangelize the lost with methods that just don’t work.

In this lesson we will survey some of what we have already learned in lesson 1 on man and sin. We will remind ourselves how sin has affected all men and why men don’t seek God on their own. Next, we will survey different apologetic methods, considering their ability to overcome the internal and external barriers working to keep men in the grips of the evil one. Then we will consider what apologetic method has the best biblical support. And finally, look at why the biblical method is to be used in evangelizing the lost.

I. REVIEW OF MAN AND SIN

SUMMARY OF HOW ALL MEN ARE AFFECTED BY SIN	
“Evil thoughts continuously” Gen. 6:5	“Blinded by Satan” II Cor. 4:4
“Incurably wicked heart” Jer. 17:9; Mk. 7:21-23	“Can’t see the gospel” II Cor. 4:4
“Accustomed to doing evil” Jer. 13:23	“Love darkness” Jn. 3:19
“Futile in their speculations” Rom. 1:21	“Do not come to the light” Jn. 3:20
“Foolish, darkened heart” Rom. 1:21	“Unwilling to come to Jesus” Jn. 5:40
“Exchange truth for a lie” Rom. 1:23	“Dead in trespasses and sins” Eph. 2:1
“They don’t seek God” Rom. 3:11	“Satan working in them” Eph. 2:2
“Set their minds on the flesh” Rom. 8:5	“Futile in their mind” Eph. 4:17
“Hostile toward God” Rom. 8:7	“Darkened understanding” Eph. 4:18
“Do not submit to God” Rom. 8:7	“Without the life of God” Eph. 4:18
“Cannot submit to God” Rom. 8:7	“Ignorant of the truth” Eph. 4:18
“Cannot please God” Rom. 8:8	“Hard Hearted” Eph. 4:18
“See spiritual truth as foolishness” I Cor. 2:14	“Calloused conscience” Eph. 4:19
“Cannot understand the Bible” I Cor. 2:14	“Given over to sensuality” Eph. 4:19
“Gospel is veiled from their eyes” II Cor. 4:3	“Practicing every kind of impurity” Eph. 4:19

We must keep in mind the pervasiveness and effects of sin when considering the best apologetic method for communicating the gospel. Methods that are unable to overcome the internal effects of sin and the external forces working to keep sinners from the gospel might be used sparingly to promote conversation, but should not be relied upon as a primary means for evangelizing the lost.

II. REVIEW OF THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL BARRIERS WORKING AGAINST THE SALVATION OF SINNERS

Summary of Internal and External Barriers	
Sin has corrupted man’s mind (Rom. 8:5).	Sin has made men guilty before God (Ezra 9:15).
Sin has made men desire sinful pleasures instead of God (Mk. 7:21-23).	Sin has made men fear the judgment of God (Jn. 16:7-11).
Sin has made men love what is created rather than their Creator (Rom. 1:25).	Sin has made men hate and flee from the light (Jn. 3:20).
Sin has corrupted man’s speculations (Rom. 1:21).	Sin has corrupted man’s heart (Jer. 17:9).
Sin has made men love evil (Jn. 3:19).	Sin has made men spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1).
Sin has corrupted man’s desire for truth (Jn. 3:20).	Sin has corrupted man’s reasoning (Eph. 4:18).
Sin has made men incapable of understanding the gospel (I Cor. 2:14).	

A shallow understanding of the sinfulness of man leads to inadequate approaches to apologetics and evangelism. Imagine trying to sink a battleship with a sling shot and marshmallows. No matter how hard you might try, you couldn’t penetrate the thick steel hull of the ship. King David could not have conquered Goliath with a feather duster. This is what it is like when people take great pains to evangelize the lost with apologetic methods that have no power to overcome the barriers working against the sinner’s salvation.

III. SURVEY OF APOLOGETIC METHODS

Through the centuries, men have developed different apologetic approaches for reaching the lost. Each method has a certain strategy and emphasis. Every method has presuppositions and theological implications. Whatever apologetic approach we use, it must be able to overcome the internal and external barriers that keep people from saving faith in Jesus Christ and must be validated by the Word of God.

A. **Rational Approach to Apologetics.** This approach believes that men in their fallen state can be reasoned with, and that reason is a valid source of knowledge independent of experience. You ask someone, "Does God exist?" If they say, "No," then what? Some might use reason in an attempt to prove God exists. Others might reason we are rational beings because we were created by a rational being. Others might reason that since everything can’t come from nothing, there must be a first cause from which all things have their origin, etc. Then the rationalist must go on to prove the Bible is God’s Word and true before he preaches the gospel.

1. *Assumptions of the Rational Approach to Apologetics*
 - a. Man's ability to reason is unaffected by sin.
 - b. Man is able to verify truth through reason, logic, and his intellect.
 - c. Logic and reason are able to compel a person to accept the truth claims of Scripture, repent, and believe in Jesus Christ.
 - d. Rational apologetics believes that people must first rationally believe God exists and the Bible is true so that they can believe the gospel and be saved.

2. *Weakness of the Rational Approach to Apologetics*
 - a. Reasoning with sin-cursed men can't overcome the internal and external barriers keeping them from faith in Jesus Christ.
 - b. Reason can't illuminate the Scriptures to the heart of fallen man.
 - c. Reason can't prove God exists or that the Bible is true.
 - d. Reason doesn't lead a sinner to the knowledge of the truth and faith in Jesus Christ.
 - e. Reason isn't a source of truth.
 - f. The reasoning of men is corrupted by sin, biased, and because of sin men suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

B. Naturalistic Approach to Apologetics. The view that the physical creation is sufficient to explain God and the truth claims of Christianity. Saving truth can be learned from observing objects and events in space and time. An example might be: "How could anyone deny the existence of God when it can be seen in creation and what has been made that God exists? Look at the design in creation which argues for a creator. The fossil record proves there was a flood. The various geochronometers or earth time clocks prove the earth is only 6-10 thousand years old. How could all the planets orbit around the sun year after year if God was not guiding their orbits?"

1. *Assumptions of the Naturalistic Approach to Apologetics:*
 - a. God's creation is compelling evidence that God exists.
 - b. By observing creation, we can come to faith in Jesus Christ and be saved.

- c. The mind of man is not corrupted by sin but able to objectively sort through objects and events in creation, so they repent and believe.
- d. We must first verify truth by observing creation before we can believe in it.

2. *Weaknesses to the Natural Approach to Apologetics*

- a. The naturalistic approach cannot overcome the internal and external barriers that keep men from faith in Jesus Christ.
- b. The Bible teaches that creation does not compel men to believe. It only serves to condemn them and make them without excuse.
- c. Men look at God's creation with sin-cursed, corrupted minds, suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. Therefore creation, though enough to condemn men, is not enough to verify truth and bring people to salvation in Christ.

C. **Historical Approach to Apologetics.** This approach looks to history, the events of the past, to validate the truth claims of Christianity through extra-biblical historical proofs. An example might be: "Josephus, the Jewish historian, talks about Jesus, hence, Jesus must have existed. The early church fathers claim some of the same things as do the Scriptures so the Scriptures must be true. Different ancient writings verify that certain parts of both the Old and New testaments are true, and hence, they can be trusted."

1. *Assumptions to the Historical Approach to Apologetics:*

- a. We must historically verify the Scriptures before we can believe in them.
- b. Extra-biblical, historical proofs compel sinners to come to the conclusion that God exists, and the Word of God is true.
- c. Unregenerate man is able to objectively weigh incomplete, extrabiblical historical proofs and come to saving faith in Jesus Christ.
- d. The historical records of men can be trusted above or to the same degree as the Word of God.

2. *Weaknesses of the Historical Approach to Apologetics*

- a. Cannot overcome the internal and external barriers in man.

- b. The Bible, which contains history, is inerrant, authoritative, infallible, and inspired truth, unlike the fallible and often errant historical records of man.
- c. The Bible is true regardless of what men say about history.
- d. Historians contradict each other and the Bible.
- e. Men often rewrite history or present a slanted, biased view of history.
- f. Historical evidence does not compel anyone to believe in the Scriptures.

D. **Empirical Approach to Apologetics.** This approach says the only true source of knowledge is experience, usually limited to our five senses. An example might be: “Science is able to prove by measurable phenomena that the earth is about 6 thousand years old. Therefore, the Scriptures must be true. The medical profession can prove by blood analyses that all humans are related. Therefore, we know that the story of Adam and Eve must be true. When I pray, I feel the presence of God, I feel the peace of Christ, therefore I know the Bible is true.”

1. *Assumptions to the Empirical Approach to Apologetics*

- a. The physical can prove that the spiritual exists and is true.
- b. Observational science, measurability, and repeatability provide compelling evidence that God exists, and the Bible is true.
- c. Our senses are unbiased and are able to determine truth from error.
- d. Scriptural truths must first be proven experientially by science before we can believe in them.

2. *Weaknesses of the Empirical Approach to Apologetics*

- a. Can't overcome the internal and external barriers keeping men from saving faith in Jesus Christ.
- b. Supernatural events cannot be proven to be true by scientific method.
- c. Our senses are corrupted and biased by sin.
- d. We never have all the facts or the ability to wade through the facts objectively and arrive at spiritual truth.
- e. Supernatural and spiritual realities lie outside what is normal or natural and are not measurable or repeatable.

- f. We can't prove the existence of God and the truth of the Bible by science.

E. **Pragmatic Approach to Apologetics.** This view says truth is determined by the practical consequences of ideas. Example: "We have discovered that those who pray have more peace in their life and feel closer to God than those who don't. This proves the Bible is true because we have experienced what the Bible says will happen when we pray. We have done a survey and discovered that more Christians have happy marriages than non-Christians, hence the Bible's teaching on marriage must be true."

1. *Assumptions to the Pragmatic Approach to Apologetics:*

- a. If it works, it must be true.
- b. The means justify the end.
- c. Man, his ideas, and their consequences compel one to believe that God exists, and His Word is true.
- d. Pragmatic experience must prove God is true, and the Bible exists, before we can believe and be saved.

2. *Weaknesses of the Pragmatic Method to Apologetics*

- a. The pragmatic approach cannot overcome the internal and external barriers keeping men from saving faith in Jesus Christ.
- b. The Bible teaches that truth comes from God, not experience.
- c. God is just as concerned about the means as He is the end.
- d. Pragmatism has never compelled anyone to believe in God.
- e. Satan is willing to provide us with pragmatic experiences to deceive and lead us away from the truth.
- f. How we understand our experiences often contradicts God's Word.

F. **Conclusion to the Apologetic Methods Listed Above.** The various approaches to apologetics listed above are common methods Christians use in their desire to reach the lost and fulfill the great commission. However, every method above has serious shortcomings.

- 1. None of the methods above have the power to overcome the internal effects of sin within man.

2. None of the methods above can overcome the external influences of Satan, demons, the world, or men held captive by Satan to do his will.
3. All the methods above attempt to first prove God exists, and the Bible is true, as a prerequisite to faith in Jesus Christ, while the Bible teaches we must first believe in order to know the truth.
4. Truth that agrees with the Bible may be found in each of the apologetic methods listed above, but it can only be verified by the Word of God.
5. These methods might be used as conversation starters, to challenge faulty views, to get people's attention, but unless the gospel is clearly preached, there is no hope of the lost ever coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ.
6. *Why do Christians often gravitate to the methods listed above which are doomed to failure?*

Christians often forget, when sharing the gospel, that they have been born again, are spiritually alive, and have the indwelling Holy Spirit who illumines their minds to the truth. After coming to faith in Jesus Christ, the apologetic methods above encourage them in their faith and confirm what they already know to be true from the Word of God. Without thinking about it, they use what encourages them to evangelize the lost, not considering how sin has affected all men. They don't consider the internal and external barriers preventing men from coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, they use what encourages them in their faith to evangelize the lost. Their intentions may be good and sincere, but their efforts will always be in vain for the methods above are impotent against the influences of the world, the flesh, and the devil. A biblical approach is needed.

IV. THE PRESUPPOSITIONAL METHOD OF APOLOGETICS

The presuppositional method of apologetics is kind of a misnomer because all apologetic methods have presuppositions. All the apologetic methods listed above presuppose that men can arrive at the truth apart from the Bible and without the influence of the Holy Spirit. They all assume we must first prove God exists and the Bible is true before people can believe the gospel and be saved. The presuppositional method does not have these flawed presuppositions. The presuppositional method presupposes that fallen man is unable, because of the effects of sin, to come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. There are *two key presuppositions* to the presuppositional method that are assumed prior to proofs, evidences, or argumentation.

- A. *Key presupposition #1: God exists.* The person who holds to a presuppositional apologetic method doesn't try to prove God exists, but assumes, presupposes God exists when evangelizing the lost. The existence of God is taken for granted because of what the Bible teaches in texts like Rom. 1:18-23:

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

1. Notice fallen man knows the truth about God's existence but suppresses the truth given to him by God in unrighteousness (vs. 18).
2. Notice that which is known about God is evident *within* every person, observable outside of them in creation (vs. 19).
3. Notice God's invisible attributes, eternal power, and divine nature *can be clearly seen outside of man* in creation, so that all are without excuse for believing in God's existence (vs. 20).
4. All unbelievers know God exists (vs. 21).
5. Fallen man takes their knowledge of God's existence, which God Himself supplies to him and exchanges his knowledge of God to worship and serve God's creation instead of God Himself (vs. 23).

B. *Key Presupposition #2: The Bible is God's inerrant, infallible, authoritative, inspired, and all sufficient Word of God.* The person who holds to the presuppositional method of apologetics knows the Bible is the inspired Word of God because of what the Word of God says about itself. Therefore, the presuppositional evangelist doesn't waste time trying to prove the Bible is the Word of God because they know from the Bible itself it is the Word of God. Examples of the Presuppositional Apologetics in Evangelism:

1. A Christian shares the gospel with a self-professed atheist college professor who says they don't believe in God. The Christian explains what the Bible says about man, God, Christ, and salvation referring to several Scriptures. The atheist laughs, mocks the Christian to scorn for believing in fairy tales. The Christian calls upon the atheist to repent of his sins and believe in Jesus Christ for salvation or suffer the consequences of eternal fire.
2. A believer is asked to speak about his religion on a secular college campus in a world religions class. There are many scoffers, agnostics, and those who believe in false religions present. Using the Scriptures, the believer explains

who God is, how God created man, that man fell into sin, that God became a man in the person of Jesus Christ, lived a perfect life, willingly gave Himself up to die on the cross as a sacrifice for sin, was buried and rose again on the third day. He then urges all present to repent of their sin and place their faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

3. A Christian is out evangelizing with a group from his church. He strikes up a conversation with someone and begins to share the gospel, speaking about God, man, and sin. The Holy Spirit convicts the man, and he is desperate to get the focus of the conversation off of himself and his sin to anything else. He uses one of many deflecting statements such as:
 - a. “There are so many translations and transliterations of the Bible, how do you know your translation of the Bible is true?”
 - b. “What about the natives in Africa who have never heard about Jesus?”
 - c. “If God is good, why is there so much evil in the world?”
 - d. “There are a lot of religions in the world, how do you know your religion is the right one?”
 - e. The answer to questions like this is the gospel. You preach the gospel and call sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Notice that the presuppositional method doesn't attempt to first “prove God exists” or attempts to try and “convince people that the Bible is true.” The evangelist knows God exists and the Bible is true. A doctor doesn't try to convince the patient that the medicine prescribed is actually medicine. He knows it is medicine and therefore prescribes it. In presuppositional apologetics there are also no attempts to rationally, naturalistically, historically, empirically, or pragmatically prove there is a God or that the Bible is God's Word so that the gospel can later be presented. The presuppositional apologist acts upon what he knows to be true from the Word of God. He preaches the gospel believing “the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). He speaks the gospel as “the hammer” and “fire of God” (Jer. 23:29) that never returns void without accomplishing all that God desires (Isa. 55:11). Charles Spurgeon had a presuppositional approach to evangelism and said:

You believe the gospel; you believe that men are perishing for lack of it; therefore, I pray you, do not stop to consider, do not wait to deliberate any longer. The best way to spread the gospel is to spread the gospel. I believe the best way of defending the gospel is to spread the gospel. I was addressing a number of students, the other day, upon the apologies for the gospel which are so numerous just now. A great many learned men are defending the gospel; no doubt it is a very proper and right thing to do, yet I always notice that, when there are most books of that kind, it is because the gospel itself is not being preached.

Suppose a number of persons were to take it into their heads that they had to defend a lion, a full-grown king of beasts! There he is in the cage, and here come all the soldiers of the army to fight for him. Well, I should suggest to them, if they would not object, and feel that it was humbling to them, that they should kindly stand back, and open the door, and let the lion out! I believe that would be the best way of defending him, for he would take care of himself; and the best “apology” for the gospel is to let the gospel out. Never mind about defending Deuteronomy or the whole of the Pentateuch; preach Jesus Christ and him crucified. Let the Lion out, and see who will dare to approach him. The Lion of the tribe of Judah will soon drive away all his adversaries. This was how Christ’s first disciples worked, they preached Jesus Christ wherever they went; they did not stop to apologize, but boldly bore their witness concerning him.¹

The presuppositional evangelist states with conviction and resolve, in a matter-of-fact way, that God exists, and refers to the Bible as the Word of God. He freely uses the Bible as his authority. He doesn’t follow the unbeliever down the rabbit hole of unbelief and never-ending excuses that have no power to save and lead away from the gospel instead of towards it. The unbeliever doesn’t know what they need. The evangelist knows they need—salvation, which only comes through the gospel, “the power of God for all who believe” (Rom. 1:16; I Cor. 2:18). The evangelist knows that everyone who is born again by grace, is “born again through the living and abiding Word of God” (I Pet. 1:23). If the Word of God and the gospel are not presented, there is no hope of a sinner repenting of their sin and believing in Jesus Christ unto salvation.

If you want to watch a presuppositional apologist in action watch [the debate between Ken Ham and Bill Nye the Science Guy](#). Ken relentlessly quotes and refers to biblical truth as his authority. “The Bible says. . .,” “God’s Word says. . .,” “Genesis says. . .,” etc. Ken knows God exists and the Bible is true. He knows what Bill Nye can’t know because Bill is spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1-3), blinded from the truth (II Cor. 4:4), futile in his speculations, his foolish heart being darkened (Rom. 1:21). Ken knows that only the Word of God and the gospel can break through the internal and external barriers keeping Bill Nye, or any sinner for that matter, from coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

V. **SCRIPTURAL PROOF OF THE TWO KEY PRESUPPOSITIONS USED IN THE PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETIC METHOD**

A. **First Primary Presupposition – God Exists**

1. Gen. 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
2. Psa. 14:1 The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good.

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Christ and His Co-Workers.”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 42 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1896), 256.

3. John 1:1-2 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God.
4. As discussed above under point IV-A, concerning Rom. 1:18-23, we see God has placed inside and outside of man sufficient knowledge of Himself so everyone is without excuse for rejecting God (Rom. 1:18-21).

B. Second Primary Presupposition – the Bible Is God's Word

1. Psa. 119:160 The sum of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.
2. II Tim. 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.
3. II Pet. 1:20-21 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.
4. Many times the Bible refers to itself as "the Word of God" (47 times), or "the Word of the Lord" (257 times), or what "the Lord said" (233 times), or what "God said" (46 times). The Bible attests to itself as being the inspired, authoritative, inerrant, and infallible Word of God.
5. Many Scriptures might be presented to attest to these two key presuppositions of the presuppositional method of apologetics.

VI. ADDITIONAL PRESUPPOSITIONS USED IN THE PRESUPPOSITIONAL METHOD OF APOLOGETICS

A. People Must First Believe in Order to Know the Truth

Saint Augustine (3rd & 4th century) was the first of the early church fathers to teach a person had to first believe in order to understand God's Word. The technical word for this is "fideism." Fideism teaches that there are certain truths that lie outside the reach of man's reason. Therefore, a person must have faith in order to know certain truths. In a narrower sense, the presuppositional method says that saving faith is a prerequisite to having an experiential knowledge of God and His Word because:

1. Men are born spiritually dead in sin (Eph. 2:1-3; Col. 2:13).
2. Men do not have the power in themselves to understand the things of God for God's Word can only be appraised with the assistance of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 2:10-16; 12:13; Gal. 3:2, 14).

3. Once a person places their faith in Jesus Christ, they receive the Holy Spirit who illumines their mind to the truth of the Word of God. They can then know intellectually and experientially what they could not know before.
4. Others have argued that faith is the prerequisite of *all knowledge*. Scientists “believe” that their scientific method will lead them to the truth. Evolutionists “believe” everything came from nothing, that life came from non-life, that design came from chaos, etc. They “believe” these things contrary to observational science. The atheist “believes” he is god, that he is objective, that he has all the facts, can fairly weigh the facts, and therefore has “faith” that God does not exist. Thus, it could be argued that every field of knowledge begins with faith. The idea that Christians have faith and others use facts, reason, or scientific evidences apart from faith is a lie. Everyone has faith. The question is “What do people place their faith in?” Anselm (11th century) correctly said, “For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand.”
 - a. Jn. 5:44-47 “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God? 45 “Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. 46 “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. 47 “But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”
 - b. Jn. 7:15-17 “The Jews then were astonished, saying, “How has this man become learned, having never been educated?” 16 So Jesus answered them and said, “My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. 17 “If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.””
 - c. I Cor. 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.

B. Man Cannot Logically or Rationally Prove the Existence of God

1. Acts 17:24-28 “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; 25 nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; 26 and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, 27 that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live

and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'²

2. I Cor. 1:20-21 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

C. Men Are Not Saved on the Basis of Evidence or Reason but by Faith Alone

1. Rom. 3:28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.
2. Eph. 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.
3. Heb. 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

D. Objective Evidences Alone Compel No One to Believe

1. John 12:37 But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him.
2. Luke 16:27-31 "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' 29 "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' 30 "But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' 31 "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"
3. Heb. 3:9, 16-17, 19 Where your fathers tried Me by testing Me, And saw My works for forty years. . . 16 For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? 17 And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? . . . 19 So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

²Some have noted that Paul "reasoned" with those at Athens concerning the existence of God (**Acts 17:22ff**). Yet it is clear that when Paul "reasoned" he did so from the Scriptures (**see Acts 17:2**). As you read Paul's discourse with the Greeks at Athens, Paul proclaims the truth of the Scriptures telling them that 1) God was Creator of all things (**vs. 24**), that He is sovereign over all (**vs. 24**), that He is not a physical being (**vs. 24**), that He is self-sufficient and needs nothing (**vs. 25**), that He sustains all life (**vs. 25**), that He made all nations out of one man (**vs. 26**), determines the times men live (**vs. 26**), determines where men live (**vs. 26**), that God is imminent (**vs. 27**), that by means of creation God is the father of all men (**vs. 29**), that God commands all men to repent (**vs. 30**), that God is the judge of all (**vs. 31**) that He will judge all men through Jesus Christ (**vs. 31**) and that He raised Jesus from the dead (**vs. 31**). This is how Paul "reasoned" with the Greeks at Athens. He proclaimed to them the truth of the Scriptures reasoning from the Word of God.

E. Saving Faith Is Not Merely Intellectual But Is a Volitional Heart Commitment and Trust in the Gospel

1. Rom. 10:8-10 But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.
2. James 2:19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

F. Scientific Proofs or Extrabiblical Historical Facts Do Not Compel One to Believe the Gospel

Eph. 4:17-19 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

VII. THE POWER OF GOD FOR REACHING THE LOST IS THE GOSPEL

We have seen that the preaching of the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only thing that can overcome the internal and external barriers working against the sinner’s salvation. But what message is to be proclaimed? What is the gospel? Defining the gospel has been the subject of many volumes. We can only address it superficially here. We will address it more in a following lessons. In short, the gospel is the proclamation of the person and work of Jesus Christ, and how to appropriate or receive the benefits of Jesus’ person and work. The person and work of Christ are huge subjects with many related doctrines. For our purposes we will look at I Cor. 1:18-25 in some detail and then look at several other key texts.

The Corinthian church was steeped in Greek culture. The Greeks prided themselves in philosophy, logic, and rhetoric. In fact, it was a form of entertainment. People would gather to hear expert orators, rhetoricians, and debaters discuss issues using slick philosophies, logic, and oratorical finesse in an attempt to win the argument. Powerful argumentation won the day in Corinth. It was in this context that Paul proclaimed the gospel to the Corinthians, winning some to faith in Jesus Christ. In writing I Corinthians 1:18-2:16 the Apostle Paul explains his methodology for reaching the lost. He explains *what* he preached, *why* he preached what he preached, and *the response* of the Corinthians to the proclamation of the gospel.

- A. I Cor. 1:18, *“For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”*
1. The phrase *“word of the cross”* is a reference to the gospel message which centers on Jesus Christ and His atoning death on the cross. Paul might just as well have used the term “gospel” or “Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” The gospel includes *two primary categories of information*.
 - a. The first category of information in the gospel concerns the person of Jesus Christ, who He is, the Son of God, both God and man, born of a virgin, who lived a perfect sinless life, etc. When the gospel is preached, Jesus’ person must be proclaimed.
 - b. The second category of information contained in the gospel is Jesus’ work or what He accomplished i.e., His death, burial, and resurrection.
 - c. There has been great debate as to what exactly must be included when evangelizing the lost and proclaiming the gospel. As we will learn from biblical examples, there is no “one message” but whatever message is preached, it must include the person and work of Jesus Christ. Gospel messages with very little content have been used by God to save sinners such as, *“Turn to me and be saved all the ends of the earth”* (Isa. 45:22) or *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved”* (Acts 16:31).

The person and work of Jesus Christ is a huge subject, and we can never tell someone everything that could be said. Do we have to mention the deity of Christ? Do we have to mention the resurrection? Do we have to mention Jesus’ sinlessness? Do we have to mention Jesus’ virgin birth? People have come to saving faith in Jesus Christ through gospel presentations that left out essential doctrines.

Yet even the shortened gospel message of Acts 16:31 includes critical gospel facts:

- (1) “Lord,” the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament Yahweh in many texts meaning Master, Sovereign, and King.
- (2) “Jesus,” the Greek equivalent of the Old Testament Joshua means Yahweh is salvation.
- (3) “Christ” the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament Messiah or anointed one is the promised deliverer and Savior.

We must not forget when we read about very short gospel presentations that it was given in a specific context, to a specific person or persons, who often knew more than what the Bible records. The Philippian jailer may have heard Paul

preach. The near following context of Acts 16:32 reveals Paul gave him more detail, which Luke only alludes to when he writes, *“And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house.”* Luke merely records the person of Christ and the punch line of how to appropriate the Yahweh’s salvation, the Lord, Master, King, Anointed One, and Messiah—believe on Him!

By believing these truths about Jesus, a sinner can be saved, delivered from the consequences of their sin, Adam’s sin, and the wrath of a holy and just God. *Clearly, this is not all that could be said!* The Bible gives examples of more detailed gospel presentations, which we will consider in another lesson on gospel preaching, appropriation, and response in the book of Acts. Yet the point we wish to make here is that the gospel, long or short, is *“the word of the cross”* which includes information about Jesus’ person and Jesus work.

2. We also see in I Cor. 1:18 two groups of people being contrasted, the first group is, *“Those who are perishing.”* They hear the gospel, *“the word of the cross”* and think it is *“foolishness.”* They literally think it is moronic, stupid, silly, or idiotic. Their rejection of the gospel causes them *“to be in a state of perishing.”*
 3. The second group contrasted with those who are perishing in I Cor. 1:18 are *“those who are being saved.”* Saved from what? From the consequences of their sin which ultimately leads to eternal suffering in the lake of fire. Those who *“are being saved”* are in the process of receiving the full benefits of salvation, and they have believed in the *“word of the cross”* which Paul says is *“the power of God.”* Paul emphasizes here *the process* of being saved. Even after repenting and believing in Christ and being born again, we are still in *the process* of moving towards glory and freedom from the presence of sin.
 4. The phrase *“the power of God”* is critical. The word “the” tells us the gospel is a specific power, the only power that can save a sinner. *“The power of God”* is a functional description of *“the word of the cross”* and explains that the *“word of the cross”* is the message through which God always and only exerts His power to save His elect.
- B. Next, in I Cor. 1:19 the Apostle Paul quotes Isa. 29:14, *“For it is written I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and I will set aside the cleverness of the clever.”*
1. Here the phrase *“it is written”* is a reference to the inspired Word of God.
 2. *“The wise”* and *“clever”* are those who *think they are wise*. They are those who scoff at the gospel, thinking it is foolish or moronic (vs. 18).

3. However, God will “*destroy*” and “*set aside*” what the world thinks is wisdom and cleverness by using the simple gospel message to save His elect.
-
- C. Next the Apostle Paul says in I Cor. 1:20, “*Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?*” Paul asks three rhetorical questions, not because there were no wise men, scribes, or debaters to be found in Corinth, but because none of them were able to come to know God through their worldly wisdom.
 - D. I Cor. 1:21, “*For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.*” Here Paul contrasts two methods of trying to save sinners. Relying on wisdom of man e.g., rationalism, naturalism, historicism, empiricism, or pragmatism, but never coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ, and those who rely on God’s wisdom, “the foolishness of the gospel preached,” (I Cor. 1:21, 23) which alone is able to save sinners (Rom. 1:16; I Cor. 1:18).
 - E. I Cor. 1:22, “*For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom. . .*” As explained, the Greeks loved wisdom, knowledge, and rhetoric. The Jews loved to see miracles, signs, and wonders. Yet neither miracles from God nor the wisdom of man can bring a sinner to salvation. “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead” (Lk. 16:31). When we set aside the gospel for rationalism, naturalism, historicism, empiricism, or pragmatism we are replacing God’s wisdom with man’s. The wisdom of man may encourage a redeemed saint, but only the gospel is “*the power of God for all who believe*” (Rom. 1:16; I Cor. 1:18).
 - F. I Cor. 1:23, “*but we preach Christ crucified to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness.*”
 1. Here Paul sets up a contrast “*but*” with the signs and wisdom which Jews and Greeks seek. This is something different, something antithetical. Paul didn’t give Jew or Greek what they wanted but what they needed, “*but we preached Christ crucified.*” This is another one of Paul’s synonyms for the gospel. Notice the two general categories of truth, “*Christ*” Jesus’ person, and “*Him crucified*” Jesus work on the cross.
 2. Then Paul describes a common response when the gospel is preached. “To Jews a stumbling block,” literally a scandal. It was highly offensive to hear that they participated in having their long-awaited Messiah crucified! Thus, the gospel caused many Jews to stumble. The Gentiles, on the other hand, saw the word of the cross as “foolishness” i.e., moronic. They couldn’t imagine that there was only one God. They didn’t believe in the resurrection. Both groups rejected Jesus as the Messiah and only Savior of the world.

- G. I Cor. 1:24, *“but Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God to those who are the called both Jews and Greeks.”*
1. Paul then contrasts the unbelieving response of Jews and Gentiles with the message of *“Christ crucified,”* which he describes again as *“the power of God”* and *“the wisdom of God.”*
 2. God’s saving power through the gospel is not realized in all who hear it preached, but to a select group, *“to those who are the called both Jews and Greeks.”* Thus, God is pleased to save His elect from among both Jews and Greeks through the preaching of the gospel, not man’s wisdom.
- H. I Cor. 1:25 *“Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”*
1. Here Paul speaks facetiously. He now describes the gospel as *“the foolishness of God.”* At least this is how unbelievers see it. Yet even though men may see the gospel as *“foolish,”* it is in fact *“wiser than men”* for it is the power of God for all who believe.
 2. Paul also uses the phrase *“the weakness of God”* to describe the gospel, which from the perspective of unbelievers, and even many professing Christians, is not powerful or sufficient to bring sinners to repentance. *This is why men devise other methods for bringing people to Christ.* They believe the gospel is weak, insufficient, inadequate by itself to bring sinners to saving faith in Jesus Christ. However, Paul says what men often perceive as *“the weakness of God”* is in fact *“stronger than men.”* The power contained in the gospel message confounds man’s wisdom and is the only means by which God saves sinners, the only option for overcoming the internal and external barriers that work against a sinner coming to faith in Jesus Christ.
 3. We see in this text that *“the word of the cross,”* the gospel, *“Christ crucified,”* *“the foolishness of the message preached,”* and *“the weakness of God”* is what God has chosen to save sinners. The gospel, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is what God always uses to redeem His elect. As Paul reminds us in Rom. 1:16, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”*
- I. I Cor. 2:1-5 *“And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of*

God.” Notice Paul did not try to use debate, rhetoric, and logic, so common and prized in Corinth, but instead preached the gospel, a demonstration of God’s power.

J. I Cor. 15:1-5 *“Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.*

K. II Tim. 1:8-11 *“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, 10 but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, 11 for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher.”*

It is only through the gospel preached that the elect are brought to saving faith in Jesus Christ. No other method or message can do it. Yes, rational, historical, empirical, and pragmatic arguments are often a great encouragement *to those who are already born again, who are spiritually alive, and who have a Christian world view.* This is why many turn away from the simple gospel message and attempt to use other methods to bring people to saving faith. But as we have seen, it will never work, for man’s wisdom is unable to overcome the internal and external barriers of sin, Satan, the world, and the flesh. And God has chosen the gospel alone to save sinners so that He gets all the glory, not men.

VIII. **SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT FOR THE POWER OF GOD’S WORD**

Many texts speak of the power of the Word of God to save sinners. Below is a sampling of texts to confirm the saving power of Scripture.

A. Isa 55:7-11 *Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the Lord, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. 8 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. 9 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts. 10 “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; 11 So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.*

- B. II Cor. 10:3-6 *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, 6 and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.”*
- C. I Tim. 4:12-16 *Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. 13 Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. 14 Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. 15 Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. 16 Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.*
- D. II Tim. 3:14- 4:4 *You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. 1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.*
- E. Heb. 4:12 *For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*
- F. I Pet. 1:22-25 *Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, 23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For, “All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off, 25 But the word of the Lord endures forever.” And this is the word which was preached to you.*

We learn from the texts above that the Word of God is energized by the Holy Spirit and thus powerful for salvation to everyone who believes, whether Jew or Greek. *For the evangelist, all roads must lead to the gospel.* In fact, if the gospel isn't preached, no evangelism has taken place. The evangelist may at times employ rational, historical, empirical, or pragmatic arguments as a means of striking up or fueling a conversation, but he must not rely on the flimsy reeds of man's wisdom. Eventually he must proclaim the gospel, "the power of God for all who believe" (Rom. 1:16; I Cor. 1:18). The gospel alone can overcome the internal and external barriers preventing lost souls from seeing "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image God" (II Cor. 4:4).

If you want to see sinners saved, don't worry about the culture, the degree of their biblical knowledge, or if they believe God exists or that the Bible is God's Word. You know from the Bible that God has put a knowledge of Himself in their hearts. When preaching the gospel to lost men they will feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They will want to change subjects to divert attention away from themselves, their sin, and the judgment they deserve. They will often throw up deflecting arguments to get out from under the spotlight of truth. *But don't follow them there.* Stick to the gospel, the power of God for all who believe. Tell them about God, His Son Jesus Christ, who was crucified for sinners, who died, was buried, and rose again three days later from the dead. Exhort them to appropriate the gospel using biblical means i.e., repent, believe, receive, call upon, look to, etc. Do not add any extra-biblical, man-made works to the gospel.

Homework

- Listen to Steve Lawson I Cor. 15:1-4 [The Gospel](#)
- Listen to John MacArthur Acts 5:11-42 "Five Essentials of Evangelism" Part 1
 - [YouTube Video](#)
 - [Grace to You Audio](#)
- Listen to John MacArthur Acts 5:11-42 "Five Essentials of Evangelism" Part 2
 - [YouTube Video](#)
 - [Grace to You Audio](#)
- Listen to Jack Hughes Luke 5:27-32 [Calling Sinners to Repentance](#)

Extra Credit

- Gardiner Spring, *The Distinguishing Traits of Christian Character: What must you do to be saved? How may you know you are saved?* Sometimes titled: *Good Hope By Grace* or *Essays on the Distinguishing Traits of Christian Character.*
 - [Purchase Paperback Here](#) (Reformation Heritage Books)
 - [Purchase paper back here](#) (Amazon)
 - [Free to read online](#) (Bible Lamp Word Press)
 - [Free to read online](#) (Grace Gems)
 - [Purchase Kindle Version](#)