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Lecture 3 of 12

KNOW WHY YOU BELIEVE WHAT YOU BELIEVE:

By Dr. Paul R. Shockley

“I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.” ~ C. S. Lewis

I. Why Do You Believe What You Believe?

- A. Personal Testimony.
- B. “People almost invariably arrive at their beliefs not on the basis of proof but on the basis of what they find attractive.” ~ Blaise Pascal
- C. Why do you believe what believe:
 - 1. Sociological Reasons
 - 2. Psychological Reasons
 - 3. Religious Reasons
 - 4. Philosophical Reasons
 - 5. Biblical Truth:
 - a. Exegetically accurate
 - b. Biblical, Theological, Systematic Coherence.

II. The Plausibility of our Christian Faith in the midst of a Pluralistic Setting:

- A. The Christian worldview possesses many benefits:
 - 1. Christian worldview possesses the greatest explanatory power among its rivals (e.g., Darwinian naturalism; postmodernism).
 - 2. Christian worldview is able to answer the greatest questions asked in life.
 - 3. Christian worldview is able to harmonize both natural revelation and special revelation.
- B. Explanatory Power of the Christian Worldview:

1. Physical beginning of the universe;
2. Empirical design, order, and complexity that is evident in our universe and in our biological systems.
3. The unity and diversity in biological life-forms.
4. The reality of abstract, non-physical realities (e.g., First principles of logic; mathematics);
5. Objective moral values, duties, virtues, & accountability;
6. Objective beauty & our capacity to experience beauty;
7. Existential human need for God (inward knowledge of the divine-a hole in the heart);
8. The intrinsic need for meaning, purpose, and value in life (and fulfillment thereof in Christ);
9. Inherent value and depravity of man;
10. Human Conscience;
11. Both moral & natural evil & suffering in the world;
12. Miracles;
13. The person and work of Jesus Christ;
14. The historical bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ;
15. The inherent search for both redemption from sin & immortality;
16. Value and respect of all persons (all made in the image of God);
17. Similar accounts of life-after-death type experiences;
18. Our capacity for critical thinking skills;
19. Our relationship to, distinction from, and stewardship of environment;
20. Abiding joy and comforting hope.

- C. We can provide reasonable and coherent answers to the greatest questions asked:
1. Origin: Where did we come from?
 2. Identity: What are we? Who are we?
 3. Meaning: Why are we here?
 4. Morality: How should we live?
 5. Destiny: Where are we going?
 6. Evil: What's gone wrong with the world?
 7. Hope: What can be done to fix the problems of the world?

III. Seven-Fold Criteria for Evaluating the Strength of One's Worldview:¹

- A. We can evaluate the strength of one's worldview (and truth-claims) made by incorporating the following seven-fold:
1. Worldview must be logically coherent, that is, free of logical inconsistencies. For example, if one is told that one is spiritually incomplete without God, it must harmonize with what I already know to be true about both spiritually incompleteness and completeness.
 2. Worldview must be empirically adequate, that is, if a fact is something that actually exists; then it has objective reality; it is a provable concept.
 3. Worldview must be existentially relevant, that is, the worldview must be pertinent. In other words, this truth-claim or worldview must have an important, evident bearing on the matter at hand. . In other words, this truth-claim or worldview must have an important, evident bearing on the matter at hand. For example, will placing my trust in Jesus Christ, believing that He is God, who died on the cross for my

¹ William H. Halverson, *A Concise Introduction to Philosophy*, third edition (New York: Random House, 1967, 1972, 1976), 363; Winfried Corduan, *No Doubt About It: The Case for Christianity* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 72-79.

sins and rose bodily from the dead, fill the deep emptiness of my soul, allowing me to experience what I have existentially longed for all these years, namely, love (to truly be loved and to love in return), lasting fulfillment, ultimate meaning and purpose, and lasting relief, joy, and satisfaction-no matter how difficult life becomes. Corduan offers an interesting example regarding the relevant test for truth. He writes, "...if Buddhism and Christianity both raise the question of how to make this a better world, but then it turns out that Buddhism only directs us away from the world towards non-existence, Buddhism might not pass the test of relevance."²

4. Fourth, the truth-claim or worldview must be workable. If something works, then it is true. Though there are problems with this as the sole criterion, itself, e.g., a lie may be workable, the bottom line is that if something is true, then it works.
5. Fifth, and related to the third criterion, relevance, and fourth criterion, workability, the worldview must be able to be lived out; it must be viable. If one's worldview cannot be lived out, then it is not worthwhile. Though this criterion of viability is a negative test, it is worth using. The question becomes, can one live this worldview out? If not, then it is suspect and perhaps valueless as we strive to live life in a physical world that oscillates between moments of stability and instability within the context of knowing that life itself is vaporous; it is here today and gone tomorrow (Ecclesiastes). Stated differently, living for what matters most becomes all too important knowing that life is vaporous like steam from a hot cup of coffee. In fact, the test of viability helps clarify our values, pursuits, and plans.
6. Sixth, does this truth-claim or worldview possess explanatory power in the area of comprehensiveness? Is this truth-claim weighty, substantive? Does this worldview pull all of life together?⁸ Does this truth-claim shed light on other known inquiries, claims, insights or discoveries?
7. And seventh, does this truth-claim or worldview possess an aesthetic and moral quality that meaningfully improves or degrades that which good, honorable, and noble? Does it generate virtue or vice, contribute or degenerate one's well-being and the good of the community? Does

² Corduan, *No Doubt About it*, 74.

it satisfy, conforming to, and enriching our conscience? Or is it counterintuitive, extracting the best parts of our personhood.

- B. In sum, when I apply this seven-fold criterion, namely, the criteria of (1) internal coherence, (2) empirical adequacy, (3) existential relevance, (4) workability, (5) viability, (6) comprehensiveness, and (7) aesthetic quality, to truth-claims and worldviews I encounter, I have come to the realization that I am better able to discover and discern that which is true and false among all the competing truth-claims and worldviews that exist in our world today. Since I desire, especially in view of mistakes I have made and seen in others, to be ever so careful not to assimilate an opinion into my worldview that might affect, degenerate, and hinder my quest for experiencing the “good-life,” distract me from my devotion to God, or deteriorate my responsibility to care for the best interests of others (not necessarily what they want but what the need), applying this seven-fold criterion to truth-claims and worldviews is very valuable. When I consistently and diligently inculcate, that is, instill “true truths” into my very nature whereby truth actually becomes second nature (habituated in what I desire, think, will, and act) and desires and duties are harmonized, everyone around me benefits; lives are dynamically enriched. Finally, when I use these tools to evaluate truth-claims and assimilate “true-truths” into my lifestyle by means of diligent practice with the purpose that it will become part of my identity), God is glorified by my character and conduct. This theme of character and conduct becomes all too important not only because I am held accountable before God for the life.

IV. 10 Significant Types of Apologetics:

- A. **Classical Apologetics:** A prominent strategy in the history of the church methodologically, this approach to apologetics begins by using natural theology in order to establish theism and then by addressing the historical evidences that support Christianity.
- B. **Evidential Apologetics:** This method takes a *broad range* of historical evidences or data as the starting point and in this way argues for theism and Christianity simultaneously.
- C. **Historical Apologetics:** Often called “resurrection apologetics”- this method takes historical evidence as the basis for demonstrating the truth of Christianity with the specific starting point being the historicity of the New Testament documents. This approach then moves to the use of the miracles of Christ, particularly, the resurrection, in order to demonstrate that Christ is

God. The conclusion becomes that if one agrees that Jesus is the Son of God then what He affirms is true (the truth of Scripture).

- D. **Relational Apologetics:** Introduce people to the idea of having a love relationship with Jesus Christ. The starting point is the realization that Jesus is the embodiment of truth (moving from “what” to “who”) and then support the fact that Jesus Christ is God by offering evidential, historical, and logical evidences (liar, lunatic, or God). This view counters postmodern teachings that all viewpoints or beliefs are equally valid in view of God, truth, and reality.
- E. **Experiential Apologetics:** This internal approach appeals to Christian experience as the starting point for the truth of theism and/or Christianity. Divided into four major subtypes: (a) general religious experience, (b) special religious experience, (c) Christian mystical experience, (d) existential experiences, this method is commonly and powerfully used in discussing conversion experiences, “a changed life”, and in testimonies how God worked in some area of life, circumstance, or situation: *“I want what you have!”*
- F. **Presuppositional Apologetics:** This approach presupposes the truth of explicitly Christian theism as the starting point and then argues transcendently that all meaning and thought presupposes the Triune God of the Bible. Thus, they “reason” from Christianity through the Bible because they assume the Bible to be true and encourage the unbeliever to place his or her trust in Jesus Christ. But due to the noetic effects of sin, the unbeliever’s presuppositions are irrational and inadequate. Thus, we do not have any common ground with the non-believer. Thus, apologetics is primarily for the believer, not the unbeliever.
1. I believe this view has significant problems in that the apostle Paul declares in Romans 1:18-20 that God’s existence and attributes can be “clearly seen.” The problem is not one’s understanding the truth, but suppression of the truth, and its eventual substitution-for a lie.³
 2. Presupposing the truth of Christian theism is arguing in a circle; it lacks a basis to justify its assumptions as to why a non-believer should presuppose the Christian faith.⁴

³ H. Wayne House and Joseph M. Holden, *Charts of Apologetics and Christian Evidences* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 8.

⁴ Ibid.

- G. **Cumulative Case Apologetics:** Commonly called the cumulative case method, this informal approach is a strategy whereby it seeks to show that Christianity provides the best explanation of a broad range of data (holistic approach).
- H. **Cultural Apologetics:** This approach, pioneered by Francis A. Schaeffer, uses a presuppositional foundation that argues that only biblical Christianity posits a foundation that is strong enough to support sinful society and produce God-given values, meaning, and significance since He is here and not silent (God is both infinite and personal). Other worldviews/cultures cannot adequately nor consistently handle the sinfulness of humanity, the intrinsic value of creation (including humanity), and the nature of the external world or even produce values that correspond to how things actually are (designed).
- I. **Reformed Epistemological Method:** This approach maintains that positive arguments for Christianity or for theism are not necessary for holding a belief in God. Belief in God is properly basic and therefore rational to maintain without having to offer any evidence or argument. Arguments can be offered, but apologetically, the focus is usually centered on rebutting or undercutting objectives to theism and Christianity.

V. 12-Step Methodology by Dr. Norman Geisler & Frank Turek:⁵
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- A. I have discovered that the following 12-step methodology by Norman Geisler and Frank Turek is a very valuable tool in locating where the particular struggle lies with the non-believer. It helps me not only assess where the person is, but also where I should appropriately engage.
- B. I use this 12-step methodology as a framework while integrating some of the other types of apologetics as I seek to tailor my approach to best reach the person given his or her worldview, interests, or activities.
- C. This method involves understanding the 12 steps. Thus, I whole heartily recommend purchasing *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be An Atheist*, by Drs. Norman Geisler and Frank Turek:
 - 1. Truth about reality is knowable.
 - 2. Opposites cannot both be true (Law of Non-Contradiction).

⁵ Adapted from Norman Geisler & Frank Turek. *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be An Atheist* (Wheaton: Crossway Publishers, 2004).

3. The theistic God exists.
4. Miracles are possible.
5. Miracles performed in connection with a truth claim are acts of God to confirm the truth of God through a messenger of God.
6. The New Testament documents are reliable.
7. As witnessed in the New Testament, Jesus claimed to be God.
8. Jesus' claim to divinity was proven by an unique convergence of miracles.
9. Therefore, Jesus was God in human flesh.
10. Whatever Jesus (who is God) affirmed as true, is true.
11. Jesus affirmed that the Bible is the Word of God.
12. Therefore, it is true that the Bible is the Word of God and whatever is opposed to any biblical truth is false.

VI. Recommended Sources:

- A. Winfried Corduan, *No Doubt About It: The Case for Christianity*
- B. Norman Geisler & Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be An Atheist*
- C. Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*
- D. H. Wayne House & Joseph M. Holden, *Charts of Apologetic and Christian Evidences.*