

# APOLOGETICS

## Seeking A Biblical Model for Apologetics and Evangelism

### Lesson # 3

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We have looked at some of the more common methods or approaches of apologetics. They all have the same goal, yet fail to overcome the barriers surrounding unregenerate men. These barriers are man's sinful nature, his perverted and twisted world view, and his inability to be objective and rational. All these things are compounded by Satan's efforts to blind men and keep them in the dark.

#### I. THE PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETIC METHOD

The presuppositional method of apologetics is kind of a misnomer because all apologetic methods presuppose certain truths. However, there is a reason it is called the presuppositional method. First, all other methods presuppose certain abilities in man to comprehend the truth outside of the Bible and without the aid of the Holy Spirit while the presuppositional method does not. Second, the presuppositional method assumes man's inabilities and that there are *two fundamental truths* on which all others must be based. These *two key presuppositions* are assumed to be true, prior to proofs, evidences, or argumentation, and are believed to be the only criteria by which someone can have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and know God. The presuppositional method has other presuppositions, but the two key presuppositions are considered as of first and primary importance. They are that *1) God exists and 2) the Bible is His Word*. Here are two examples of how the presuppositional method would be used:

- A. A Christian shares the gospel story to an atheist who says they don't believe in God. The Christian explains what the Scriptures say about God and salvation. He asks the atheist to repent of his sins and believe in Jesus Christ for salvation.
  
- B. A believer is asked to speak about his religion on a secular college campus. Many scoffers, agnostics, and those who believe in false religions are 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 trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

Notice that in the presuppositional method there is no attempt to first prove God exists, or that the Bible is true. There are no rational, empirical, evidential, historical, or scientific arguments or proofs set forth in an attempt to first get people to believe in the Bible or God, so that the gospel can be shared with them. Instead, the gospel is shared first with the firm conviction that God exists and the Bible is the Word of God. Since the Bible says that all men have a knowledge of God, there is no need to try and convince people that God exists, because they already know He exists, even if they deny it. The Bible also claims to be the living Word of God. Therefore, there is no need to attempt to prove it is the Word of God for it is self authenticating.

Philosopher Blaise Pascal came close to the presuppositional method with his argument known as “Pascal’s wager.” Pascal said there was no way of proving to someone that God existed, however that it was best to “wager” that God did exist. Pascal said the one who wagers (“has faith” or “believes”) that God exists has nothing to lose and everything to gain. By wagering that God exists he may give up a few vices in this life that have destroyed many, but will also live a good life, loving his fellow man, and having peace. If he dies and God exists, he will have gained all for eternity. If he dies and God does not exist, he has lost nothing but has lived a good life. He went on to say that if one does “wager” that God exists, he will afterwards know by experience the benefit of others who have “wagered” the same. This is very close to the presuppositional method which says we must first believe in order that we might know.

## II. **ASSUMPTIONS OF THE PRESUPPOSITIONAL 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.
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. Related to the first primary presupposition above is that all men have a general knowledge of God but suppress that knowledge in unrighteousness (**Rom. 1:18-21**).

### B. **Second Primary Presupposition – the Scriptures Are 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. It is the two primary presuppositions listed above that lead us to the other presuppositions in the presuppositional method that are listed below. These other presuppositions are derived from the Scriptures.

C. **A Person must First Believe in Order to Know or Understand God and His Word.** Saint Augustine (3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> century) is credited with being the first of the early church fathers to espouse the vital truth that you must, *“Believe in order that you may understand.”* The technical word for this idea is “fideism.” Fideism teaches that there are certain truths that lie outside the reach of those who do not have faith. Therefore, a person must have faith in order to know certain truths. In a narrower sense, the presuppositional method says that saving faith is necessary to have an experiential knowledge of God and His Word. The reasoning is that:

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 they are spiritually appraised (**I Cor. 2:14**)
3. Therefore, men cannot know the truth of God apart from the assistance of the Holy Spirit who is given to men on the basis of faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ (**I Cor. 2:12-13; 12:13; Gal. 3:2, 14**). Once a person places their faith in Jesus Christ they have the resident interpreter, the Holy Spirit, dwelling within them. They can now know what before they could not know, namely God and His Word.

Others have argued that faith is the prerequisite of all knowledge. Scientists “believe” that their scientific method will lead men to the truth. The atheist “believes” he himself is god and that his personal “belief” that God does not exist makes it true. The evolutionist denies spontaneous generation but “believes” life spontaneously generated out of nothing. 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 evidences apart from faith is false. Everyone has faith. The question is not “who has faith and who doesn’t” but “what do people place their faith in.” Anselm (11<sup>th</sup> century) had it right when he said, “For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand.”

4. **Jn. 5:41-47** “I do not receive glory from men; 42 but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. 43 “I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him. 44 “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?”
5. **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.””

6. **I Cor. 2:12-14** 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, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

#### D. **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.’<sup>1</sup>
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.

#### E. **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.

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<sup>1</sup>Some 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 to them 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.

**F. Objective Evidences Alone Do Not Compel 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.

**G. Saving Faith Is Not Merely Intellectual But Is a Volitional Heart Commitment to the Gospel Message**

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.

**H. Scientific Proofs or Extrabiblical Historical Facts Do Not Compel One to Believe When They Are Strained Through a Sin-Cursed Heart**

1. **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.

2. **Titus 1:15** To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.

### I. **All Men Are Totally Corrupt and Unable To Be Objective**

1. **Rom. 1:21-23** 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.
2. **Rom. 3:10-18** as it is written, “There is none righteous, not even one; 11 There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; 12 All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one.” 13 “Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving,” “The poison of asps is under their lips”; 14 “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness”; 15 “Their feet are swift to shed blood, 16 Destruction and misery are in their paths, 17 And the path of peace they have not known.” 18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

## III. **APPARENT PROBLEMS WITH THE PRESUPPOSITIONAL METHOD**

- A. **Don't the Other Apologetic Methods Have Any Validity?** As we have mentioned in the pervious lesson, other methods can be used but not relied upon alone for they fail to overcome the internal and external barriers that keep men from Christ.
  1. Other apologetic methods can be used to facilitate discussion, build relationships, and promote dialogue with unbelievers, but in the end, the gospel must be preached and united with saving faith in order that man might know the truth.
  2. Other apologetics methods can be used to silence critics and refute their false claims.
  3. Other apologetic methods can be used to encourage believers who already have the Holy Spirit within them and a Christian world view.

- B. **Doesn't Natural Revelation Have Scriptural Support Because the Bible Says "The Heavens Declare God's Glory" (Ps. 19:1-6) and That "It Can Be Seen by Creation That God Exists" (Rom. 1:20) and That God Has "Put His Law in Our Hearts" (Rom. 2:14-16)?** It is true that God has revealed Himself in nature and creation, however, in every instance, men suppress that truth in unrighteousness (**Rom. 1:18-19**).
- C. **How Can You Expect Someone to Believe in Something They Don't Understand?** Faith we are told is *"the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen"* (**Heb. 11:1**). Faith is willing to trust in, rely upon, and believe in something it cannot see or touch. Those who do believe and know the truth are able to do so because of God's grace (**Eph. 2:8**).
- D. **From What We Have Learned Above, Why Is it That People Must First Believe That They Might Know the Truth?**
- E. **What Are the Two Primary Presuppositions in the Presuppositional Method of Apologetics?**
- F. **When You Read Through the Scriptures, What Is the Consistent Approach for Evangelizing the Lost?**