

Redeemer Bible Fellowship

“How to Defend the Faith”

Summer Series 2026

III. What does it take to save an unbeliever?

1. What or Who has the power to save?

Oftentimes the same passages that describe man’s desperate condition in sin also describe how one is rescued from that plight. For instance, the remedy for being dead in sin is God making someone alive (Eph 2:4; cf. John 3:3, 5). The remedy for Satan’s blindness is God enlightening the heart (2 Cor 4:4, 6; cf. Acts 26:18). The remedy for assessing things of the Spirit as foolish is being granted the mind of Christ through the Spirit (1 Cor 2:14-16) through the preaching of the gospel (Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:18).

2. What lacks the power to save?

i. The reasoning that seeks to persuade—1 Cor 1:17-2:5

Greg Bahsen:

By reasoning impartially with the skeptic and appealing to the ability of his mind to acquire the truth on his own principles and to reason meaningfully, that is, by not taking a firm presuppositional stance and challenging the sinner’s autonomy (but rather catering to it), we would allow the unregenerate to believe a lie in order that he come to acknowledge the *truth*! Therefore, we conclude that the Christian apologist requires a presuppositional apologetic. Such an apologetic is necessitated epistemologically as well as ethically.¹

ii. The proofs that seek to convince

Internal evidence (ie. for the resurrection of Christ—1 Cor 15)

vs.

External evidence (ie. Why we should trust the Bible in comparison to other books)

Common approach to arguing for the Bible on the basis of miracles:

The biblical miracles need to be considered on their own merits. Their impossibility, or even improbability, has never been demonstrated. We have positive evidence for their occurrence. The reasonable person will believe that they occurred as recorded...But if our argument is sound, then rational and honest people must not only believe that the Bible so teaches, but they must also believe what the Bible teaches (R. C. Sproul, John H. Gerstner, and Arthur W. Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 152, 153).²

The purpose of miracles throughout the Bible is that they validate the message of special revelation and the messenger as being from God (Moses, Elijah/Elisha, Jesus Christ, Apostles).

Mighty miracles did not produce saving faith in:

- OT Israelites under Moses—**Num 14:11** *The Lord said to Moses, “How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?”* (cf. Ps 106:21-25)

¹ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended*, ed. Joel McDurmon (Powder Springs, GA; Nacogdoches, TX: American Vision; Covenant Media Press, 2008), 130–131.

² Quoted in George J. Zemek, Jr., “A Review of *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense*,” *Grace Theological Journal* 7.1 (1986) 117.

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- OT Israelites at the time of Elijah and Elisha—(The greatest transformation took place after the discovery and reading of the law during Josiah’s reign, which is after both Elijah and Elisha were gone).
- People who witnessed Jesus—John 2:23-25, 5:16-18, 6:26-40, Acts 2:22-23
- People who witnessed the apostles—Acts 4:1-4, 14:8-19, 16:16-21

iii. The theology that seeks to enlighten

Natural Revelation vs. Natural Theology

Natural or general revelation is an entirely biblical concept, being portrayed as universally accessible knowledge in many passages in Scripture. More specifically, this revelation consists of the Creator God’s power and rights, which is taught in Romans 1:19-20, Psalm 19:1-6 and Acts 14:17. Additionally, there is the universal internal witness of God inside of man; most specifically the conscience, which is the internal mechanism that judges between right and wrong (Rom 2:14-15), and also the reality of eternity (Ecc 3:11). The scope of this revelation is obviously very limited, only revealing certain characteristics of God, and thus cannot bring someone to a saving knowledge of the truth of Jesus Christ, apart from subsequent special revelation found only in the Bible (Rom 10:13-17; 1 Pet 1:22-25).

Natural theology—a study of God apart from the special revelation of the Bible.

This is pursued through theistic, logical arguments, historical research, archeological discoveries and a host of other alternatives under the premise of “all truth is God’s truth.”

But does all truth do what God’s word does?—Ps 19:7-14; Heb 4:12-13; 1 Pet 1:23-25

Robert Thomas explains further:

If human discovery of information comes late in history, it cannot be general revelation. If it comes as a result of human ingenuity, it cannot be general revelation. General revelation is the common possession of all people of all time and in all places. It is divinely generated revelation imposed on the whole human race and impossible to avoid...[which leads to] four flaws in the theoretical foundation for such integration of “all truth is God’s truth”: 1) trust exists in varying degrees of certitude; 2) all truth does not possess the same authority; 3) all truth does not all of receptive ears; 4) all truth does not fall into the range of general revelation.³

Conclusion

When engaging with unbelievers about spiritual matters, their natural, truth-suppressing disposition must always be kept in mind. This is crucial because it leaves no room for the objection that God has not provided enough revelation to be known and it reinforces the idea that the unbeliever already has a knowledge of God. Accordingly, the Christian needs to be primarily concerned with identifying the biblical foundation on which the unbeliever is unwittingly standing to make his argument against Christianity.⁴ As mentioned above, even seeking to make rational arguments against Christianity proves the truth of Christianity because there is no foundation of rationality, truth or knowledge outside of God’s Scriptures. In an attempt to get the unbeliever to perceive this, one could ask: What are you using as the standard to determine if our discussion is beneficial? Whether

³ Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Academic, 2002), 119, 132.

⁴ Bahnsen; Butler, *The Objective Proof for Christianity: The Presuppositionalism of Cornelius Van Til & Greg L. Bahnsen*, 151.

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that answer is adherence to the laws of logic or proving facts⁵ or humanistic morality or any other absolute assessment, all legitimate answers necessitate a God of truth who has revealed himself. Reason being, where else does any standard of right and wrong or truth and error come from and why would it have any authority over anyone else outside of oneself? Moreover, to claim there is no absolute morality given from God and at the same time promote one's subjective, personal approach to morality as objective truth (ie. something that everyone should believe), is evidence of stupendous hypocrisy and inconsistency. Lastly, the unbeliever needs to be asked to make his case for the origin and value of man over the rest of the creatures on the earth and he must do it without adopting any categories that find their source in God.⁶ Any answers the unbeliever could legitimately supply will necessitate borrowing from God's truth.

Once the unbeliever is left with nothing to stand on other than the truth about God, it is important to note the futility and inconsistency of claiming to do otherwise. It's at this point that the content of the Scriptures (special revelation) should be brought to bear regarding the full-orbed nature of God's characteristics, his authority over all things, his will for mankind and his plan of redeeming people from their sins through faith in Jesus Christ. Essentially, instead of denying the guilt of sin via the conscience, resulting in suppressing clear knowledge of God from general revelation, the unbeliever can have that guilt wiped away by turning from sin and self-trust to Christ and his finished saving work alone. This salvation can be received by repenting from pretending the source of authority is in oneself and instead, acknowledging the full authority of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ (Mt 28:18) *to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen* (1 Pt 4:11).

Final Considerations

Only God can change the unbeliever's [heart] and behavior. The non-Christian must be renewed unto knowledge, righteousness, and holiness of truth. He must be saved from his epistemological folly induced by his ethical rebellion against God's clear revelation in nature around him, his own constitution, and Scripture. When the heart is cleansed from sin, only then can the eyes see clearly, the ears hear plainly, and the mind reason properly. Out of the most intense concern for the sinner's salvation, and in full recognition of his true condition, we must use an apologetic that does not compromise the authority or truth of God's Word or give any ground to rebellion. We must challenge the unbeliever at every point with the presupposed authority of Christ over his life and thinking, praying the Holy Spirit to work regeneration along with the sure witness of the Word.⁷

‘[In I Pet 3:15,] the apostle stresses an attitude of total dependence on God...The passage teaches that believers are encouraged to be prepared to give defense, but this defense is to be devoid of all arrogance, pride, or self-sufficiency’...‘Such an attitude is commensurate with a presuppositional approach: ‘In the immediate context, then, Peter is saying that the believer must confess his inability to convert men by mere human reasonings and God's unique and sovereign ability to do the work of converting.’⁸

⁵ Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 123-125, 128, 203-204.

⁶ Here's a helpful list of additional questions from Bahnsen: <https://defenseoffaith.wordpress.com/2015/10/29/seminary-apologetics-a-checklist-for-reasoning-with-unbelievers-part-ii-2430/>

⁷ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended*, ed. Joel McDurmon (Powder Springs, GA; Nacogdoches, TX: American Vision; Covenant Media Press, 2008), 130.

⁸ Quoted in George J. Zemek, *Tethered to the Text: An Exegetical Approach to Apologetics* (Jupiter, FL: Expositors Press, 2024), 261.