

Summary of Presuppositional Apologetic Method by Greg Bahnsen (from Always Ready)—with Bahnsen’s Bible references added, except those in square brackets. Edited by Steve R. Scrivener

... we can now *summarize* the way in which we ought to go about defending the Christian hope within us:

The Nature of the Apologetic Situation:

1. The controversy between the believer and unbeliever is in principle an *antithesis* between two *complete systems* of thought involving ultimate commitments and assumptions. **Col 2:3, 8**
2. Even laws of thought and method, along with factual evidence, will be accepted and evaluated in light of one's governing presuppositions. **Lk 16:31**
3. All chains of argumentation, especially over matters of ultimate personal importance, trace back to and depend upon starting points which are taken to be self-evidencing; thus circularity in debate will be unavoidable. However, not all circles are intelligible or valid.
4. Thus appeals to logic, fact, and personality may be necessary, but they are not apologetically adequate; what is needed is not piece-meal replies, probabilities, or isolated evidences but rather an attack upon the underlying presuppositions of the unbeliever's system of thought. **1 Cor 1:20**
5. The unbeliever's way of thinking is characterized as follows:
 - a. By nature the unbeliever is the image of God **Gen 1:26** and, therefore inescapably religious; his heart testifies continually, as does also the clear revelation of God around him, to God's existence and character **Rom, 1:19, 20, [1:32]**.
 - b. But the unbeliever exchanges the truth for a lie **Rom 1:25**. He is a fool who refuses to begin his thinking with reverence for the Lord **Pr 1:7**; he will not build upon Christ's self-evidencing words **Mt 7:26, 27** and suppresses the unavoidable revelation of God in nature **Rom 1:18**.
 - c. Because he delights not in understanding but chooses to serve the creature rather than the Creator **Rom 1:25**, the unbeliever is self-confidently committed to his own ways of thought **Pr 12:15**; being convinced that he could not be fundamentally wrong, he flaunts perverse thinking and challenges the self-attesting word of God **Pr 13:16; 1 Cor 2:14**.
 - d. Consequently, the unbeliever's thinking results in ignorance; in his darkened futile mind **Eph 4:17, 18** he actually hates knowledge **Pr 1:22** and can gain only a "knowledge" falsely so-called **1 Tim 6:20 (NASB)**.
 - e. To the extent that he actually knows anything, it is due to his unacknowledged dependence upon the suppressed truth about God within him **Rom 1:18, 21**. This renders the unbeliever intellectually schizophrenic: by his espoused way of thinking he actually "opposes himself" and shows a need for a radical "change of mind" (repentance) unto a genuine knowledge of the truth **2 Tim 2:25 (NASB)**.
 - f. The unbeliever's ignorance is culpable because he is without excuse for his rebellion against God's revelation; hence he is "without an apologetic" for his thoughts. **Rom 1:20**
 - g. His unbelief does not stem from a lack of factual evidence but from his refusal to submit to the authoritative word of God from the beginning of his thinking. **Lk 16:31**

The Requirements of the Apologist:

1. The apologist must have the proper attitude; he must not be arrogant or quarrelsome **2 Tim 2:23–25**, but with humility **Js 3:13** and respect he must argue in a gentle and peaceable manner **1 Pet 3:15b**.
2. The apologist must have the proper starting point **Jn 14:6**; he must take God's word as his self-evidencing presupposition **Mt 7:29**, thinking God's thoughts after Him **Ps 36:9** (rather than attempting to be neutral), and viewing God's word as more sure than even his personal experience of the facts **2 Pet 1:16–19**.
3. The apologist must have the proper method; working on the unbeliever's unacknowledged presuppositions **Rom 1:18** and being firmly grounded in his own **Col 2:3, 6, 7**, the apologist must aim to cast down every high imagination exalted against the knowledge of God by aiming to bring every thought (his own, as well as his opponents) captive to the obedience of Christ **2 Cor 10:4, 5**.

4. The apologist must have the proper goal: securing the unbeliever's unconditional surrender **2 Cor 10:5** without compromising one's own fidelity **1 Pet 3:15a**.
 - a. The word of the cross must be used to expose the utter pseudo-wisdom of the world as destructive foolishness. **1 Cor 1:18–20**
 - b. Christ must be set apart as Lord in one's heart, thus acknowledging no higher authority than God's word and refusing to suspend intellectual commitment to its truth. **1 Pet 3:15a**

The Procedure for Defending the Faith 1 Cor 1:20:

[The two fold apologetic procedure of Pr 26:4, 5 is firstly 1, 2, 4 and 5 (Pr 26:4, see 5a), and secondly 3 (Pr 26:5, see 3a)]

1. Realizing that the unbeliever is holding back the truth in unrighteousness **Rom 1:18**, the apologist should reject the foolish presuppositions implicit in critical questions and attempt to educate his opponent **2 Tim 2:23–25**.
2. This involves presenting the facts within the context of the Biblical philosophy of fact:
 - a. God is the sovereign determiner of possibility and impossibility. **Acts 26:8**
 - b. A proper reception and understanding of the facts requires submission to the Lordship of Christ. **Acts 26:9–15**
 - c. Thus the facts will be significant to the unbeliever only if he has a presuppositional change of mind from darkness to light. **Acts 26:19–20**
 - d. Scripture has authority to declare what has happened in history and to interpret it correctly. **Acts 26:22–23, 27**
3. The unbeliever's espoused presuppositions should be forcefully attacked, asking whether knowledge is possible, given them:
 - a. In order to show that God has made foolish the wisdom of the world **1 Cor 1:20** the believer can place himself on the unbeliever's position and answer him according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceits; that is, demonstrate the outcome of unbelieving thought with its assumptions **Pr 26:5**.
 - b. The unbeliever's claims should be reduced to impotence and impossibility by an internal critique of his system; that is, demonstrate the ignorance of unbelief by arguing from the impossibility of anything contrary to Christianity. **1 Cor 1:20; Pr 26:5; Mt 7:26–27**
4. The apologist should appeal to the unbeliever as the image of God **Gen 1:26** who has God's clear and inescapable revelation, thus giving him an ineradicable knowledge of God **Rom 1:18–21**; this knowledge can be exposed by indicating unwitting expressions or by pointing to the "borrowed capital" (unadmitted presuppositions) which can be found in the unbeliever's position **[Acts 17:28, 29 and Rom 1:18]**.
5. The apologist should declare the self-evidencing and authoritative truth of God **Jn 5:37, 39; Is 8:20; Jn 17:17** as the precondition of intelligibility **Col 2:3** and man's only way of salvation (from all the effects of sin, including ignorance and intellectual vanity) **Jn 14:6**:
 - a. Lest the apologist become like the unbeliever, he should not answer him according to his folly but according to God's word. **Pr 26:4**
 - b. The unbeliever can be invited to put himself on the Christian position in order to see that it provides the necessary grounds for intelligible experience and factual knowledge—thereby concluding that it alone is reasonable to hold and the very foundation for proving anything whatsoever. **Col 2:3**
 - c. The apologist can also explain that Scripture accounts for the unbeliever's state of mind (hostility) **Col 1:21** and the failure of men to acknowledge the necessary truth of God's revelation **Rom 1:18; Ps 14:1**; moreover, Scripture provides the only escape from the effects of this hostility and failure (futility and damnation) **Eph 4:17–24; 1 Cor 3:18–20; Mt 7:24–29**.

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