

TRUTH, KNOWLEDGE, AND BELIEF

Our goal in apologetics is to point people to what is true. We want people to know the truth about God, and then believe in him. Our goal is always leading people to faith in Christ, to the glory of God. Therefore, we must discuss not only truth and propositional knowledge of facts, but also a relational knowledge (belief/trust) of Jesus. Christianity is a religion based on true historical events. When Paul related the historical details of Christ's resurrection to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:3-8), he stated that if Christ has not been raised, then his preaching and their faith was in vain and futile (vv. 14, 17). Christianity is based on truth.

Before learning certain arguments for God or evidences of his existence, it is necessary to lay some philosophical groundwork. Often, when we are trying to convince people that God is real and the only way to know him is through a relationship with Jesus, it will require more than offering certain lines of evidence. We will have to challenge the root of someone's faith. We will have to question how that person knows what he or she knows. In other words, we must ask, "What is truth?" and "How you know that?"

Therefore, it is necessary to get to the foundation of truth, knowledge, and belief. If you can get to the root of the issue, it may not be necessary to know everything about history, science, and biblical evidence. We will study answers to popular objections to Christianity, but apologetics is more than memorizing answers. Rather, it is a way of thinking. We must think about what is true, how we know truth, and how faith factors into that knowledge.

Let's think of a concrete example. Think of a simple fact: it is raining. Now, that statement is true only if it is actually raining. But how do I know it is raining? Well, I can look out a window and see the rain. If I'm unsure about what I see, I can step outside and feel the rain. I can quickly verify through two of my five senses that it is indeed raining. Therefore, the statement "it is raining" agrees with reality, and I can know that through my senses. That is quite simple.

However, imagine I were working in a windowless office on the tenth floor of a building. My friend calls me on the phone and tells me it is raining, which means we will have to postpone our plans to play tennis. Now, I have no access to a window, so I can't see it is raining and I can't step outside to feel the rain. I must trust my friend. I must believe that he is telling me the truth. There may be other ways to verify my friend's statement—by calling other friends or checking the weather on the Internet—but these methods, too, will require faith in those sources.

Our personal ability to know truths beyond the shadow of a doubt is actually quite limited. We often require faith or belief to know that something is true. When I board a plane, I can't know with my own senses that the plane is able to operate properly and that the pilot knows how to fly the plane and is mentally and physically fit to do so. Even if I were in a position to inspect the plane, I wouldn't know what to look for to be sure it is mechanically sound. And how does one verify that a pilot is competent? But I trust (or believe) that the plane will reach its destination safely on the basis of that airline's track record. Once again, we see that our

knowledge of the truth is often mediated by faith, a trust that is reasonable but not empirically proven.

If we ponder these things at length, we might find them quite disturbing, were it not for our faith in God. Christians believe that people have access to many truths because God is faithful and true, because he has created an ordered universe, and because he has revealed himself through creation and through Scripture. Ultimately, we can know certain truths because of the character and actions of God.

Let us now examine truth, knowledge, and belief and how they relate one to another.

TRUTH

What is truth? In the example above, the statement “it is raining” is true if it is actually raining. If it were not raining, the statement wouldn’t be true. Sounds simple, doesn’t it? This is the correspondence view of truth, which means that the proposition (the declarative statement) corresponds to reality. To put it another way, a true statement agrees with reality. According to Douglas Groothuis, “A belief or statement is true only if it matches with, reflects or corresponds to the reality it refers to. For a statement to be true it must be factual.”¹

Most people would agree with this definition of truth, and in certain contexts, nearly everyone would agree with this definition of truth. When dealing with financial matters, every reasonable person would agree that the number of dollars on their bank statement agrees with the actual amount of money they possess. Unless the bank had made a gross error, few people would question the meaning of the number on their bank statement. If the statement says five hundred dollars, then the person only has five hundred dollars. There is no haggling over the meaning of the number 500. No honest and reasonable person would say, “500 is your truth; but my truth is 5,000.” No right-thinking person would say, “There may a definite number of dollars in my account, but there’s no way that we can truly know that number.” Again, this is simple, something we take for granted.

In the worlds of business, science, and medicine, most people don’t question truth. When it comes to history, some conspiracy theorists may challenge conventional historical reporting (by insisting, for example, that the CIA, Fidel Castro, and the Mafia assassinated JFK), but we tend to think of those people as a bit unrealistic.

However, in the fields of theology and philosophy, this common sense view of truth, the correspondence view, is regularly questioned. Other views of truth have become more prevalent in the world of philosophy. Though most people do not study philosophy, these ideas have a way of trickling down from academic philosophers who teach at universities to their students and into the non-academic world, as these students become public school teachers, writers, journalists, and other people who subtly influence our society.

¹ Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 124.

Skepticism

Skepticism is a position of doubt. A skeptic is uncertain whether anyone can know truth. As with all philosophical positions, there are degrees to which a person may hold a position. Some skeptics are mildly doubtful; they require a great deal of evidence in order to believe something is true. Others would say there are objective realities, but we have no access to them. J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig offer a definition of the traditional view of skepticism: “There is some controversy over what the Academic skeptics have actually affirmed, but the traditional view is that they asserted two things: (1) The skeptical thesis: All things are inapprehensible, no one has any knowledge. (2) Regarding the skeptical thesis itself, we can dogmatically affirm that *we know* that no one has any knowledge.”² If you are paying attention, you can see that this statement contradicts itself. It says, “We truly know that we cannot know truth.” For a skeptic to be consistent, he would have to be skeptical about his own skepticism, doubtful about his own doubt. But such a view is untenable for everyday living. You can’t doubt everything.

C. S. Lewis recognized such when he wrote *The Abolition of Man*. In it, he writes,

But you cannot go on “explaining away” for ever: you will find that you have explained explanation itself away. You cannot go on “seeing through” things for ever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it. It is good that the window should be transparent, because the street or garden beyond it is opaque. How if you saw through the garden too? It is no use trying to “see through” first principles. If you see through everything, then everything is transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To “see through” all things is the same as not to see.³

Lewis uses the term “first principles.” These are what others may call presuppositions or touchstone truths. We all reason from foundational things, whether it is the Bible, human reason, the laws of science, or other things that are more subjective, like our intuition and emotions. But if we are skeptical about everything, we have no foundation from which to make any judgments. We will have to doubt whether we know anything, even first principles like the idea that we can trust our minds to work properly or that our five senses do not betray us. We will have no truth to stand on, and we will have to doubt our own position.

The skeptical position towards God could be expressed in such a way: “There may be a God, but there is no way of knowing him.” Perhaps the skeptic may say, “There is no way of proving any religious belief.” Some have even said, “Each religion sees the part of spiritual truth, but none can see the whole truth.”⁴ These statements sound powerful when you first hear them, but if you stop and think, they are all self-refuting. The first statement says that there is no way to know God, but that statement itself asserts a type of knowledge of God. The second

² J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 92.

³ C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 91.

⁴ Timothy Keller refutes this claim in *The Reason for God* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 8.

statement concerns religious belief, and if there is no way of proving religious belief, there is no way to prove that statement is true. Whoever speaks the third statement assumes that he or she sees the whole of spiritual truth. Otherwise, how could he or she know that each religion only sees part?

This last idea may require an illustration. The British missionary to India, Lesslie Newbigin, reported that Indians often told him that no one is able to see the whole of spiritual truth. They told him a story: A king and his courtiers witness blind men who encounter an elephant and start to feel it to see what it is. Each blind man feels a different part of the elephant. One man feels the trunk and states that the animal is long and flexible, like a snake. Another man feels a leg and states that the animal feels round and thick, like a tree trunk. A third man feels the elephant's side and states that the animal is large and flat. The point is that no one can describe the whole elephant, just as no one religion can describe the whole of God. This sounds reasonable, but there is a flaw in this story. Newbigin makes this devastating observation:

The story is told from the point of view of the king and his courtiers, who are not blind but can see that the blind men are unable to grasp the full reality of the elephant and are only able to get hold of part of the truth. The story is constantly told in order to neutralize the affirmation of the great religions, to suggest that they learn humility and recognize that none of them can have more than one aspect of the truth. But, of course, the real point of the story is exactly the opposite. If the king were also blind there would be no story. The story is told by the king, and it is the immensely arrogant claim of one who sees the full truth which all the world's religions are only groping after. It embodies the claim to know the full reality which relativizes all the claims of the religions and philosophies.⁵

Skeptics may sound wise, but we must remind them of their own skepticism. To be consistent, a skeptic cannot claim to know anything with certainty, even his own skepticism. If he says, "We cannot know truth, we must respond, "Then I cannot know your statement is true." When people assert "truths," they must apply that truth to their own statements.

According to Tim Keller, "If you say all truth-claims are power plays, then so is your statement. If you say (like Freud) that all truth-claims about religion and God are just psychological projections to deal with your guilt and insecurity, then so is your statement. To see through everything is not to see."⁶

Postmodernism

Another attack on truth has been mounted by postmodernism. This term needs some explaining. Premodern thought is associated with the time up until the Renaissance. Premodern people thought that ultimate truth came through faith in a god, though many other truths could be

⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 9-10.

⁶ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 38.

known through exploring the world and using reason. The modern era began with the European Renaissance (about 1420-1630) and flourished in the Age of Enlightenment, approximately 1650-1800, and beyond. Modern thinkers believed that most everything could be known through science and reason. Perhaps some spiritual truths could be learned through a religious faith, but humans were capable of learning almost anything on their own. (This brief historical sketch is, of course, a generalization.) Postmodern thinking, developed in the twentieth century, however, calls into question the very notion of absolute, objective truth.

By its very nature, postmodernism is very difficult to define. Moreland and Craig explain why:

For one thing, postmodernism is a loose coalition of diverse thinkers from several different academic disciplines, and it would be difficult to characterize postmodernism in a way that would be fair to this diversity. Further, part of the nature of postmodernism is a rejection of certain things—for example, truth, objective rationality, authorial meaning in texts along with the existence of stable verbal meanings and universally valid linguistic definitions—that make accurate definitions possible.⁷

The key elements in that definition are the rejection of truth and as “authorial meaning.” A premodern or postmodern thinker would assume that there are absolute truths that can be known. A postmodern thinker assumes that truth is relative, simply the product of any particular culture. A premodern or modern thinker would accept that the meaning of a text was what the author intended to communicate. A postmodern thinker assumes that the meaning is up for grabs. Postmodern thinkers believe that the reader is able to decide what the text means. (This has enormous implications for how one reads the Bible or any other authoritative document.)

This may sound like ivory tower material to you, but as with all philosophical movements, there is a trickle-down effect. When you try to share the gospel with someone and hear, “That may be true for you, but not for me,” that is postmodern philosophy at work. When a Christian, who should have a premodern way of thinking, talks with a postmodernist, there is a clash of worldviews. According to James Sire, “The ‘premodern’ Christian had too clear a view of human depravity, and the ‘postmodern’ mind has too dim a view of any universal truth.”⁸

Postmodern thought generally says that there is no truth but what you decide to be true. Postmodernists believe that truth is the product of language, which is created by societies. This is another way of saying that we create our own realities. This way of thinking is the natural result of people who drift from God. The first step is deciding that we don’t need God to know truth. (Or, perhaps, that we know truth better than God!) The next step is saying there is no God. When one denies God, there is no reason to believe in universal truth or objective morality. Once you part ways with God, the purpose of life is what you make it.

⁷ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 144-45.

⁸ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 218.

This way of thinking may sound absurd to some of us, with good reason, but it affects the thinking of many people. Not too long ago, I asked a teenager, “What is the purpose of life?” He responded by saying, “Each person has their own purpose and they have to find it for themselves.” His answer assumes that there is no one true purpose of life.

Perhaps the easiest way to get a sense of postmodernism is to see what postmodern philosophers write. The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) is, perhaps, the father of postmodernism. This is what he said about truth:

What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins.⁹

Truth, according to Nietzsche, is nothing more than something made by human beings, illusions as worthless as old coins that no longer count as currency. Perhaps it should be noted that Nietzsche had a mental breakdown in 1889 and suffered from mental illness during the remaining years of his life. At any rate, if truth is an illusion, then Nietzsche’s statement is illusory, a product of his imagination. There is apparently no basis for his statement. No other truth exists to which he can appeal.

A more contemporary postmodern philosopher, Richard Rorty, states that truth is the product of language, which we made for ourselves.

The world does not speak. Only we do. The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold beliefs. But it cannot propose a language for us to speak. Only other human beings can do that. . . . *Languages* are made rather than found, and . . . truth is a property of linguistic entities, of sentences.¹⁰

Rorty says that truth is a property of language, and we “program” ourselves with that language. Therefore, human beings create their own truth. If that is so, Rorty’s statement has no absolute truth to support it. It is simply his truth. I can refute his comments, and my comments are true, too, because they are a property of my own linguistic entities. Of course, Rorty may not appreciate that. He may think I am misinterpreting his comments, which means that, at heart, he is not truly a postmodernist.

Postmodernists often obscure the inherent instability and incoherence of their statements by using complex language. They don’t come out and say: “This is absolutely true: there is no

⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense,” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1954), 46-47.

¹⁰ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 6-7. Quoted in Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 223.

absolute truth!” If they did, it would be clearly absurd. Instead, they wrap their absurd thoughts in layers of, for lack of a better word, gobbledygook. J. Budziszewski, a philosopher and a Christian, noticed this trend. “C. S. Lewis said that a good test of whether you understand something is whether you can express it in uneducated language, in street talk. . . . The problem is that once postmodernism is translated into street talk, anyone can see how silly it is.”¹¹

If we actually used this philosophy in everyday life, we would see just how absurd it is. Imagine going to the doctor and being told you have cancer. Imagine responding to him in this fashion: “You say I have cancer, which may be true, but only insofar as truth is a property of linguistic entities, of sentences. And we all know that we have programmed ourselves with a language, which cause us to hold beliefs. While I appreciate your concerns, I say that I do not have cancer. That sentence—that linguistic entity—causes me to hold the belief that I am perfectly healthy.” In essence, you told the doctor, “That may be true for you, but not for me,” and you have avoided the reality of the situation. That is not philosophical sophistication; it is insanity.

No one in real life is postmodern. It would be impossible to live in such a way. Postmodern philosophers only apply this way of thinking to more abstract concepts, like God, religion, and morality. Some postmodern philosophers believe that any claims of truth are power plays, ways of asserting authority over others. That very statement, however, is a truth claim and thus a power play. “If we hold that all linguistic utterances are power plays, then that utterance itself is a power play and no more likely to be proper than any other.”¹² Postmodernism, like skepticism, is inherently unstable. By its own logic, it cannot stand. It devours itself.

Unfortunately, postmodernism has subtly shaped the way that many people think. It has affected the thinking of younger generations and it has even crept into Christendom. All Christians should reject this way of thinking. I agree with J. P. Moreland when he writes, “I am also convinced that postmodernism is an irresponsible, cowardly abrogation of the duties that constitute a disciple’s calling to be a Christian intellectual and teacher.”¹³ He then adds, “Faced with such opposition and the pressure it brings, postmodernism is a form of intellectual pacifism that, at the end of the day, recommends backgammon while the barbarians are at the gate.”¹⁴ Instead of courageously facing reality, postmodernists play games that help no one deal with the major issues of life, like death and evil. All Christians should reject any thinking that leads them away from truth, particularly truth related to God, sin, salvation, and judgment.

¹¹ J. Budziszewski, “Practical Responses to Relativism and Postmodernism, Part 1,” in *Philosophy: Christian Perspectives for the New Millennium*, ed. Paul Copan, Scott B. Luley and Stan Wallace (Addison, TX; Norcross, GA: CIM; RZIM, 2003), 94. Quoted in James W. Sire, *Why Good Arguments Often Fail* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 114.

¹² Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 238.

¹³ Moreland, “Postmodernism and Truth,” in *Reasons for Faith*, ed. Norman L. Geisler and Chad V. Meister (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 125.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

Coherence and pragmatism

There are two other views of truth opposed to the correspondence view. One is coherence. The coherence view holds that if a set of beliefs is coherent (logical and consistent) it is true. However, fiction writers often create fantasy worlds that are coherent, but are not true. And it is possible that two equally coherent set of beliefs could have completely different ideas about God and the meaning of life. Only one can be true, so coherence won't help us assess if a set of beliefs is actually true.

Pragmatism when related to truth says that something is true if it produces a beneficial outcome. That is, something is true if it "works." For that to be true, however, one would have to know what is beneficial (what works) and what the effects of a belief would be. So, for example, someone could say, "I believe in God. My belief is true because it works for me." But what does it mean to work? Does it mean you feel better, or you have a sense of purpose? How do you know believing in God accomplishes that? And couldn't some other belief accomplish the same goal? In the end, the pragmatic view of truth doesn't address reality.

Truth according to the Bible

In contrast to skepticism, postmodernism, coherence, and pragmatism, the Bible states that truth can be known. We can trust God's word because it is true.

And now, O Lord GOD, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant. (2 Sam. 7:28)

This God—his way is perfect;
the word of the LORD proves true;
he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him. (Ps. 18:3)

Your righteousness is righteous forever,
and your law is true. (Ps. 119:142)

But you are near, O LORD,
and all your commandments are true. (Ps. 119:151)

The sum of your word is truth,
and every one of your righteous rules endures forever. (Ps. 119:160)

¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. (John 17:17-19)

God's words are true. What he has revealed in the Bible is true (see Eph. 1:13; 2 Tim. 2:25). Not only are his words true, but he is true. Jesus is full of grace and truth (John 1:14) and is true (1 John 5:20). Moreover, Jesus himself is truth (John 14:6). Likewise, the Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of truth" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:6).

In contrast to God, Satan is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). He lied to Eve in the garden (Gen. 3:4; 2 Cor. 11:3) and he is trying to deceive the whole world (Rev. 12:9). All truth comes from God and all lies come from Satan.

We can even say that God is the source of logic and reason. The above statement, that all truth comes from God and all lies come from Satan, reminds me of one of the laws of logic. The law (or principle) of bivalence states that every proposition is either true or false. The statement, “ $2 + 2 = 4$,” must be true or false. The statement, “The Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776,” must be true or false.

There are three other key laws of logic. A similar one to the law of bivalence is the law of the excluded middle, which says that any factual statement and its denial cannot both be true. “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” and “ $2 + 2 \neq 4$ ” cannot both be true.

Yet another law of logic is the law of noncontradiction, which, according to Aristotle, states, “It is impossible for the same attribute at once to belong and not to belong to the same thing and in the same relation.”¹⁵ Jesus cannot be both God and not-God. (Though he can be both fully God and fully human.)

Finally, the last law is the law of identity, expressed as $A = A$. A is what it is and is nothing other than itself.¹⁶

These laws of logic seem so commonsense that we often take them for granted. Non-Christians take them for granted, too. But the question we should ask is, Why do laws of logic exist? We could ask the same question of mathematical and scientific laws. Why is our universe orderly, and what (or Who) keeps these laws in place?

In 1985, a Christian theologian, philosopher, and pastor named Greg Bahnsen debated an atheistic scientist named Gordon Stein at the University of California, Irvine. Dr. Bahnsen overmatched Dr. Stein, in part because he offered the transcendental argument for God’s existence, which Dr. Stein had never heard of. Bahnsen defined that argument in this way:

The transcendental proof for God's existence is that without him, it is impossible to prove anything. The atheist worldview is irrational and cannot consistently provide the preconditions of intelligible experience, science, logic, or morality. The atheist worldview cannot allow for laws of logic, the uniformity of nature, the ability for the mind to understand the world, and moral absolutes.¹⁷

Bahnsen means that God is necessary for there to be laws of logic, laws of science, and universal, objective morals. If there is no God, why should there be an orderly existence? If there is no God, and we have simply evolved out of nothing, why should we trust our minds to know truth? If we were the product of blind, evolutionary forces, our minds would only be suited for survival, not for exploring the truths of human existence, the world, and the universe.

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1005b.19-20, in *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Trans. Hugh Tredennick. (Medford, MA: Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1933, 1989).

¹⁶ These laws are discussed briefly in Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 46-48.

¹⁷ The recording and transcript of the debate are available at <http://bryanlopez.com/2012/01/17/the-great-debate-does-god-exist-is-atheism-valid/> (last accessed March 31, 2012).

In the same debate, Bahnsen showed that laws of logic are immaterial (nonphysical), just as the Christian God is immaterial. The implication is that if the universe consisted of only material things—if there was no immaterial, supernatural Being—then we could not account for immaterial forces and realities. If we have evolved out of impersonal matter, then how do we account for our very personhood, the things that separate us from rocks and trees, like self-consciousness, thought, rationality, and emotions?

During the debate, the two speakers cross-examined each other. Bahnsen questioned Stein first.

DR. BAHNSEN: Do you believe there are laws of logic then?

DR. STEIN: Absolutely. . . .

DR. BAHNSEN: Are they material in nature?

DR. STEIN: How can a law be material?

DR. BAHNSEN: That's a question I'm going to ask you.

DR. STEIN: I would say no.

MODERATOR: Dr. Stein, you have an opportunity to cross-examine Dr. Bahnsen.

DR. STEIN: Dr. Bahnsen, would you call God material or immaterial?

DR. BAHNSEN: Immaterial.

DR. STEIN: What is something that is immaterial?

DR. BAHNSEN: Something not extended in space.

DR. STEIN: Can you give me an example of anything other than God that's immaterial?

DR. BAHNSEN: Laws of logic.

I'm not sure how Gordon Stein walked into that situation, but he essentially proved Greg Bahnsen's point. The laws of logic are immaterial, like God, because they come from God and reflect his character.

The only reason we can think, know truth, and use logic is that all of these things come from God. If there were no God, there would be no reason why we should trust our thoughts, have access to truth, or have logic that is universal and unchanging. Rather, we would fully expect to live in a universe that was capricious, constantly changing, and disordered.

The Bible tells us that God is reason why the universe is orderly. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The "Word" is a translation of the Greek word *logos*. This word could mean many things. To Stoic philosophers, this word meant reason, "the impersonal principle governing the universe."¹⁸ It could also refer to wisdom, or to the words spoken by God. (We must remember that God spoke creation into existence—"By the word of the LORD the heavens were made" [Ps. 33:6a]). According to Vern Poythress, "John responds to the speculations of his time with a striking

¹⁸ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 26.

revelation: that the Word (*logos*) that created and sustains the universe is not only a divine person ‘with God,’ but the very One who became incarnate: ‘the Word became flesh’ (1:14).”¹⁹

The author of Hebrews expresses this thought when he writes,

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. (Heb. 1:1-3a).

God the Father created the universe through Jesus, who sustains the universe through his powerful word. The reason the universe continues to be orderly is because of God. In a proper sense, each moment of our life is a supernatural event, governed by the power of God. Because God is an intelligent person (which is not to say a created being or a human, but One who is personal), we are intelligent people.

John Frame presents this argument in his book on apologetics. He writes, “Granted that the universe contains both persons (like you and me) and impersonal structures (like matter, motion, chance, time, space, and physical laws), which is fundamental?” He then adds, “If the impersonal is primary, then there is no consciousness, no wisdom, and no will in the ultimate origin of things. What we call reason and value are the unintended, accidental consequences of chance events.”²⁰ However, we do have personal traits. We are not robots, the sum of all our material parts.

Frame then considers life created by a personal being. “But if the personal is primary, then the world as made according to a rational plan that can be understood by rational minds. . . . If personality is absolute, there is one who cares about what we do, who approves or disapproves our conduct.”²¹ An absolute Creator—One who is immaterial but capable of making material things, One who is personal, who is all powerful—best accounts for everything we see and experience. If that is so, then why don’t all people see it? “When scientists seek the causes of things, they almost always assume that the personal elements in the universe can be explained by the impersonal (matter, laws, motion), rather than the other way around. . . . Is it not initially at least equally plausible that impersonal matter, motion, and force can be explained by the decisions of a person?”²² After all, we have seen people make impersonal things (like computers), but we’ve never seen an impersonal thing (like a rock) make a person.

Why do so many scientists and other normally rational people not see the error in their logic?

“The only even remotely plausible explanation of this situation is that given in the Bible: that though God’s existence is clearly revealed to all (Rom. 1:18-20), rebellious mankind seeks to suppress that revelation and thus to operate

¹⁹ Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Science* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 21-22.

²⁰ John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 35.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

²² *Ibid.*, 39.

on the assumption that the God of Scripture does not exist. Is this not the most likely reason for the almost universal, but irrational, preference for impersonalism over personalism?”²³

Unbelievers suppress the truth about God

Everyone knows there is a God. Deep down, in some part of our minds, we are aware of God’s existence. We all see evidence that points to him. Like laws of logic and an innate sense of right and wrong, our very existence, along with all of creation, points us toward God.

In Romans 1:18-23, Paul writes,

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Because people are unrighteous by their very nature, they suppress the truth about God. Yet God has revealed some of his attributes, like his eternal power and divine nature, plainly to everyone. This means that everyone knows God in a general way. Simply by living in this world, everyone knows something about his eternal power and divine nature. Theologians call this natural revelation: God has revealed himself in nature. Everyone knows him. Therefore, everyone has no excuse for their sin, their suppression of truth and their idolatry.

According to this passage, when people suppress the truth about God, they become “futile in their thinking” and their foolish hearts become darkened. Suppressing the truth is always a foolish thing to do. Denying God cuts one off from the root of truth. That is why David writes, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Pss. 14:1; 53:1).

The problem of why normally intelligent and reasonable people do not know God does not have an academic solution. It can’t be solved merely through education. The problem is not an intellectual one; rather, it is a moral one. People suppress the truth of God because they don’t want there to be a God. As Tim Chester and Steve Timmis put it, “The problem is not that we *cannot* know God. The problem is that we *will* not know God. It is a problem of the heart rather than the head.”²⁴

However, the problem of the heart leads to a problem of the head. Unrighteousness leads to the suppression of the truth, which leads to futile thinking. Ephesians 4:17-18 says, “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of

²³ Ibid., 40.

²⁴ Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 167.

their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.” Hard hearts lead people to dismiss the truth of God (thus producing ignorance) and to think in ultimately unproductive ways. That is why normally brilliant physicists, when confronted with evidence that the universe had a definite beginning, which suggests creation, start making up fantastic ideas that sound more like fairy tales than science. Even when some brilliant atheists realize the universe had a definite beginning, they make inane claims. The Oxford-educated atheistic philosopher and cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett writes, “What does need its origin explained is the concrete Universe itself. . . . It . . . does perform a version of the ultimate bootstrapping trick; it creates itself *ex nihilo* [out of nothing]. Or at any rate out of something that is well-nigh indistinguishable from nothing at all.”²⁵

Amazingly, sometimes unbelievers admit that they are led to certain conclusions by their hearts or their commitments to immorality. Nietzsche clues us in on this tendency when he writes, “To explain how a philosopher’s most remote metaphysical assertions have actually been arrived at, it is always well (and wise) to ask oneself first: what morality does his (does *he*) aim at?”²⁶ In other words, the philosopher’s desired morality (or immorality) explains their philosophy. They try to justify their desires with their philosophical beliefs.

Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), author of *Brave New World*, gives us a clearer example. In a 1937 essay, he writes,

I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; and consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. . . . For myself, as, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation . . . from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom; we objected to the political and economic system because it was unjust. The supporters of these systems claimed that in some way they embodied the meaning (a Christian meaning, they insisted) of the world. There was one admirably simple method of confuting these people and at the same time justifying ourselves to our political and erotic revolt: we could deny that the world had any meaning whatsoever.”²⁷

Huxley and his contemporaries wanted sexual freedom, so they denied a system of morality based on Christianity. To defend their stance, they denied that the world had any meaning. It might not surprise you to know that Huxley took LSD over the last few years of his life and encouraged others to do the same.

²⁵ Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking, 2006), 244. Quoted in William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 151.

²⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. Quoted in Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 166.

²⁷ Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1937), 272-73. Quoted in Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 166.

One more example shall suffice. The contemporary philosopher Thomas Nagel goes a step further: he admits that he doesn't want there to be a God.

I am talking about something much deeper—namely the fear of religion itself. I speak from experience, being strongly subject to this fear myself: I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that.²⁸

Nagel supposes he is not alone. He ponders, "I am curious whether there is anyone who is genuinely indifferent as to whether there is a God—anyone who, whatever his actual belief about the matter, doesn't particularly want either one of the answers to be correct."²⁹ (Some atheists believe that the Christian belief is "wish fulfillment." We can just as easily assert that atheism is "wish fulfillment," too.)

In all of these statements, we see a truth that Jesus articulated well. "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed" (John 3:19-20). With this passage in mind, William Lane Craig writes, "No one in the final analysis really fails to become a Christian because of lack of arguments; he fails to become a Christian because he loves darkness rather than light and wants nothing to do with God."³⁰

Christians need to defend the truth

Scripture warns us about people who are "always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of truth" (2 Tim. 3:7). We are told that these are people who "oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified in the faith" (2 Tim. 3:8). Though people like this surround us, we need to defend the truth. In particular, we need to defend truth about God. True words about God help sanctify us, bring others to Christ, and ultimately glorify God. We must remember that all truth comes from God. Christians should therefore be people who speak truth, who bear no false witness. (Sometimes, this means that Christians must admit what they don't know. We need to speak truthfully about all things, not just the things of the Bible. Better to say, "I don't know," than to speak false things about history, science, politics, or anything else.)

Satan intends to deceive the world by telling lies. Since human beings, in their fallen state, suppress the truth, they are glad to listen to him. Paul warns Timothy, "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). What must Timothy do? "Preach the

²⁸ Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 130. Quoted in Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 143.

²⁹ Nagel, *The Last Word*, 130. Quoted in Keller, *The Reason for God*, 123.

³⁰ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 47.

word” (2 Tim. 4:2). We, too, must be committed to the truth of the Bible, the word of God. We must defend the gospel (Phil. 1:7, 16), contend for the faith (Jude 3), make a defense and give an answer for the reason for the hope within us (1 Pet. 3:15), and destroy arguments raised against the knowledge of God (2 Cor. 10:5). This means that we will often have to point out how unbelievers do not have a proper basis for their “truth” claims. We must point out how their philosophies refute themselves. When we show them their claims are not grounded in truth, we are exposing the fact that rebellion against God is not an intellectual issue. The problem is not that Christianity is not logical, reasonable, or based on fact. The problem is they don’t want to believe in Jesus and let him be Lord over their lives. “The role of rational apologetics is to demonstrate that unbelief is a problem of the heart rather than a problem of the head. . . . It is to strip away the excuses and expose rebellious hearts.”³¹

Of course, we must also present biblical truth to people. We must insist that we can know the truth about God, because he has revealed it to us. We must never forget that the goal of apologetics is similar to the goal of evangelism: leading people to the truth of the gospel with the hope that they will believe and so be saved, for their good and God’s glory. We must remember that God “desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4).

³¹ Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 172.