

Adult Sunday School Class: A Christian Philosophy of Learning
Applications to Apologetics
28 April 2002
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*(Note: These notes are a lightly edited version of the notes that I used in teaching the class. The form is based on the style used by [Winston Churchill](#) for his speech notes.
Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, copyright by The Lockman Foundation.)*

[Title slide up at the beginning]

Dear Father,
Please grant us the grace this morning
to honor You in everything that we say and do.
In Jesus name I ask this,
Amen.

Today is the seventh meeting of
"A Christian Philosophy of Learning."

We start this week discussing
specific application areas;
today's topic will be apologetics.

As we look at the various application areas
in the next 5 weeks,
I'll be trying to do two things:

(1) Give you some helps for learning
about the particular area that is the subject for the class,

and

(2) Give you some general helps
that will apply across multiple
application areas.

The emphasis will be
on how to learn
in each area,
and not so much on teaching specific material
in the area;
although there will be some of that, too.

There's simply not enough time
to cover much specific information.

Before we start looking at apologetics this morning,
let's quickly review what we've talked about
in previous six classes.

[Next slide]

We're trying to develop
"A biblically-sound
comprehensive way of thinking about
acquiring and applying truth."

Specific elements of this philosophy of learning,
we're calling valuable verities.

We've discussed nine of these verities so far.

First, **A wise person
will continually seek
to acquire and apply truth
for the glory of God.
An unwise person will not.**

Second, **Truth
consists of all the propositions
that God affirms.**

Third, **A truth is still a truth,
even if you do not believe it is true,
or if you do not know whether it is true,
or if God has not chosen to reveal that it is true.**

Fourth,
**The starting point
for acquiring and applying truth is regeneration.**

Fifth, **No person
ever reaches a point
where he should stop acquiring and applying truth.**

[Next slide]

Last week,
we added 4 more verities.

Our sixth verity was,
in shorthand,
the Bible is the Word of God,
that is:

**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,
and is profitable for doctrine,
for reproof,
for correction,
for instruction in righteousness,
that the man of God may be complete,
thoroughly equipped for every good work,
which comes from 2 Timothy 3:16-17**

Verity number 7 was

**God does not need to reason
from known truth to new truth,
because He knows everything all at once.**

However,

as we saw in verity number 8:

**Humans must reason
from known truth to new truth,
because we do not know everything all at once.**

Our last verity from last week

summarized our discussion about types of reasoning:

Human reasoning

may be divided into two main types:

deductive reasoning,

which is evaluated as to validity and soundness;

and

inductive reasoning,

which is evaluated as to strength,

burden of proof,

and standards of proof.

That's it for our review.

Are there any quick questions

before we start talking about apologetics?

In case there are some of you here

who don't know what I mean by the word 'apologetics',
let's discuss it a bit.

[Next slide]

In simple terms,
'apologetics'

is a word commonly applied
to defending the truth of Christianity.

1 Peter 3:15 is generally considered

to be the main passage that commands
believers to engage in apologetics.

Here's what this passage says in the New King James:

**But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts,
and always be ready
to give a defense
to everyone who asks you
a reason for the hope that is in you,
with meekness and fear.**

The NASB is similar:

**but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts,
always being ready**

to make a defense
to everyone who asks you
to give an account
for the hope that is in you,
yet with gentleness and reverence;

The Greek word translated as *defense*
is *apologia*,
which is the origin of our English word *apologetics*.

Over the years,
several different approaches
to apologetics have been developed.

Sadly,
quarrels among proponents
of different approaches are common.

Far too often
some of these quarrels
resemble nothing so much
as political mudslinging campaigns.

Of course,
it ought not be this way,
but it often has been.

By God's grace,
my hope is that our discussion this morning
will be free of both quarrels
and mudslinging.

Are there any questions or comments,
before we move on to your homework?

[Next slide]

Your homework for this week was this:
for the apologetic methods you know,
think about these two questions:

One, what are some of the similarities
among the methods?

Two, if you had to come up with
one phrase or sentence
to summarize the major difference
among the methods,
what would it be?

Now,
I didn't just pick these questions randomly.

These questions provide an opportunity

to give a hint about a good, general
approach to learning about any area.

[advance slide]

Comparing and contrasting
is a general method to use
when studying any area
in which there exist
two or more theories
that claim to be different.

That is,
if you're studying some new area,
you might want to consider starting your study
By looking at the existing theories
(I'm using that word as a generic word
for approaches, ideas,
or whatever you want to call it —
more formally,
we should call them
sets of accepted propositions)
in this area,
and trying to determine
what's similar among these,
and what's fundamentally different.

In doing this,
there's something important
to keep in mind,
which we'll make our 10th
valuable verity.

[Next slide]

Valuable Verity (V^2_{10})

**Proponents of a particular theory
rarely give accurate descriptions
of opposing theories,
no matter how hard
they try to be accurate.**

This has a pretty clear application:
if you're interested in learning as much as possible
about what particular theories say
in some area,
you should study material from the proponents
of each theory,
and not rely on what is said
by proponents of your favorite theory.

Proverbs 18:17 speaks to this:

The first to plead his case seems just,

Until another comes and examines him.

Are there any questions or comments
so far?

Let's return to the homework.

[Next slide]

Before I ask for some of you
to tell us your answers to these questions,
I'll ask some other questions,
which simply require raising your hand.

How many of you know
at least one apologetic method?

How many of you know
at least two methods?

four or more methods?

That's interesting.

[Next slide]

Let's talk first about similarities among the methods.

First, of course,
for an apologetic method to have any claim
to legitimacy
it must acknowledge that
the Bible is the Word of God.

What do you think are some other similarities?

[advance slide]

Here are some Scripture passages that might help
us think about this clearly.

Let's look at Romans 1:16-21.

(Rom 1:16-21) For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. {17} For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." {18} For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, {19} because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. {20} For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. {21} 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.

What does this passage
and others that are similar
tell us relative to apologetic methods?

I think there are at least two things.

[advance slide]

At some level,
everyone knows that God exists.

Clearly, not everyone admits to this knowledge,
and in fact not everyone is even aware
that they have this knowledge.

Some people may even claim
that they'd like to believe that a God exists,
but they just can't without better evidence.

This claim isn't true, however,
as Romans 1 makes clear.

[advance slide]

Unbelief is a moral problem,
not an intellectual one.

There's one more proposition
that is also affirmed by all the methods.

[advance slide]

It comes from
Ephesians 2:8-9 and many other passages,
which tell us that

[advance slide]

Apologetic method does not save,
God does.

(Eph 2:8-9) For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; {9} not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

Not only can we not save ourselves,
we can't save anyone else either —
So an apologetic method,
no matter how good it may be,
doesn't save anyone.

All legitimate apologetic methods affirm this.

I'll summarize two of these critical similarities
in our tenth valuable verity.

[Next slide]

Valuable Verity (V^2_{11})

**All legitimate apologetic methods
affirm these two propositions:**

**(1) Unbelief in the Gospel
stems from sin,
not
from intellectual problems
with the message;**

**(2) Only God,
by his grace,
saves anyone.**

Of course,
there are more than just these two similarities,
but these are two of the most important ones.

Are there any questions
or comments
about this,
before we move on to differences?

[Next slide]

The second question you were to consider for homework was this:

If you had to come up with
one phrase or sentence
to summarize
the major difference among the methods,
what would it be?

I told you that I had a three word phrase.

Does anyone want to tell us
what sentence or phrase you came up with?

Before I tell you my answer —
answers, actually —
I'll give a very brief
description
of five currently used methods
for defending the truth
of the Christian faith.

There are more than five methods,
but we're only going to consider five.

One that we're not going to consider in any detail
is Pascal's Wager,

which I mentioned last week.

The basic idea, which is attributed to
the mathematician Blaise Pascal,
is that one should choose to believe the Gospel
because the consequence of being wrong
in that belief,
are far less severe
than the consequence of being wrong
in unbelief.

That's not so much an apologetic method
as it is a decision making procedure
applied (rather badly) to
belief in the Gospel.

Each of the five methods
we'll discuss have common names,
and 4 of them have some fairly well known
major proponents,
but I'll not use those quite yet
in this discussion,
instead we'll just give them letters.

Those of you who are familiar
with the methods will recognize them,
I think,
but please don't identify them,
until I say it is OK.

[Next slide]

We'll call these five methods, the
E,
J,
R,
C,
and
G methods.

For each of these,
I'll give you a
really
simplified description.

My intent is that this description
will be accurate as far as it goes,
but it will be necessarily incomplete.

Let's begin with the E method.

If I'm using this method
then I'll say that you should believe
Christianity is true because ...

[Next slide]

... It has worked wonders in my life.

That is,
the emphasis is on how
believing the gospel
has changed my life.

I'll suggest to you
that you should believe
the gospel just as I have,
so that you can have the same
wonderful things in your life
that I've had in mine.

That's the E method.

If I'm using the J method,

[Next slide]

then I'll say that you should believe Christianity is true because
the historical record
confirms much of what the Bible says. ...

That is,
the emphasis is on applying similar standards
to the Bible that are applied to other old documents,
and on how,
according to those standards,
what the Bible says is credible,
including what it says about Jesus,
and thus it ought to be believed.

That's the J method.

The R method is similar,
but includes a bit more.

If I'm using the R method,

[Next slide]

then I'll say that you should believe Christianity is true because
there exist valid deductive arguments
for the existence of God,
and the historical record
strongly suggests that
this God has revealed Himself in the Bible. ...

The emphasize is on first establishing
the existence of a God,
and then using the historical record

to suggest that this generic God
is, in truth,
the God of the Bible.

That's the R method.

The fourth method I'll mention this morning,
I've called the C method.

[Next slide]

If I'm using the C method,
I'll say that you should believe Christianity is true because
Assuming Christianity is true
is necessary for proving anything at all.

That is,
only someone who believes that Christianity is true
has any basis from which to believe
that anything is true.

That's the C method.

We have only one more to go,
which I've labeled the G method.

[Next slide]

If I'm using the G method,
I'll say you should believe
that Christianity is true because
the Bible says it is true,
and we can show
by valid deductive argument
that no other belief system
can be true.

That is,
although we can not demonstrate
by deductive argument that Christianity is true,
we can show that none of the proposed
alternatives to it can be true.

As I said earlier,
these very quick descriptions
are quite incomplete,
but I think they are accurate as far as they go.

Let's put these descriptions together on one slide:

[Next slide]

E: Christianity has worked wonders in my life. ...

J: The historical record confirms much of what the Bible says. ...

R: There exist valid deductive arguments for the existence of God, and the historical record strongly suggests that this God has revealed Himself in the Bible. ...

C: Assuming Christianity is true is necessary for proving anything at all. ...

G: The Bible says it is true, and we can show by valid deductive argument that no other belief system can be true. ...

I've included the ...'s to emphasize
that this is just a very simple,
and very incomplete synopsis.

Are there any questions or comments at this point?

I mentioned earlier
that there have been
quite a few quarrels
among proponents of the various methods.

It is almost accurate to say
that at one time or another
proponents of each one of these 5 methods
has claimed that the proponents of the other methods
are intellectually deficient,
or not true to the Bible,
or even,
in a few extreme cases,
likely not among the regenerate.

If we asked these people
to do the second part of the homework,

[Next slide]

they would be likely to say something like,
for example,
"That's easy,
method R is the right one,
and all the others are nonsense,
which can't in any way be
considered to be obeying 1 Peter 3:15."

I don't think that's a right answer,
however.

What did you all come up with
to answer this question?

Allow some discussion and then proceed ...

There are many different ways to answer this question.

I think there are at least
two useful three word answers:

[Next slide]

The first one is
standards of proof.

Remember that last week
we talked about
different levels of standards of proof,
with five main ones,
and a bunch of lesser ones.

These five methods tend to employ
different standards of proof.

For example,
the J and R methods
accept historical evidence,
which at best reaches to the level 3 standard,
which is something on the order of
“very likely.”

In contrast, the
G method purports to employ
the highest standard —
essentially, beyond all doubt —
in showing that other belief systems can not be true.

We don't have time this morning
to go into this into any more detail,
but I'll be happy to discuss it privately with
anyone who is interested

[Next slide]

A second answer to the question is
necessary assumed propositions.

Each of the five methods we've discussed
has a different set of
propositions that must be assumed
by those who use the method,
for the method to make any sense.

Take for example, the E method.

What are some propositions that must be true,
before using this method makes any sense?

My experiences are real.

What happens in my life can happen in your life.

I have an accurate memory of what has happened in my life.

Others

If you think about the necessary assumed propositions
for each of the other 4 methods,
I think you'll see that the sets are different.

Any quick questions or comments
about these differences?

[Next slide]

I'll close our discussion about apologetics
by making a few suggestions,
which you're welcome to do with what you will.

First,
don't use an apologetic method
that you do not understand.

Some of the most awful
attempts at defending the faith
that I've ever seen have come when
someone is using a method —
like the C method, for example —
that they really don't understand.

Second,
don't use an apologetic method
that your listener cannot understand.

It does no good
to delve into deep philosophical issues
if the person you're talking to
doesn't understand such issues.

And third,
For 1 Peter 3:15,
remember the beginning
("sanctify the Lord God"),
and the ending
("with meekness and fear"),
not just the middle part
("always be ready to give a defense
to anyone who asks").

Too often,
I'm afraid,
we forget these things,
and end up offending people,
not with the message —

which they never hear —
but with our arrogant attitude,
which may drown out all of our words.

Are there any questions
before I give you the week's work for next class?

[Next slide]

Next week, we'll talk about applications to science.

Here's your's week's work.

W₇²: Think about these questions:

- a. What is science?
- b. To what extent is science concerned with truth?
- c. Are there currently some subjects studied by scientists that would not be studied if all scientists had a Christian philosophy of learning?

Also, Quote ID challenge #2 continues.

We want to know who said,
"If a picture is worth a thousand words,
then why did God give us His Word,
instead of His drawings?"

The number of wrong guesses
is up to three.

That's all for this morning. Thanks.