

DR. GREG L. BAHNSEN

*Always
Ready*

**DIRECTIONS FOR
DEFENDING THE FAITH**

*By Greg L. Bahnsen, Ph.D.
1948-1995*

edited by Robert R. Booth



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EDITOR'S PREFACE

The Apostle Peter instructs believers that they should be “always ready to give a defense [*apologia*] to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). Dr. Greg Bahnsen was not only “always ready” to make such a defense, he was always ready to teach others how to prepare themselves for this essential work. It pleased God, in the mystery of His providence, to raise up this doubly-gifted man for the benefit of His people in this generation. That same mysterious Providence that gave us Dr. Bahnsen also called him home at the early age of 47—he went to be with his Lord on December 11, 1995. Dr. Bahnsen left in his wake a legacy of apologetic evangelism. Not only was he one of the leading apologists and debaters of this century,¹ taking on prominent atheistic champions, he was also devoted to seeing Christians at all levels equipped and competent to defend the faith themselves.

The defense of the Christian faith [apologetics] is the responsibility of every Christian. This was the heart-felt conviction of Dr. Bahnsen, who devoted much of his ministry to the training of men and women for this important task. He was eminently qualified to offer such training and instruction. First, Dr. Bahnsen was a man who loved and was committed to his Lord Jesus Christ—he was called by God to this task. He received a B.A. (*magna cum laude*, philosophy) from Westmont College, and then simultaneously earned the M.Div. and Th.M. degrees from Westminster Theological Seminary, specializing in systematic theology and ethics. From there he went on to the University of Southern California where he received his Ph.D. in philosophy, specializing

¹ This is a point conceded even by many of Dr. Bahnsen's theological opponents. Few, if any, were his equal when it came to intellectual acuity and debating skills. A prime example of his apologetic skills is witnessed in his famous debate at the University of California, Irvine, in 1985, with atheist promoter, Dr. Gordon Stein.

in the field of epistemology (the theory of knowledge). His dissertation was on the subject of self-deception, making a significant contribution to this important apologetic issue. While a student at seminary, he was called upon by the renowned apologist, Dr. Cornelius Van Til, to lecture for him in his apologetics course. Dr. Bahnsen has done much toward explaining, applying and even popularizing the work of Dr. Van Til's distinctive presuppositional apologetic.²

This volume is a compilation of materials produced by Dr. Bahnsen over several years and is intended to introduce students to important foundational concepts essential to biblical apologetics. The first section, previously published as a syllabus, provides a step-by-step explanation of key issues in Christian apologetics and establishes the biblical support for the presuppositional method. The second section of this volume offers further practical advice on how to approach an apologetic situation and provides specific answers to particular apologetic questions such as "the problem of evil." The book concludes with an appendix giving a detailed exposition of the Apostle Paul's defense of the faith as he delivered it at the Areopagus in Athens, as recorded in Acts 17.

Every believer can profit from this material. It may prove especially useful as a textbook for school and church classes. As we become better equipped to defend the faith we find greater confidence and boldness to carry the message of the gospel to every dark place. No challenge shall intimidate the believer as he gently and respectfully closes the mouth of unbelief. May God bless you in your preparation to be "always ready."

Your fellow servant,
Randy Booth
Director of Covenant Media Foundation

²"Presuppositional apologetics" is a distinct school of apologetic method, standing over against the "classical" (Thomistic) and fideistic methods. This book is an explanation and application of the presuppositional apologetic method.

SECTION ONE:

**THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST
IN THE REALM OF KNOWLEDGE**

CHAPTER 1:

THE ROBBERY OF NEUTRALITY

The plea for Christians to surrender to neutrality in their thinking is not a uncommon one. Nevertheless it strikes at the very heart of our faith and of our faithfulness to the Lord.

Sometimes the demand to assume a neutral stance, a non-committal attitude toward the truthfulness of Scripture, is heard in the area of Christian scholarship (whether it be the field of history, science, literature, philosophy, or whatever). Teachers, researchers, and writers are often led to think that honesty demands for them to put aside all distinctly Christian commitments when they study in an area which is not directly related to matters of Sunday worship. They reason that since truth is truth wherever it may be found, one should be able to search for truth under the guidance of the acclaimed thinkers in the field, even if they are secular in their outlook. "Is it really necessary to hold to the teachings of the Bible if you are to understand properly the War of 1812, the chemical composition of water, the plays of Shakespeare, or the rules of logic?" Such is the rhetorical question of those who are disposed to insist on neutrality from Christians working in scholarly areas.

Sometimes the demand for neutrality arises in the realm of apologetics (defense of the faith). We are told by some apologists that they would lose all hearing with the unbelieving world if they were to approach the question of

Scripture's truthfulness with a preconceived answer to the question. We must be willing, according to this outlook, to approach the debate with unbelievers with a common attitude of neutrality—a "nobody knows as yet" attitude. We must assume as little as possible at the outset, we are told; and this means that we cannot assume any Christian premises or teachings of the Bible.

Other times the plea for neutrality in the thinking of the believer comes with reference to schools. Some Christians feel that there is no real urgency for Christian schools, that secular education is all right as far as it goes, and that it needs only to be supplemented with Christian prayer and Bible reading in the home. Thus the idea is that one can be neutral when it comes to education; one's Christian faith need not dictate any particular assumptions or way of learning about the world and man. We are told that the facts are the same at state schools as they are at Christian schools; so why insist that your children be taught by committed believers in Jesus Christ?

Well then, in these and many other ways we can see that the Christian is called upon to surrender his distinctive religious beliefs to temporarily "put them on the shelf," to take a neutral attitude in his thinking. Satan would love this to happen. More than anything else, this would prevent the conquest of the world to belief in Jesus Christ as Lord. More than anything else, this would make professing Christians impotent in their witness, aimless in their walk, and disarmed in their battle with the principalities and powers of this world. More than anything else, such neutrality would prevent sanctification in the Christian's life, for Christ said that His followers were "sanctified (set apart) by the truth." Immediately He went on to declare, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17).

Whatever some people may say with respect to the demand for neutrality in the Christian's thought—the demand that believers not be set apart from other men by their adherence to God's truth—the fact is that Scripture sharply differs with this demand. Contrary to neutrality's demand, God's word demands unreserved allegiance to God and His truth in all our thought and scholarly endeavors. It does so for a good reason.

Paul infallibly declares in Colossians 2:3-8 that "All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in Christ." Note he says *all* wisdom and knowledge is deposited in the person of Christ—whether it be about the War of

1812, water's chemical composition, the literature of Shakespeare, or the laws of logic! Every academic pursuit and every thought must be related to Jesus Christ, for Jesus is the way, *the truth*, and the life. (John 14:6) To avoid Christ in your thought at any point, then, is to be misled, untruthful, and spiritually dead. To put aside your Christian commitments when it comes to defending the faith or sending your children to school is willfully to steer away from the *only* path to wisdom and truth found *in Christ*. It is not the end or outcome of knowledge to fear the Lord; it is the *beginning* of knowledge to reverence Him (Prov. 1:7; 9:10).

Paul declares that all knowledge must be related to Christ, then, according to Colossians 2. He says this for our protection; it is very dangerous to fail to see the necessity of Christ in all our thinking. So Paul draws to our attention the impossibility of neutrality "in order that no one delude you with crafty speech." Instead we must, as Paul exhorts, be steadfast, confirmed, rooted, and established in the faith as we were taught (v. 7). One must be presuppositionally committed to Christ in the world of thought (rather than neutral) and firmly tied down to the faith which he has been taught, or else the persuasive argumentation of secular thought will delude him. Hence the Christian is obligated to presuppose the word of Christ in every area of knowledge; the alternative is delusion.

In verse 8 of Colossians 2 Paul says "Beware lest any man rob you by means of philosophy and vain deceit." By attempting to be neutral in your thought you are a prime target for being *robbed*—robbed by "vain philosophy" of all the treasures of "wisdom and knowledge" which are deposited in Christ alone (cf. v. 3). Paul explains that vain philosophy is that which follows the world and not Christ; it is thinking which submits to the world's demand for neutrality rather than being presuppositionally committed to Christ in all of our thinking.

Are you *rich* in knowledge because of your commitment to Christ in, scholarship, apologetics, and schooling, or have you been *robbed* by the demands of neutrality?

CHAPTER 2:

THE IMMORALITY OF NEUTRALITY

All the *treasures* of wisdom and knowledge are to be found in Christ; thus if one were to try and arrive at the truth apart from commitment to the epistemic authority of Jesus Christ he would be *robbed* through vain philosophy and deluded by crafty deceit (see Col. 2:3-8). Consequently, when the Christian approaches scholarship, apologetics, or schooling he must staunchly refuse to acquiesce to the mistaken demands of neutrality in his intellectual life; he must never consent to surrender his distinctive religious beliefs “for the time being,” as though one might thereby arrive at genuine knowledge “impartially.” The *beginning* of knowledge is the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7).

Attempting to be neutral in one’s intellectual endeavors (whether research, argumentation, reasoning, or teaching) is tantamount to striving to erase the antithesis between the Christian and the unbeliever. Christ declared that the former was set apart from the latter by the truth of God’s word (John 17:17). Those who wish to gain dignity in the eyes of the world’s intellectuals by wearing the badge of “neutrality” only do so at the expense of refusing to be *set apart* by God’s truth. In the intellectual realm they are absorbed into the world so that no one could tell the difference between their thinking and assumptions and apostate thinking and assumptions. The line between believer and unbeliever is obscured.

Such *indiscrimination* in one's intellectual life not only precludes genuine knowledge (cf. Prov. 1:7) and guarantees vain delusion (cf. Col. 2:3-8), it is downright *immoral*.

In Ephesians 4:17-18, Paul commands the followers of Christ that they "no longer walk as the Gentiles also walk, in the vanity of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance in them, because of the hardening of their heart." Christian believers must not walk, must not behave or live, in a way which imitates the behavior of those who are unredeemed; specifically, Paul forbids the Christian from imitating the unbeliever's *vanity of mind*. Christians must refuse to think or reason according to a worldly mind-set or outlook. The culpable agnosticism of the world's intellectuals must not be reproduced in Christians as alleged neutrality; this outlook, this approach to truth, this intellectual method evidences a darkened understanding and hardened heart. It refuses to bow to the Lordship of Jesus Christ over every area of life, including scholarship and the world of thought.

One has to make this basic choice in his thinking: to be set apart by God's truth *or* to be alienated from the life of God. It cannot be two ways. One shall be set apart, set against, or alienated from either the world or from the word of God. He will stand in *contrast* to that intellectual method which he refuses to follow. He either refuses to follow God's word or he refuses to follow the vain mind-set of the Gentiles. He distinguishes himself and his thinking either by contrast to the world or by contrast to God's word. The contrast, the antithesis, the choice is clear: either be set apart by God's truthful word or be alienated from the life of God. Either have "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16) or the "vain mind of the Gentiles" (Eph. 4:17). Either "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5) or continue as "enemies in your mind" (Col. 1:21).

Those who follow the intellectual principle of neutrality and the epistemological method of unbelieving scholarship do not honor the sovereign Lordship of God as they should; as a result their reasoning is made vain (Rom. 1:21). In Ephesians 4, as we have seen, Paul prohibits the Christian from following this vain mind-set. Paul goes on to teach that the believer's thinking is diametrically contrary to the ignorant and darkened thinking of the Gentiles.