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Ready
Always

DIRECTIONS FOR
DEFENDING THE FAITH

By Greg L. Bahnsen, Ph.D.

1948-1995

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Dedication

In loving memory of Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen

[September 17, 1948 — December 11, 1995]

Who was “always ready” to defend the faith,

and always ready to meet his Lord.

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 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

[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.

[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

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?

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 mindset. Paul goes on to teach that the believer's thinking is diametrically contrary to the ignorant and darkened thinking of the Gentiles. "But you did not learn Christ after this manner!" (verse 20). While the Gentiles are ignorant, "the truth is in Jesus" (verse 21). Unlike the Gentiles who are alienated from the life of God, the Christian has put away the old man and has been "renewed in the spirit of your mind" (verses 22-23). This "*new man*" is distinctive in virtue of the "holiness of truth" (verse 24). The Christian is completely different from the world when it comes to intellect and scholarship; he does not follow the neutral methods of unbelief, but by God's grace he has new commitments, new presuppositions, in his thinking.

Therefore, the Christian who strives after neutrality in his thought is found actually to be endeavoring to efface the fact that he is a Christian! By denying his distinctive religious commitment he is reduced to apostate thought patterns and absorbed into the world of unbelief. Attempting to find a compromise between the demands of worldly neutrality (agnosticism) and the doctrines of Christ's word results in the rejection of Christ's distinctive Lordship by obliterating the great gulf between the thinking of the old man and that of the new man.

No such compromise is even possible. "*No man is able to serve two lords*" (Matt. 6:24). It should come as no surprise that, in a world where all things have been created by Christ (Col. 1:16) and are carried along by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3) and where all

knowledge is therefore deposited in Him who is The Truth (Col. 2:3; John 14:6) and who must be Lord over all thinking (2 Cor. 10:5), *neutrality is nothing short of immorality*. “Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4).

Do you have the courage of your Christian *distinctives* in scholarship, apologetics, and schooling, or have you been trying to wipe out the contrast between Christian thought and apostate thought by following the demands of neutrality? Put in biblical perspective this question can be rephrased in this way: does your thinking operate under the Lordship of Jesus Christ or have you become an enemy of God through neutral, agnostic, unbelieving thought patterns? Choose this day whom you will serve!

3: The Nature Of Unbelieving Thought

In Parts I and II of the present study a discussion of the demand for neutrality in our scholarly, apologetical, or educational endeavors has shown it to lead to unfortunate results. It robs one of all the treasures of knowledge that there are. Secondly, taking a neutral approach to knowledge has been demonstrated to be immoral in character, allowing one’s Christian distinctives to be muffled and finally integrated into the rebellious ways of an unbelieving mind-set. Finally, it has been noted that in reality it is impossible for the genuine Christian to be neutral in his intellectual life, for such neutrality in a Christian would call for a dual commitment: one to secular agnosticism, one to saving faith (i.e., “serving two lords”).

Returning to Ephesians 4 and Colossians 2, let us ask what the true

character of neutralist thinking is. Just what kind of thinking is it that does not base itself upon the teaching of God's Son, that refrains from presupposing the doctrines of Christ?

Paul tells us in Ephesians 4 that to follow the methods dictated by the intellectual outlook of those who are outside of a saving relationship to God is to have a *vain* mind and a *darkened* understanding (vv. 17-18). Neutralist thinking, then, is characterized by intellectual futility and ignorance. In God's light we are able to see light (cf. Ps. 36:9). To turn away from intellectual dependence upon the light of God, the truth about and from God, is to turn away from knowledge to the darkness of ignorance. Thus if a Christian wishes to begin his scholarly endeavors from a position of neutrality he would, in actuality, be willing to begin his thinking in the dark. He would not allow God's word to be a light unto his path (cf. Ps. 119:105). To walk on in neutrality he would be stumbling along in *darkness*. God is certainly not honored by such thought as He should be, and consequently God makes such reasoning *vain* (Rom. 1:21b). Neutrality amounts to vanity in God's sight.

That "philosophy" which does not find its starting point and direction in Christ is further described by Paul in Colossians 2:8. It has been mistakenly thought from time to time that this passage condemns any and all philosophy, that without qualification the Christian must avoid philosophic thought like the plague. However, a careful reading of the passage will evidence that this is not so. Paul does not disapprove philosophy absolutely, for he delineates certain qualifications. It turns out that there is a particular kind of philosophic thinking that Paul scorns. Paul is not against the "love of wisdom" (i.e., "philosophy" from the Greek) per se. Philosophy is

fine as long as one properly finds genuine wisdom—which means, for Paul, finding it in Christ (Col. 2:3).

However, there is a kind of “philosophy” which does not begin with the truth of God, the teaching of Christ. Instead this philosophy takes its direction and finds its origin in the accepted principles of the world’s intellectuals—in the traditions of men. Such philosophy as this is the subject of Paul’s disapprobation in Colossians 2:8. It is instructive for us, especially if we are prone to accept the demands of neutrality in our thinking, to investigate his characterizations of that kind of philosophy.

Paul says that it is “vain deception.” What kind of thinking is it that can be characterized as “vain”? A ready answer is found by comparison and contrast in scriptural passages that speak of vanity (e.g., Deut. 32:47; Phil. 2:16; Acts 4:25; 1 Cor. 3:20; 1 Tim. 1:6; 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:15-18; Tit. 1:9-10). Vain thinking is that which is not in accord with God’s word. A similar study will demonstrate that “deceptive” thinking is thought which is in opposition to God’s word (cf. Heb. 3:12-15; Eph. 4:22; 2 Thess. 2:10-12; 2 Pet. 2:13). The “vain deception” against which Paul warns, then, is philosophy which operates apart from, and against, the truth of Christ. Note the injunction of Ephesians 5:6, “Let no man *deceive* you with *vain* words.” In Colossians 2:8 we are told to take care lest we be robbed through “vain deceit.”

Paul further characterizes this kind of philosophy as “according to the tradition of men, after the fundamental principles of the world.” That is, this philosophy sets aside God’s word and makes it void (cf. Mark 7:8-13), and it does so by beginning with the *elements of learning* dictated by the world (i.e., the precepts of men; cf. Col.

2:20, 22). The philosophy which Paul spurns is that reasoning which follows the *presuppositions* (the elementary assumptions) of the world, and thereby is “not according to Christ.”

It follows from these points that the Christian who strives for neutrality in the world of thought is (1) not neutral after all, and thus (2) in danger of unwittingly endorsing assumptions that are hostile to his Christian faith. While imagining that his intellectual neutrality is compatible with a Christian profession, such a believer is actually operating in terms of unbelief! If he refuses to presuppose the truth of Christ, he invariably ends up presupposing the outlook of the world instead. All men have their presuppositions; none is neutral. Shall your presuppositions be the teachings of Christ or the vain deception against which Paul warns? Choose this day whom ye shall serve!

4: The Mind Of The New Man Rooted In Christ

The believer is directed to avoid philosophy which is rooted in worldly, humanistic, and non-Christian presuppositions (Col. 2:8). Instead he is called to be rooted in Christ and established in the faith (v. 7); his presuppositions must be the precepts and doctrines of Christ, not the futile traditions of men (cf. vv. 3, 4, 22; 3:1-2). This precludes the claim to neutrality and prohibits seeking after it. Neutrality is in actuality veiled agnosticism or unbelief—a failure to walk in Christ, an obscuring of Christian commitment and distinctives, a suppression of the truth (cf. Rom. 1:21, 25).

Thus Paul commands us to be rooted in Christ and to shun the presuppositions of secularism. In verse 6 of Colossians 2 he explains very simply how we should go about having our lives (including our scholarly endeavors) grounded in Christ and thereby insuring that our reasoning is guided by Christian presuppositions. He says, “As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk in Him”: that is, walk in Christ in the same way that you received Him. If you do this you will be “established in your faith even as you were taught.” How then did you become a Christian? After the same fashion you should grow and mature in your Christian walk.

When one becomes a Christian his faith has not been generated by the thought patterns of worldly wisdom. The world in its wisdom knows not God (1 Cor. 1:21) but considers the word of the cross to be foolish (1 Cor. 1:18, 21b). If one keeps the perspective of the world, then, he shall never see the wisdom of God for what it really is; thereby he will never be “in Christ Jesus” who is made unto believers “wisdom from God” (1 Cor. 1:30). Hence faith, rather than self-sufficient sight, makes you a Christian, and this trust is directed toward Christ, not your own intellect. This is to say that the way you receive Christ is to turn away from the wisdom of men (the perspective of secular thought with its presuppositions) and gain, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:12-16). When one becomes a Christian his faith stands not in the wisdom of men but in the powerful demonstration of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:4-5).

Moreover, what the Holy Spirit causes all believers to say is “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor. 12:3). Jesus was crucified, resurrected, and ascended in order that He might be confessed as Lord (cf. Rom.

14:9; Phil. 2:11). Thus Paul can summarize that message which must be confessed if we are to be saved as “Jesus is Lord” (Rom. 10:9). To become a Christian one submits to the Lordship of Christ; he renounces autonomy and comes under the authority of God’s Son. The One whom Paul says we receive, according to Colossians 2:6, is Christ Jesus *the* Lord. As Lord over the believer, Christ requires that the Christian love Him with every faculty he possesses (including his mind, Matt. 22:37); every *thought* must be brought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

Consequently, when Paul directs us to walk in Christ after the same fashion in which we received Him, we can see at least this much: the Christian walk does not honor the thought patterns of worldly wisdom but submits to the epistemic Lordship of Christ (i.e. His authority in the area of thought and knowledge). In this manner a person comes to faith, and in this manner the believer must continue to live and carry out his calling—even when he is concerned with scholarship, apologetics, or schooling.

If the Christian will evidence commitment to Christ’s personal Lordship and presuppose the word of the Lord, then he will be walking in Christ after the manner in which he received Him. Hereby you will be “rooted in Him” rather than rooted in the apostate presuppositions of worldly philosophy, and we shall be able to behold “the steadfastness of your faith in Christ” (Col. 2:5). Such firm, presuppositional faith in Christ will resist the secular world’s demand for neutrality and reject the unbeliever’s standards of knowledge and truth in favor of the authority of Christ’s word. This faith will not be plundered of all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hidden in Christ, and will not be deluded by the crafty speech and vain deceit of secular philosophies (vv. 3-8).

Therefore, the unqualified precondition of genuine Christian scholarship is that the believer (along with all his thinking) be “rooted in Christ” (v. 7). Interestingly, the verb tense of the Greek for “rooted” in this verse suggests an action which has been accomplished in the past but continues in force or effect in the present—which is precisely Paul’s point in verse 6! The principles which apply to the Christian’s walk (inclusive of his thought) are the same which applied to his previous reception of Christ at conversion. The Christian scholar, having been rooted in Christ by renouncing the authority of secular wisdom for the Lordship of Christ, must carry out his scholarly endeavors by continuing to be rooted in Christ in the same fashion.

Therefore, the new man, the believer with a renewed mind that has been taught by Christ, is no more to walk in the intellectual vanity and darkness which characterizes the unbelieving world (read Eph. 4:17-24). The Christian has new commitments, new presuppositions, a new Lord, a new direction and goal—he is a *new* man. That newness is expressed in his thinking and scholarship, for (as in all other areas) *Christ* must have the *preeminence* in the world of thought (cf. Col. 1:18b). We must concur with Dr. Cornelius Van Til in saying:

It is Christ as God who speaks in the Bible. Therefore the Bible does not appeal to human reason as ultimate in order to justify what it says. It comes to the human being with absolute authority. Its claim is that human reason must itself be taken in the sense in which Scripture takes it, namely, as created by God and as therefore properly subject to the authority of God... The two systems, that of the non-Christian and that of the Christian, differ because of the fact that their basic assumptions, or presuppositions differ. On the

non-Christian basis man is assumed to be the final reference point in prediction... The Reformed method...begins frankly “from above.” It would “presuppose” God. But in presupposing God it cannot place itself at any point on a neutral basis with the non-Christian... Believers themselves have not chosen the Christian position because they were wiser than others. What they have they have by grace alone. But this fact does not mean that they must accept the problematics of fallen man as right or even as probably or possibly right. For the essence of the idea of Scripture is that it *alone* is the criterion of truth. (*A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1969, pp. 15, 18, 43.)

5: Revelation As The Foundation Of Knowledge

The new man in Christ has new presuppositions and a new Lord over his thoughts. Rather than striving for intellectual neutrality he is “rooted in Him,” walking after the manner in which he received Christ: in faith, by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, under the supreme authority of Jesus Christ—not according to the thought patterns of worldly wisdom. That is, the Christian *presupposes* the truthful word of God as his *standard* of truth and direction.

God tells us to apply our hearts unto His knowledge if we are to know the certainty of the words of truth (Prov. 22:17-21). It is characteristic of philosophers today that they either deny that there is absolute truth or they deny that one can be certain of knowing the truth; it is either not there, or it is unreachable. However, what God has written to us (i.e., Scripture) can “make you know the