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Demolition Apologetics

We said last time that one of the contributions of Romans 1-3 is how to give an apologetic. Today we want to spend some working with some apologetic implications of the text of Romans 1. How to give an apologetic; how not to give an apologetic; what to include; what to avoid. Before we get too far in, “What is an apologetic?” An apologetic is a courtroom defense. The reason Romans 1-3 contributes to giving a courtroom defense is because at the end of verse 20 the unbeliever is said to be without a courtroom defense before God. That final word in the verse is *αναπολογητος* and means “without an apologetic.” So if we can tap into why they are without an apologetic then we can strategize how to intervene before they come face to face with God and are standing their naked, exposed before Him.

There are a couple of points here we want to start off with as far as apologetics is concerned. First, we have a responsibility to be ready to give an apologetic. Peter tells us in 1 Pet 3:15 that we should always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks for a reason for the hope that is in us. So in giving a defense we’re not ramming and cramming the Christian worldview down someone’s throat. We can make comments to make people think but we’re not pushy. Basically we are living the Christian life and the way we live our life prompts someone to ask us a question and that opens the door for us to give a defense. Second, if someone is asking you a question that means God is working with them. Paul in 1 Cor 2 says that the natural man does not welcome the things of God. That means he does not have a natural receptivity to the things of God. So if someone is asking you a question that means that God the Spirit is supernaturally working with that person and they’re open. If they’re not asking a question then they’re not open. So on the most basic level you have a responsibility to be ready to give an apologetic

and if someone is asking you a question then you should recognize that God the Spirit is working with that person and you have an open door.

Now the reason we say that Paul is giving us tools for how to give an apologetic in Romans 1-3 is because he paints a portrait of three groups of the human race and their condemnation with respect to divine revelation. All men have revelation. Remember, there are two kinds of revelation; general and special. General revelation is the revelation of God that is available to all men through creation and conscience. All three groups have access to creation and conscience, that's why we call it general. Special revelation is the revelation of God that is available to a subset of men through the canon of Scripture. It's called special because it is specific revelation in human language. But having said that we don't want to make the mistake of assuming that general revelation is less clear in its witness than specific revelation. They are both perfectly clear revelations of God, they both speak, but the speech of general revelation comes in the form of patterns that humans detect whereas the speech of special revelation comes in the form of human language. As an example, I can look at a tree and make observations and conclude that it is not there by chance, it has design features and someone made it. I can do that because God made me in His image. God has thought, so I have thought and He designed my mind to be able to detect design and inevitably come to the conclusion that God designed the tree. But if God tells me that if I eat the fruit of that tree then I will surely die then I not only know God made it but the consequences of eating it. Both are perfectly clear revelations of God and render me responsible for that knowledge, but one gives more specific information. So what we're saying here is that all men have clear knowledge of God but some knowledge is attained through general revelation in creation and other knowledge is attained through special revelation in Scripture. All this knowledge tells us about God and renders us responsible to respond to Him. The problem in Romans 1-3 is that no one responds to the knowledge they have properly. Therefore they are condemned. Why is Paul showing that all men are condemned? Because it's a necessary pre-requisite to seeing the need for salvation.

The reason this is such great apologetic material for us as Christians is because it tells us things we could not know about our unbelieving friends otherwise. In other words, it's knowledge that we could not have access to

apart from special revelation. We can't see into the human psyche. So it's very important to pay careful attention to what is said here because God can see into the human psyche. And God tells us they have knowledge they are suppressing. There's no way we could know that apart from the word of God. This gives us an advantage because we can appeal to that knowledge that they think no one else knows about. Of course, when we appeal to the knowledge they can lie to us and say it is not clear, I do not know God, but they know they are lying and lying violates the conscience. So knowing these things about their psyche we can construct an apologetic that respects what God has said and can therefore be used by the Spirit of God to draw men to Christ. It's critical to understand that what we are doing is not bypassing the Holy Spirit but using the very means that the Holy Spirit in Scripture uses means to draw men to Christ.

I mentioned last time it's a two-step procedure in constructing the apologetic used by the Holy Spirit. I've drawn this from Paul's statement in Acts 20:21 where he says that when he was at Ephesus he "solemnly testified to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." If you study the book of Acts you will see this is a summary statement of how Paul did apologetics to both Jews and Greeks. Even a cursory evaluation of Paul's apologetic encounters with Jews in Acts 13 and Greeks in Acts 14 and 17 will show that he always started with repentance toward God and then moved to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, Paul did not start with Jesus, he ended with Jesus. There is one occasion where Paul started with Jesus and the resurrection and the message was not understood. The people reinterpreted Jesus and resurrection to be two new gods Paul was introducing into the Greek pantheon. Paul had allowed them to suppress the truth because he bypassed repentance toward God. He then went back to repentance toward God to remind them of the nature of God which they knew very well to provide context and then, to those who repented, he preached faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the doctrine of God is the proper context for preaching Jesus and the gospel. Now when I say there are two steps it's important to understand that I'm not saying there are two steps to salvation; repentance toward God and then faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is only one requirement for salvation and that is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. However, repentance toward God is preparatory for understanding the faith message. L. S. Chafer agrees saying, "...repentance toward God could not itself constitute, in this case, the

equivalent of “faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ,” though it may prepare for that faith.”¹ Paul very clearly shows us in his apologetic encounters to both Jews and Greeks that they needed to have a change of mind about God. They were suppressing the truth they knew about God and consequently reconstructing Him into created idols. His preaching of the true God of creation and history reminded them of what they already knew of Him but were continually suppressing in order to hide from Him with whom they have to do. Only after acknowledging Him would the individual be in a position to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and respond to their need with faith. This is not adding anything to the gospel, this is preparing someone for the gospel. Preparation is necessary because the sinful suppression of the knowledge of God causing a distorted view. Too often we jump straight to Jesus, having never prepared them for their need for Jesus by reminding them of the God they know and are sinfully suppressing. The Holy Spirit uses this reminder to convict them of the sinful suppression. If they are acknowledging their sin then the Holy Spirit is working with them and we can present the answer for their sin in the person and work of Jesus Christ and call for faith in Him. So an apologetic encounter needs to follow what is doctrinally laid out for us in Romans 1 and illustrated for us in Acts 13, 14 and 17 and summed up by Paul in Acts 20:21. All apologetic encounters I have found in Scripture confront people with God first. This begins with God and His confrontation with Adam in the Garden, it continues with God and His confrontation with Cain, it continues with God’s confrontation of Job, Elijah’s confrontation with the Baal prophets, John the Baptizer’s confrontation with the Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus’ confrontation with Nicodemus, and Stephen’s confrontation with the Sanhedrin. There is no other example in Scripture. Apologetics always starts with a biblical presentation of God. That is what gets people in a position to be convicted of their sinful suppression of Him which is necessary so they see a need for the cross work of Jesus Christ!

Now the first group we are looking at Paul called barbarians and foolish in verse 14 and he begins discussing them in verse 18, we called them pagan Gentiles. We’ll deal with cultured Gentiles and Jews later. There the arguments will surround morals, ethics and revelation. But here with pagan Gentiles the issue is creation. The fact that the creation/evolution controversy is such a hot topic shows you just how pagan our culture is. The intellectual elite are for the most part pagans in this country. They have the knowledge of God all around them and within themselves. So we are going to tailor our

apologetic to pagan Gentiles along the lines of reminding them of what they know of God through creation, taking into account that they are suppressing this knowledge. Let me be crystal clear here; we are not setting out an argument for God's existence in the traditional way that apologetics has done. Traditional apologetics assumes the validity of the unbeliever's claim that he does not know that God exists. It then precedes to try and prove that God exists. I mentioned last time the cosmological argument, sometimes called the first cause argument. It is an argument seeking to prove that God is the origin of the universe. The argument, somewhat crudely put, says that

1. Everything that exists has a cause
2. The universe exists
3. The universe must have a cause
4. That cause is God

When the English philosopher and atheist Bertrand Russell contemplated this argument during his early years he says he was at first convinced of it. But he goes on to say that he later read John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography*, and "... I there found this sentence: "My father taught me that the question 'Who made me?' cannot be answered, since it immediately suggests the further question 'Who made god?'" That very simple sentence showed me, as I still think, the fallacy in the argument of the First Cause. If everything must have a cause, then God must have a cause. If there can be anything without a cause, it may just as well be the world as God, so that there cannot be any validity in that argument."ⁱⁱ In other words, can you see how he got around this argument? Russell is a famous atheist and he merely took 1. the major premise of the argument, that all things that exist must have a cause and plugged God into the equation. Whoever made up that argument gave the opponent the very premise that undermines the argument. What's the lesson? Never, and I mean never, when you are talking to an unbeliever, make an abstract universal. Notice the abstract universal in the major premise, "everything must have a cause." Once you've said "everything" he just puts God in the equation you gave him and turns your argument on its head. Russell saw this and rightly concluded "there cannot be any validity in that argument!" Further, it was arbitrary to exclude God from the premise. He had just as much right to exclude the universe from the premise. Herein, however, I want you to observe something is revealed by Russell's rejection of this argument. And that is that if the world has no cause then the world must

be eternal. This is precisely our point. Ultimately unbelief results in the crafting of idols, the stealing of attributes of the Creator and re-locating them in the creation. Nevertheless, don't use it. Unbelievers already know God and by crafting this argument you are saying God has not done what He said He has done. And I find it very difficult to imagine that God would use what you have done rather than what He has done to win someone to Christ.

Another argument that relates to creation is the teleological or design argument. This argument is seeking to prove that God designed the universe. The argument states,

1. Design requires a designer
2. The universes manifests design
3. The designer of the universe is God

Now, this may sound good, may make sense to you, but a slick atheist will always get around it. Russell, for example, in 1927 said, "it is a most astonishing thing that people can believe that this world, with all the things that are in it, with all its defects, should be the best that omnipotence and omniscience have been able to produce in millions of years." In other words, for every example of design that you can muster, someone can show how an improvement. And they're right. What's wrong with this argument? It violates Scripture. It does not take into account that mal-design was introduced at the Fall. Things are not in their pristine condition at original creation. It also opens itself up to the fallacy of the prior argument in that if 1. design requires a designer, then plug God into point 2. God manifests design and then in 3. you are left with the question, who designed God? It only pushes the problem back one step further. Then, of course, we have to ask, who designed what designed God and this process continues *ad infinitum*. Do you see how foolish it is to follow the traditional arguments for the existence of God? They are all flawed. They are all problematic.

Well, if we are not to use these kinds of arguments what are we to use? How is it proven if not by these arguments? It's proven another way. All things are not proven by arguments. Apologist Scott Oliphint makes this interesting remark, "Evidence for God's existence is abundant; there is no place in the entirety of the universe that does not evidence his existence. In that sense, everything proves God. It does not do so in the same way that an argument

proves God. But everything proves God nevertheless because it “shouts” of his existence and attributes.”ⁱⁱⁱ What is his point? It’s not a logical argument (or illogical, all the traditional arguments are ultimately fallacies) that proves God’s existence, its more immediate than that. God has made it known to them. There is no escaping Him. Everything is evidence of God and He is known immediately by everyone but they are suppressing this knowledge of God in unrighteousness. This means that they are in the business of constantly denying what is real, what is true. They are not truth seekers. The Greek word philosophy means lover of wisdom. What Paul is saying is that there are no philosophers, none who love wisdom. They devise elaborate philosophies and theories in order to avoid the clear knowledge of God that is both within them and evident around them.^{iv}

These sinful elaborate dreams are idolatrous distortions of the world. How then can they be defended? They cannot. Paul says they have no defense. All positions outside the Christian worldview are totally indefensible. No matter how many degrees are after their name, no matter how articulate their speech, no matter what arguments they use, they are not capable of giving a reasoned defense. “This must be burned in our hearts: *Any and every position that is opposed to Christianity is utterly indefensible.*” If it were defensible then men would have an excuse before God, but verse 20 says “they are without excuse.” There is a story that Russell was once asked, “What if you were to die and immediately find yourself before God? What would you say?” Russell responded, “Not enough evidence! Not enough evidence!” Friend, if Paul is right, and he is, Russell would not and did not say that when he died. Russell and countless others have spent their whole lives and careers refusing to see what was clearly being revealed to them in all places and at all times. Instead of acknowledging Him and giving thanks they spent all the breath and life God gave them concocting theories and arguments to deny Him. Therefore they are without an excuse, without an apologetic.

Now there is a valid argument for the existence of God. This is taking an offensive posture in the conflict with unbelief. This is how you go on the attack and challenge them to give an answer. Understand that there is a way to do this and we are commanded to do this. Paul said in 2 Cor 10:5, “destroy speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God.” So that’s what we want to do. Their beliefs or knowledge falsely so-called, are speculations that we are to utterly destroy. The way to utterly destroy them is to present the argument from the impossibility of the contrary. In other

words, it is our claim that it is philosophically impossible, apart from the Christian worldview, to give an account for the real world as it actually is. So we demolish simply by showing the unbeliever that if his worldview were true it could not account for the actual world we live in. As Bahnsen says, “We must challenge the unbeliever to give a cogent and credible account of how he knows anything whatsoever, given his espoused presuppositions about reality, truth, and man...”^v

I will give three examples of how to challenge the unbeliever to give a cogent, credible account of how he knows anything. First, we must challenge atheism to provide from within its own worldview the preconditions for *life*. The atheistic worldview claims that there is only one level of existence, the universe. There is no God outside of the universe. The universe is all there is. How did life begin in the universe? Spontaneous generation, the theory that life comes from non-life. Aristotle developed this theory because he saw red meat sitting on a table and a few days later maggots sprung from the meat. He concluded by observation that life comes from non-life. Of course, Louis Pasteur disproved spontaneous generation years ago when he did an experiment. He took broth and put it in a flask with a curved neck that would prevent any dust particles from entering the flask and getting into the broth. Then he boiled the broth to kill anything that might be contaminating the broth. As a control he had another flask of broth with a curved neck but he did not boil the broth. After a few days the unboiled broth began to grow things in it. These he later called microbes. As for the boiled broth, nothing grew. Pasteur concluded that the theory of spontaneous generation was not true, life was not coming from non-life, life was coming from life that was already present but too small to see. Atheism has never explained how life began. It simply has no answer. It cannot account for it on its own espoused presupposition of one level of existence. Atheism is foolishness. It is an insane view point; nothing more than a sinfully concocted scheme to try and hide from God. Second, we must challenge atheism to give an account for *language* from within its own worldview. The atheistic worldview claims that language evolved step by step from the higher primates as cranial capacity increased.^{vi} However, it is very troubling to atheists that we have found fully developed feral children, children that were dropped off in the forest when they were very young, children who have all the cranial capacity of modern humans and all the tools for language built into their brains and yet do not speak human language. The children could only make grunts and signals like an animal

but they could not speak propositional language. Also, whenever higher primates such as gorillas have been taught vocabulary words and symbols they have learned many of them but they have not taught them to the next generation. It is apparent that for a human to speak a propositional language they must learn it by listening to another human speak the language. That's why more recent foreign language programs are recognizing that to learn a new language you don't need to sit down and memorize all the conjugations and forms. That's not how people learn their first language. They learn it by listening to mom, dad and other human beings. Atheism cannot account for language, the very thing they use to deny the Christian worldview. The Christian worldview can account for it in that God is by nature a speaker and He taught Adam to speak. Third, we must challenge atheism to give an account for the laws of logic from within its own worldview. Atheism is materialist, everything is material, there is no spiritual realm and everything can be proven by material evidence. However, if all is material then where are the laws of logic? Can you please show me a law of logic? How much they weigh?. Sure, you can write a law of logic with symbols on a piece of paper but when I erase the symbols on the paper what happened to the law of logic? Did it disappear? No one has seen a law of logic. No one has even seen a number. Number is a concept. You can say there are five apples or three cars and you can draw a symbol for five and three. But those symbols aren't the numbers themselves. No one has ever seen a number. Number is not a physical object, it is a concept of differentiation. Atheism cannot account for number within a materialist worldview. Sure, they use numbers, we know that, but they can only use them because they don't live in an atheist world but in a Christian one. The Christian worldview can account for life, language and the laws of logic. God created life, God is the first speaker, and God is a coherent thinker. Atheism, from its own espoused presuppositions can't account for any of them. And the most destructive argument for God against atheism is that atheism is therefore presupposing theism. They are having to borrow life, language and the laws of logic from God in order to deny Him. As Van Til describes, he saw a father on a train with his son. The father corrected the son and the son did not like the correction so the father picked up the son. While the father was holding up the son the son slapped his father in the face. The presupposition behind the son slapping his father was that his father was holding him up. So it is with the unbeliever; God must hold him up so that the unbeliever can deny Him. The Scripture says,

“the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God” and “The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless.”

What is Paul telling us then? There is no such thing as a true atheist. To be sure there are those who say, “There is no God” or “There is no convincing evidence for God” but the Psalmist reminds us, “The fool says in his heart there is no God” (Ps 14:1). J. Vernon McGee said, the Hebrew word “fool” means “insane.” The man who says there is no God is an insane man. How does a man become insane? Paul will explain in verses 21ff that their failure to give thanks and honor where thanks and honor are due leads them to an inevitable mass of speculations and darkening of heart. Professing to be wise they become insane. Such is the end of men who suppresses the truth in unrighteousness. May we use apologetics to the glory of God to unearth the suppression so that they have a change of mind toward God and thus be prepared to have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

ⁱ L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, p 377-78.

ⁱⁱ See Bertrand Russell’s lecture, *Why I Am Not a Christian* at <http://www.users.drew.edu/~jlenz/whynot.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ K. Scott Oliphint, *The Battle Belongs to the Lord*, p 130.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, p 128.

^v Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, p 5.

^{vi} http://infidels.org/library/modern/graham_oppo/review-m.html#7

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