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A0444 -- October 31, 2004 – 1 John 4:6 – Defending the Bible

Because we ran out of time last week and because of the crucial claims imbedded in 1 John 4:6, I have decided to devote this Sunday to dealing with *some* attacks on the Protestant Bible and to show you the vanity of these attacks.

BOUNDARY OF DEFENSE – 66 BOOKS OF PROTESTANT CANON

I am defending only the 66 books of the Protestant canon. This includes the 39 Old Testament books (22 in the Jewish Bible) and the 27 New Testament books. I am not defending the 15 Apocryphal books that you would find in the Roman Catholic Bible. The reason I am not defending them is because they were written in the intertestamental period when there were no Jewish prophets. For example, Josephus, the Jewish historian in the first century, in his work Against Apion, chapter 1 section 8 writes,

“For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another [as the Greeks have], but only twenty-two books...which are justly believed to be divine; and of them five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death...the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conducts of human life...It is true, our history hath been written down since Artaxerxes very particularly, but hath not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time...and...during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them.”

Jerome, who translated the Hebrew and Greek scriptures into the Latin Vulgate, the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church, set off the 15 Apocryphal books from the rest of the Old Testament, saying that they were not of the same authority. So, we do not accept these

books as direct revelation from God because there was no continual succession of prophets when they were written to check the accuracy of the claims within them. We accept the 39 Old Testament books and the 27 New Testament books, the argument for these 27 being detailed and, on a case-by-case basis, permits us from such a study. For their defense I recommend the book *God Has Spoken* by Dr. Mal Couch.

DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

Now that I have given you the boundary of this defense and the reasons for this boundary, let's look at John's statement in 1 John 4:6: "**he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us.**" This is a very authoritative claim. In essence, if you know God then you will listen to the apostles. His claim amounts to stating that God has revealed Himself in human language to the apostles who recorded what God said. So, the doctrine we have to deal with here is the *Doctrine of Revelation*. Can God communicate with men? Can God speak infallibly through fallible men? The world says "no"; the Bible says "yes". Therefore, there are two types of people: those who listen to the word of God and those who do not listen to the word of God.

Before we answer these questions, we must ask, "Why is revelation necessary? There is one major reason: because of who God is (SRJLOOOIE). Because God is the Creator and is distinct from His creation and not a part of it, He is inaccessible by the creation. Therefore, for man to know anything about God, God must reveal Himself to man.

We also claim that God has revealed Himself and therefore we can know God in a limited, albeit true way. In what ways do we claim that God has revealed Himself? We say that God has revealed Himself in two ways: general revelation and special revelation. General revelation refers to revelation available to all men who have ever lived. What revelation do all men have of God? First, CREATION. Everyone has come into contact with creation. It is the handiwork of God, His craft. And you know a craftsman by the craft that the craftsman crafts. This is described in **Romans 1:20**, "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."

Secondly, not only do all men have the creation, but all men have CONSCIENCE. All men are created with conscience. And conscience amounts to being born with knowledge of God. We call this God-consciousness (Rom. 2:14-15). The conscience is like a tape-recorder that records everything you have ever done or even thought. And this tape will be used as evidence against those who say, "God, you just didn't make yourself clear to me, I

didn't know you were there." God will just say, "Well, let's play your tape," and that will be the end of it. So, general revelation is God revealing Himself to all men in CREATION and in CONSCIENCE so that no man is without excuse.

But that's not all, God has also revealed Himself to men in a second way. We call this *special revelation*. Special revelation is God speaking audibly into history in human language. By revealing Himself audibly, God can communicate a complex of ideas about Himself, man, and nature in a way that man can understand.

So, we have general and special revelation from God. This is the Christian claim. But this is exactly what the unbeliever denies. He denies that God has revealed Himself in the Bible. He denies that God can audibly speak to us. He therefore denies that God can be known. To him, God, if He exists, is wholly unknowable. To him, we Christians have just created a God in our own image, there is really nothing there, and even if there were, whatever is there could not be known. So, we have to respond to this. The Bible does not teach fideism, i.e., that we do not reason with unbelievers, instead we just give them the gospel. Fideism is contrary to 1 Peter 3:15. To do this we take a two-step process: (1) argument by truth and 2) argument by folly (Prov. 26:4, 5). First, argument by truth. We show him how the doctrine of revelation makes perfect sense in the Biblical framework. If God is the Creator, then by necessity He has both the know-how, the ability and the inevitability of revealing Himself. I just showed you that argument from Scripture. But this is not all we are required to do. Second, argument by folly. We have to show the unbeliever the folly of his reasons for rejecting God and His revelation. To do this we have to know exactly what arguments (or excuses) unbelievers give for not accepting God and His revelation?

BASIS FOR ALL ATTACKS ON BIBLE – ATHEISTIC MATERIALISM

First, let me give you a little history and background so you can understand the basic reason underlying unbelievers' arguments and the sanctified Christian response. For the last 200 years, a number of Christian doctrines have been under attack. Most of these attacks relate to whether the Bible is a reliable document or not. Because the Bible makes claims that you cannot check out in the same way you would check to see if there is a box of crackers in the closet, most modern people reject the Bible. The basic issues will now surface pretty quickly. Ever since Immanuel Kant, practically everyone automatically presupposes (because we have been brainwashed to think this way) that the only way to know things is by empirical evidence. If I can't see it, hear it, feel it, if I can't detect it with my sensory perception, then it can't be known. So, they have an unchallenged philosophy of knowledge (epistemology) underlying their rejection of the Bible. Because the Bible makes claims that

are extra-sensory then the Bible is meaningless. At best, it is just a book of myths and stories that are factually impossible. Notice, unbelievers have a philosophy of knowledge and fact. When you put these two aspects of their philosophy together you get materialistic atheism; that the only things that exist are material in nature and therefore, because God is immaterial, there is no God or no one can know if there is a God.

So, these people are reacting against the **metaphysical** claims of the Bible. Now, most people are not familiar with the word “metaphysics.”ⁱ Simply put, it deals with claims that are not physical in nature. In other words, you can’t check these claims by appealing to physical evidence. For example, whenever you hear an atheist and a theist debating the Existence of God, you will always hear the atheist arguing for the lack of physical evidence for God’s existence. So, the debate over the existence of God is classed as a metaphysical debate. It deals with a claim that is not physical in nature. In other words, you don’t go about trying to prove the existence of God in the same way that you would try to prove that there is a box of crackers in the closet. One is a physical claim and the other is a metaphysical claim.

Now, the Christian *doctrine of revelation* is also a metaphysical claim. And this is why unbelievers reject the Bible, because it makes these sorts of claims; claims that you can’t check out in the same way you would check to see if there is a box of crackers in the closet. They say, “If there is a God that is something that cannot be known because the only things that can be known are those things which we can detect with our five human senses.” So, from Kant to our present-day, Christians have been maligned for believing in an ancient book that is senseless and obviously false.

We are under serious attack from the non-Christian world so much so that I have to share with you this stunning insight by W. H. Walsh in the book *Metaphysics*. He says, “It must be allowed that the reaction against [metaphysics] has been...so violent indeed as to suggest that the issues involved in the controversy must be something more than academic.”ⁱⁱ Exactly. The reaction is much more than academic. The real issue at stake is eternal life and eternal death. Christ said, “And this is life eternal, that they should know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou didst send” (John 17:3). But “if the unbeliever can stand on the claim that such a God *cannot be known* because nothing transcending the physical (nothing “metaphysical”) can be known,”ⁱⁱⁱ then the issue of eternal destiny has just been avoided. Why would an unbeliever want to avoid facing the issue of eternal destiny? Because he is depraved.

WHY UNBELIEVERS VIOLENTLY REJECT THE BIBLE

This depravity reveals itself in the form of protective barriers that he builds around himself to protect him against the life and death claims of a transcendent God. This is no different from Adam and Eve covering themselves with fig leaves (operation fig leaf). Indeed, modern man is really no different than ancient man. He is still trying to cover up his sin and avoid having to face the Triune God. And we must strip the unbeliever of his protective barrier as God stripped Adam and Eve of theirs. We do this by argumentation. Not “arguing,” but “argumentation.” There is abundant evidence that Moses, Elijah, Jesus, Peter, Paul and others used argument to strip unbelievers of their protective clothing and reveal their nakedness before God. We must show him that his protective barrier is really no barrier at all. Paul taught us that the unbeliever suppresses the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18), that the carnal mind is at enmity with God, that professing to be wise they become fools in their reasoning (Rom. 1:22). We must demonstrate this in order to really challenge the unbeliever with the gospel.

2 BASIC ARGUMENTS

What exactly are the arguments against the Christian doctrine of Revelation? They can be summed up in the following:

- 1) You can only know things you experientially observe.
- 2) You cannot gain information from your experience about something that lies beyond your experience.

In short, you can only know what you experience directly with your senses. This, of course, if true, would nullify Christianity.

What should the Christian response be to these two arguments? Let’s look at the first argument: You can only know things you experientially observe.

First: Did you observe this statement? How do you know this? According to your standards, the only way you could know that people can only know things they experientially observe is if you observed that. How do they know that knowledge only comes through the senses since no one can experience that knowledge only comes through the senses? If you have not observed this statement, then how did you come to know that this is the only way of knowing things and that only empirically observable things can be known? So, this argument is self-refuting. This is simply an arbitrary and speculative pronouncement. It has no basis and is self-refuting.

Second: If we follow the logic of the statement, “you can only know things you experientially observe,” then we have to say that knowledge is limited to the individual, and that each individual on the planet has his own set of knowledge based on his own individual experience. Therefore, what may be true for you is not true for me. Therefore, if we were taking a multiple-choice test in some class, everyone should get a 100 no matter what their answers are since truth is *relative to* and *defined by* the individuals experience. Of course, no one can live this way as demonstrated by the fact that we still have tests.

Third, it gets even worse because if you can only know things you experientially observe, then your knowledge is limited to the present. Someone may ask you, “Is the box of crackers in the closet?” You may have seen the box of crackers in the closet ten seconds ago, but since you are not observing the box of crackers at that moment, you would have to respond that you do not know. This is ultimately where John Dewey, the Father of Modern American Education, ended up in his philosophy. Nothing could be known beyond what you yourself were experiencing at that very moment. Everything was in flux, including your knowledge.

Fourth, if you can only know things that you experientially observe, then science is impossible. Wait a minute, I thought science was based on experiential observation. How then is science impossible on this basis? Because science assumes the uniformity of the laws of nature. But if you can only know things that you experientially observe, then to assume the uniformity of the laws of nature is to make the claim of universal experience. In other words, if knowledge comes by individual experience, then each of us has a very limited knowledge. To know that natural laws are uniform would require that one be physically present in every part of the universe at all times. And no one has ever made that observation. So, if all knowledge is by experiential observation, then we have no basis for claiming that natural law is uniform. Once that claim is undermined then the entire field of natural science is undermined. (Hume showed this.) Natural science assumes, irrationally, the uniformity of nature. It has to. Who would ever go do an experiment if they did not expect to be able to get repeatable results? Peter said it this way about unbelievers, that in the last days mockers will come mocking, saying “*all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.*” **2 Peter 3:4.** Natural science must assume the uniformity of nature if it is to operate and be able to say that the future will be like the past. But if we assume that knowledge only results from experiential observation, then on what basis can we predict anything? From the natural scientist’s assumption, unless we have universal experience in all of space and time then we cannot predict anything. For example, on what basis can I predict that just because my car stayed on the road on the way to church today

that it won't fly off the road on my way home? Or that the dog I left at home this morning will not be a cat when I get home this afternoon? This may sound absurd, but people do not have universal experience; and so, unbelievers cannot, on their basis, account for how they can have certain knowledge that their dog will still be a dog when they get home; that is, if they even get home without the car flying off the road. On their basis, just because they have never experienced a dog turning into a cat does not mean it is not possible. In fact, if an atheist were to say, "My dog will still be a dog when I get home later today, because the last time I went home my dog was still a dog," is to steal principles from the Christian worldview. Only the Christian worldview can account for why dogs remain dogs and do not turn into cats. And the reason is because God has created stable categories and He continually upholds the universe so that there is a uniformity to nature. But the atheist does not have such a God in his worldview. Therefore, how can his worldview account for why natural science works and why dogs remain dogs and don't turn into cats? He cannot, and this is where Christians need to challenge the non-Christian as to how they can account for knowing anything at all in their worldview.

Someone ask me one time at my last job (USDA) why I, as a Bible-believing Christian, was a scientist. I told them I was a scientist *because* I was a Christian. You should have seen the look on their face. Talk about confusion. Most scientists are atheists, but I said that if I were not a Christian, I would not be a scientist. Why? Because only Christians have a basis for doing science. No atheist does. Science is a Christian discipline. The only reason atheists can do science is because they live in a Christian universe. God makes it certain that science can take place. But the atheist worldview cannot account for why science works. The Christian worldview can; it is because God has created stable categories and upholds nature so that we can predict things.

In conclusion, the argument that you cannot know anything that you cannot experientially observe has major problems:

- 1) It is self-refuting. The argument itself is not the result of experiential observation.
- 2) It would limit knowledge to the individual and make all knowledge relative. Relative knowledge sounds nice, but no one can live that way.
- 3) It would limit knowledge to the present moment. Nothing could be known about the past or the future.
- 4) If all knowledge is by experience, then this undermines the basis of all modern science, which is the uniformity of nature, because no one has universal experience and their worldview cannot account for how we can do science and predict things. He must borrow from the Christian worldview even to do science.

Now let's deal with the second argument, that you cannot gain information from your experience about something that lies beyond your experience.

First of all, this argument is actually true. You cannot move from experience to God and have any certainty of knowledge. But this is not what Christianity does, this is what science in general tries to do. Scientists frequently reason from what is observed in the laboratory to what is unseen (e.g., talk about subatomic particles [leptons, quarks, etc.], using mathematical formulas to compute gravitational forces at unobserved places in the universe, etc.). If scientists can reason from observable nature to unobservable nature, then why can't Christians reason from what is observable to what is not observable (Natural Theology)? This betrays their argument, showing that the real issue is that their minds are already made up in advance against Christianity. They want us to play by this rule but they don't want to have to play by this rule. Why can't we all play by the same rules?

Second, as I said before, this argument is true; you cannot reason from your experience to things that lie beyond your experience. But Christians don't do this. So, this problem really has no bearing on Christianity. Christians don't (or shouldn't) reason from the seen world to the unseen God. Instead, it is the other way around. We reason (or should reason) from the unseen God to the seen world. God interprets our experience. He tells us who we are and what nature is. We do not know things *independently* of God, we know them *because* of God. He interprets us and the significance of our experiences. In other words, Christianity does not create god in man's image but God created man in His image. We are, therefore, to think God's thoughts after Him (Ps. 36:9). We are not to reason from nature to God but from God to nature. God reveals who He is, what man is, and what nature is so that man can think about God, man and nature properly, so that we can share God's thoughts about these things. We do not start with a blank slate (*tabula rasa*) as if we were neutral and reason to God. No one can do this. We are fallen and God, by definition is inaccessible to His creatures unless He reveals Himself to us. And this is the Christian claim, that God has revealed Himself to us through CREATION, CONSCIENCE, and AUDIBLY in the BIBLE. God created the world to reflect His character and to be a continual witness of Him. If He didn't, then nothing could be known. God's creation of the world is what guarantees that all men have true knowledge of God, man, and nature. And this is what makes man responsible to God and without excuse (Rom. 1:20). God created man in His own image so that man could think and learn about the world from God's perspective. In fact, God made the world and man in such a way that man would inevitably learn and know about God and the world around him. We don't move from our sensory experience to knowing God, but God reveals Himself to us. All men are being confronted by God all the time. The problem is that men close their eyes. They are willingly blind.

Why don't people see God? If the light is on but my eyes are closed, then I can't see the light. John says in his gospel, John 3:19-21 **"This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. ²⁰ "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. ²¹ "But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."**

So, the unbeliever is willingly ignorant of God. He is hiding behind his informal fallacies. Additionally, God came to fallen man with verbal revelation, words chosen by God and which are designed to be understood by man's mind (which is created by God) so that we could come to correct knowledge about God and the world. We rest on God's self-revelation. He interprets our experience for us. Theology does not work from man to God but from God to man through His infallible verbal revelation (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21).

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we have only looked at a couple of arguments against the Bible. But I have shown you that the tact in any attack against Christianity is two-fold: First, make an argument of truth, and second, an argument of folly. The Christian is to have a spirit of *humble boldness*. These are not contradictory. We are to be *humble* because we did not arrive at this knowledge on our own, God revealed it to us through His word. And if He didn't, then we would not have this knowledge. Second, we are to be *bold*. We are not to compromise Christ or His Scriptures in trying to reach our non-Christian friend (1 Cor. 2:2; Col. 2:8). He must hear a clear witness. Today I have given you a small taste, very small of how to defend the Bible against non-Christian attacks. Their attacks are all based on an antagonism toward knowing anything beyond experiential observation. If he can validly make this argument then he can avoid being responsible to God. I showed you that his argument is faulty on four counts. It is self-refuting, limits knowledge to the individual, limits knowledge to the immediate present, and destroys the possibility of doing science because it has no basis for assuming the uniformity of nature. It therefore destroys the possibility of knowledge. Secondly, I showed you that their argument that you cannot learn anything from your experience that will result in knowledge of something that lies beyond your experience is true in a sense. The problem with their argument is that Christianity, in principle, does not do this and that its natural scientists that do this. Christians base their knowledge on God's revelation which is perfectly logical in the Christian framework.

If God is the Creator of all things then He has necessarily revealed Himself in His creation. He has necessarily spoken about creation. And He has Created mankind in His image. Therefore, God can communicate with man audibly and man can understand God. God can also have men record His audible revelation. God can actually choose the exact words He wants to use and preserve the style of the individual author. God chose to do this through prophets and apostles and this is why John could write in 1 John 4:6, “We are from God; **he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us.** By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” John is not speaking on his own authority but on the authority of God. Therefore, the one **who knows God listens to** John and the one **who is not from God does not listen to** John. Hopefully, today, I have showed you a sanctified argument for truth of the Bible and silenced the folly of unbelieving attacks.

ⁱ The word is composed of two words; *meta* and *physics*. *physics* refers to the “physical world”, things you can detect with the five senses. *meta* means “after”. So, “metaphysics” means “after the physics”. The word was the title of one of Aristotle’s works and was so called because it *came after* his work on physics.

ⁱⁱ *Metaphysics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1963), p. 12.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bahnsen, Greg, *Always Ready* (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 1996), 182-183.

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