



What Is The Biblical Apologetic Methodology?

Script References

Introduction

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Welcome to The Apologist by the Cántaro Institute, a podcast for the advancement of the Christian philosophy of life. Your host is Christian thinker and Institute Director, Steven R. Martins.

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Welcome to another episode of The Apologist. In our last two episodes, we were looking at the discipline of apologetics. What is it? Where do we find it in the Bible? How does it apply to us? And how does it relate to the mission of the Church? Well, now that we have some answers, we're going to go ahead with the next question. What is the apologetic methodology? In other words,

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How exactly can we engage in apologetics conversationally? Most of us, you know, we're probably acquainted with the likes of Lee Strobel, Josh McDowell, Norman Geisler, and there are several others who happen to use an evidential or classical model. Personally, my first exposure was Ravi Zacharias. I had a friend who gave me a few CD's back then, you know, we didn't

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all have iPods or iPads and all that sort of stuff. We had CDs that we listened to and there was a couple of apologetic lectures there. And unfortunately, you don't hear much about Ravi Zacharias today because of the scandal that came up after his passing. But anyways, that was my introduction to Christian apologetics. And Ravi used a mix of methodologies. He introduced me

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in time to other apologists. I would have found out about Lee Strobel, Josh McDowell, eventually, but it was actually through Ravi's ministry that I would find out about these other apologetic ministries. But it wasn't until I met Joe Boot, and Joe Boot, he had served as the Canadian Director for RZIM Canada, that would be Ravi's International Ministry,

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just before Andy Bannister came in and fulfilled that role. And when I began to work alongside Joe, he introduced me to men like Cornelius Van Til, Greg L. Bahnsen, both of these men have gone to be with the Lord, by the way. But their contributions to the discipline or the field of apologetics have really stretched well beyond their lifetimes.

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Dr. Boot happened to be a product of a lot of their ministry and teaching. Well, some call their apologetic methodology presuppositionalism. Others call it transcendentalism. Well, whatever name you might prefer to use for it, I have simply called it the *biblical* method. First, a word about why I prefer this method

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over say, evidentialism and classical apologetics. When we're talking about evidentialism, the method is best presented in Lee Strobel's books and documentaries. Whether it's the case for a creator or the case for Christ, it usually involves a truckload of evidences, whether scientific or historical, and the question at the end is generally this:

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Where will the evidence take you? In the documentaries, it's usually Lee Strobel, he's at the end of the documentary, making this question, this challenge to the viewer. Now, if we lived in a perfect world, I would say there's nothing wrong with this method. Why? Because every evidence, every fact, is a created fact. And because it's a created fact,

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it points to the creator God of the Bible. But, we don't live in a perfect world. We live in a fallen world. And that means that man cannot be neutral in his thinking. We cannot be neutral in our thinking. Man is in a fallen state because of his sin. And sin has a compromising effect on our thinking. What theologians have termed the

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noetic effects of the fall. This means that man in his sin cannot help but suppress the truth. What truth? The truth of God. The truth concerning himself. The truth concerning the world. The Apostle Paul mentions this in his letter to the Romans, chapter 1, verse 18. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven,

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against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." This means that because of his sin, whatever evidence might be presented to him, or to her for our ladies who happen to be listening in, he's going to disregard the true meaning of those evidences and facts. And he's going to interpret them

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according to his own fallen worldview and he's going to present them within a false context in order to advance his intellectual framework or his beliefs. So Lee Strobel, in other words, is appealing to the compromised heart, to the heart that has already decided to distort the meaning of the evidences and facts.

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I would love to spend a whole episode on the nature of facts and the presupposed abstract nature of the facts, but I have to get a move on if I'm going to address our biblical methodology in this episode. What I am going to say is this: Evidentialism presupposes man's religious neutrality, but man cannot be religiously neutral in a world which God has created. This is why evidentialism

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is not a biblical methodology. That is to say it is not biblically consistent. It presupposes that which the Bible does not teach as true. All right, well what about classical apologetics? You know, I've mentioned Norman Geisler. He's a proponent for this particular methodology. He's written many books, given many lectures. But another more recognized individual, particularly within

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broadly reformed circles would be R.C. Sproul. Now I know what you might be thinking. How could I possibly accuse R.C. Sproul, who is now with the Lord by the way, of using an unbiblical methodology? Look, R.C. Sproul, he's a spiritual giant. He's a genius. I don't know of a greater Bible teacher in our century,

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although there are many that come close, and I happen to really enjoy listening to John MacArthur and Steve Lawson. Well, as it concerns what the Bible teaches, as it concerns our Christian theology, no one could accuse him of being unbiblical or not being committed to the authority of God's Word. But, R.C. Sproul is a Bible teacher. He's a theologian.

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He is not an apologist. So, his methodology is a bit of a blunder, admittedly. Now, remember, I had said before everyone's an apologist. I'm referring in this case that he's not a specialist on apologetics. But of course, we all have this mandate. We're all apologists in the sense that anyone who asks us why we believe what we believe, our response is an apologetic. All right? So, I want to make that clear.

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The classical method, to try to put it briefly, what it does is it inherits the framework, the intellectual framework, from medieval scholasticism. Although we probably would just refer to that as plain old scholasticism. It presupposes that there are some things as sacred and other things as natural or translated into our common language today, perhaps secular.

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This does seem to be inconsistent with Sproul's understanding of Christ's Lordship. But I think we're all a bit inconsistent when it comes to understanding how that Lordship applies. And it's hard to lay the blame on any one person. I mean, we're talking about the whole of the Church having inherited this framework of thought, for example.

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Classical apologists can appeal to recycled or synthesized arguments of the Greek philosophers to argue for the existence of God. William Lane Craig might be a prime example for the use of classical apologetics, and this is simply the result of the Church having inherited a lot of the teaching of the Greek philosophers, stretching back all the way to the patristic age, the Church Fathers.

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Well look, when you look at William Lane Craig, you look at these other classical apologists, you're going to hear about the cosmological argument, you're going to hear about the teleological or the ontological argument, you know, the list goes on. But generally, within classical apologetics, it's a two-step process of making a case for the existence of a God. And then making the case is the second step, that the God is the God of the Bible.

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It of course uses evidences and facts, but it's different from the evidential method because it actually seeks to first establish a theistic universe. But here's why I don't refer to this as a biblical model or a biblically consistent model. The Bible never seeks to convince the reader that we live in a theistic universe. Just think about it. Genesis, Chapter 1,

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Verse 1, "In the beginning, God." There's no apologetic for God's existence. There's no argument being made for His introduction. It's just presupposed. In the beginning, God. Again, we turn to Paul, Romans, chapter 1, verses 19 to 23. "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

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For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools

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and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things." Alright, so that's Paul. And what he's saying is, everyone already knows that God exists. Everyone knows that we live in a world that God created. We know this in our heart of hearts,

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this truth. Romans chapter 1, verse 18. Classical apologetics, in other words, wastes its breath in trying to convince man of what he already knows is true. But it also errs in the fact that it appeals to man's intellect. It assumes his religious neutrality and in his ability to repent and believe without the

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empowerment of the Spirit of God. Now, I know classical apologists would probably deny that, but by implication, if you're consistent with the method, that's what it implies. It also assumes that we can arrive at the truth of God without the direct use of the Scriptures. In other words, natural arguments? It's enough. They're enough. Creational revelation? It's enough.

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But if that were the case, why then the need for inscripturated revelation? Now, I know I might be oversimplifying this part a bit, but it's still true. This method underestimates the influence and the power of sin over the fallen mind. And by doing so, it overestimates the power and liberty of the fallen human will.

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Why is the presuppositional method the biblical method then? That's the next question to ask. I've already discounted evidentialism. I've already discounted classical apologetics as being not consistent with the scriptural presuppositions. Well, here's why I think the presuppositional method is the biblical method. Because it presupposes

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what the Bible presupposes, and it's modeled after the way that the Bible engages with fallen men in his thinking. I'm going to try to unpack this for you. Bahnsen, in his book, *Pushing the Antithesis*, a fantastic book, definitely recommend you get a copy, he bases the presuppositional method on proverbial biblical wisdom. Proverbs, chapter 26, verses 4 to 5.

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It says, "answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes." Now you might think that Solomon was contradicting himself, right? He's like answer a fool according to his folly, but before then he says, answer not a fool according to his folly, you know, which, which is it? Ah, by the way, we believe that King Solomon authored these proverbs.

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Well, the fourth verse says to not answer a fool according to his folly. The fifth verse says to answer a fool according to his folly. And the only way that this proverb can avoid violating the law of non-contradiction is if Solomon is referring to the fool in two different senses. And that's actually the case with this passage because it aligns with what Hebrew scholars have called the antithetic parallelism that characterizes much of the book of Proverbs.

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We need to ask some questions to understand how this passage can form the basis for our biblical apologetic methodology. And the first question is, who is the fool? You know, it's the very first question we need to ask before we can get into the method and understanding and untangling, well, what looks like a tangled passage, but it's really not. Who is the fool? If we reconcile this with the rest of the Old Testament, this term fool,

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we learn that the fool is generally the apostate. In other words, the man or the woman who has not only fallen away from God, but who stands in opposition to God. We might think of the fool as someone stupid, as someone dumb, maybe you kind of think back to the movie *Dumb and Dumber*, one or two, that movie featuring Jim Carrey.

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That's not what Scripture has in mind here. It's not referring to that. But, to the contrary, the fool is often bright and respectable in the eyes of the world, and that is who Scripture is referring to. Not just someone who's intellectual, but we're talking about those whom the world, this fallen world system regards as being wise, as being

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greatly superior in their reasoning, in their outlook of life, in their understanding of the world. All right? So that kind of gives you a bit of a picture as to who the fool is. It's not someone who lacks a mental capacity to think rationally and normally. It's not referring to that. All right? We need to just make sure we have that clear. The fool here is those who believe themselves to be wise and who are regarded as wise by this fallen world system.

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Okay, I mean just consider how Paul refers to the fool in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 20. "Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has God not made foolish the wisdom of this world?" And in verses 26 to 27, "For consider your calling, brothers, not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

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But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong." And also in chapter 3, verses 18 to 20, "Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, he catches the wise in their craftiness." And again,

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"The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." The fool, again, is not someone who's mentally deficient or who's shallow-minded. It's someone who simply rejects God as the ultimate source for wisdom and truth. Now that we understand who the fool is, what is this Proverb trying to say? That we're not to argue with the fool

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on his own terms of unbelief. Or to put it differently, we are not to argue according to his own presuppositions. The believer who attempts to argue with the unbeliever while adopting the same presuppositions, that is the presuppositions of his disbelief, actually dishonors God in his thinking. Back in high school I had a friend named Enrique. He was from Nicaragua

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and he was an atheist and a skeptic of our class. Everyone loved him. He was a very sociable guy. And we often got into conversations regarding the Bible and how it relates to life. Well, there was one occasion when he challenged me to a private debate, and I agreed. But I had to comply with one of his conditions, that I was not allowed to use the Bible as my point of reference

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or for the foundation of my arguments. Any arguments I ever put forward had to be completely independent from the Bible. Well, I didn't really know better at the time. I gave it a go. And what was the end result? I couldn't get anywhere with him. Because, without the light of Scripture, without the truth of God's Word, without His special revelation I couldn't

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make a positive case for the God of the Bible, let alone the Christian worldview. By temporarily abandoning my Biblical presuppositions for what I believed at the time was neutral ground turned out to be a rejection of God's truth and it left me lost in fallen apostate thought. What did this lead to? It led to the natural man, the fallen man, my

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friend to think that he was in fact wise in his own eyes, that he was right even though he was wrong, and what's worse is I was made the fool with him. Now verse five says otherwise, but that's because it's meant in a different sense. Verse four had more to do with making a positive case for the truth. Verse five is more about making a negative case for the lie.

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In other words, what this Proverb is trying to say is that we can answer the fool according to his own folly, or according to his same presuppositions, in order to demonstrate his foolishness or futility. Well, what might be a biblical example of that? Think of the prophet Isaiah, where he writes in chapter 44, verses 12 to 20, that a man cuts his own piece of wood, he uses it for his own benefit, and then what's left of it he uses to construct an idol.

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And what does he do with his idol, which he crafted with his hands? He worships it. He prays to it. He's praying for salvation when there's a great need. You know, the Old Testament prophets had a tendency of reducing pagan worship to absurdity. And they're not wrong for doing so. The Puritan, Matthew Henry, says that the believer may use his wisdom, that is the wisdom of the Lord, for the conviction of a fool.

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Alright, well what might then be a modern example of this? Well, imagine you're speaking with an unbelieving naturalist, and the subject of your discussion happens to be origins. The naturalist will always argue in favor of a non-theistic universe, a universe without a God, and therefore a universe that came into being not because of God. You'd be arguing, of course, for Christian theism. Well, right off the bat,

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the naturalist will want to pull certain evidences and facts to make his case. And you might be tempted to as well. But before you engage in any kind of factual argumentation, you have to first address the underlying philosophy of those facts. What do I mean by that? Well, you have to consider the fact that the naturalist has no evidence or facts for a non-theistic origin of life.

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Because at the end of the day, if you carry his worldview presuppositions all the way through, if you're consistent, all facts are impersonal and abstract entities that should be indiscernible data. As a matter of fact, they probably shouldn't even be entities for that matter. I mean, where did these facts come from? Who determines that these are facts? How can we decipher these facts? How do we know these facts are intelligible?

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By removing God from the picture, you're actually left with meaningless data, undifferentiated data, or simply no data at all. Why is that? Because all facts are God's facts. All facts exist within the context of God as Creator. They're personal, created facts, because all things in our universe bear the imprint of the Creator. With this being the case, then,

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the unbeliever really has no choice but intellectually borrow God's facts and read into them that which isn't true, a willful misinterpretation, I think we call that eisegesis as opposed to exegesis. And really what we need to demonstrate is that he is borrowing the capital that can only be possible within the Christian worldview. We call this the borrowing of capital from Christianity.

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In this discussion, you'll want to answer the unbeliever according to his own unbelief. How do you do that? You can do that by asking, how do you make sense of biological life? How do you make sense of chemical processes? Of the laws of nature? Physics? Etc. How do you justify any law, whether natural or philosophical like logic, in a universe that is governed by random causality?

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I mean, laws are fixed, are they not? They don't fluctuate, they don't suddenly stop working the next day, and yet we supposedly live in a universe that's in constant flux according to the naturalist worldview. Now

the naturalist might want to call this a paradox, something that we don't yet understand, but we call this a contradiction and proof of the futility of his own worldview. If we remain consistent

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with his non-theistic presuppositions we're left with a universe that cannot be intelligible. Because in order for it to be intelligible, certain laws need to be set in place for the discernment and the processing of information. But here's the part. That is exactly what a chance-oriented universe cancels out. What does a naturalist then do? He borrows those laws.

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It can only be justifiable within a Christian worldview for what purpose? Not only to make sense of his world, but to launch an assault on the God behind creation. There's an illustration that Van Til provides in his book, *Christian Apologetics*. It's called, The Man Made Out of Water. This man, made out of water, lives in an ocean that infinitely extends to all directions. And this man wants to get out of the water.

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So he builds a ladder made out of what? Made out of water. And he places it upright upon the water. And he climbs right out of the water, only to fall right back into the water. To use his own words, Van Til says, "so hopeless and senseless a picture must be drawn of the natural man's methodology or thinking." What we are provided with in Proverbs chapter twenty-six, verses four to five, is the basis

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for our apologetic methodology. And this is one of the reasons why I call presuppositional apologetics, biblical apologetics. That's where I'm going to leave it for now. But be on the lookout for our next episode where I'll be talking about the myth of neutrality. Grace and peace to you all.

Closing

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