

Lesson 1

The Myth of Neutrality: Part One

Based on Lecture 1 of

Greg L. Bahnsen's *Basic Training for Defending the Faith*

**“He who is not with Me is against Me;
and he who does not gather with Me scatters” (Matt. 12:30).**

I. Central Concerns

You are a Christian. You believe in Christ as your Lord and Savior. You worship him on the Lord's Day. You seek to obey his Word. You want to honor him in all that you do. And as a child of God you want others to believe in Christ and serve God. In fact, you are watching these video lectures by Dr. Bahnsen partly to help you understand *how* to challenge those who do not believe in Christ.

But a huge problem arises as you consider how best to witness for the Lord. Even though America was founded as a Christian nation³ (so that virtually every mature American has heard of Christ somewhere along the way) And even though you see churches on almost every corner (showing that many Americans worship God) And even though most of the people you personally know claim to be Christians⁵ (increasing

³Gary DeMar, *America's Christian History* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1995); Gary DeMar, *America's Christian Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003); David J. Brewer, *The United States: A Christian Nation* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, [1905] 1996); Charles B. Galloway, *Christianity and the American Commonwealth: The Influence of Christianity in Making This Nation* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, [1898] 2005).

⁵According to recent Gallup polls, about 82% of Americans claim to be Christians.
<http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/godsofbusiness/gallupoll.shtml>

your confidence that the gospel saves sinners) Yet you know that many people do not even believe God exists. How can you reach such people? How should you reason with them? What method must you follow when showing them that God exists? This is what Dr. Bahnsen's whole series is about.

Setting up the Issue

The opening lecture in this series focuses on a particular issue that affects the *way* we must defend the Christian faith. We will be considering this issue in just a moment. But we must understand that this lecture series is designed to instruct you in the *proper manner*, the *right method*, the *correct procedures* for proving God's existence. Dr. Bahnsen will show that the *manner by which* you set about to prove God exists is vitally important. Not just any old way will do.

In Lecture One, Dr. bahnsen opens by considering a vitally important question: Whether or not you should be *neutral* regarding your Christian commitment while arguing for the existence of God to an unbeliever. Many Christians attempt to reach either the atheist or the agnostic⁶ by saying something to the effect: "I will set aside my belief in God so that I can prove to you that He exists. I will not depend upon my faith, so that I can show you that the God's existence is reasonable and not just my personal bias." They will often say: "I believe that there are good, independent, unbiased reasons that can lead you to the conclusion that God exists."

⁶An atheist denies the existence of God. The word "atheist" is from the Greek: *a* means "no," and *theos* means "god." An "agnostic" is one who *doubts* the existence of God; or rather, he holds that any god who may exist is unknowable. The word "agnostic" is from the Greek *a*, which means "no" and *gnostos* which means "known."

In the five lectures presented in the *Basic Training* series, Dr. Bahnsen presents the *biblically-warranted* procedure for defending the faith. The method he teaches is not only different from the one mentioned in the preceding paragraph, but it is the *exact opposite* of it. That's a pretty big difference! In fact, Dr. Bahnsen even *warns against* that other method. He urges you *not* to set aside your faith commitment even temporarily in an attempt to approach the unbeliever on "neutral ground."

In his first lecture, Dr. Bahnsen condemns the attempted use of neutrality in apologetics. He shows that the neutral approach is built on a myth. He even calls it "the myth of neutrality." Let us consider what he teaches here.

As he calls you away from neutrality in apologetics, Dr. Bahnsen braces you for the unbeliever's response. He points out that when you make it clear that you *are* committed to Christ and will have God as the *starting point* in your reasoning, unbelievers will vigorously complain along the following lines:

- "That's not fair! How can you assume what you are supposed to prove?"
- "You're prejudicial! You can't take Christianity for granted!"
- "You must realize that since we have conflicting viewpoints as to whether or not God exists, both of us must approach the matter from a position of neutrality."
- "You must employ standards that are common to all men, not standards generated out of your Christian convictions."

Consequently, the unbeliever will challenge you to build your case for God on *neutral* ground, without building on your foundation in God. The main point of Dr. Bahnsen's

first lecture is to warn against this approach. In fact, this whole lecture series demonstrates that if you don't start with God as your basic assumption, *you can't prove anything*. He will show that the assumption of God's existence is necessary to *all* reasoning.

Documenting the Evidence

The neutrality principle is the (alleged) operating assumption in *all* unbelieving argumentation, just as it is (unfortunately) in most evangelical apologetic systems. You must recognize this nearly universal practice in modern thought. Thus, we will provide a few sample quotations which should illustrate that neutrality and its twin, doubt, have long been unchallengeable principles in the modern world's conflict with Christianity. This has been true especially since the Enlightenment.⁷

Dr. Bahnsen argues that the existence of God is the necessary starting point for even proving His existence. This flies in the face of the neutrality principle. Note the following calls to neutrality and doubt:

- David Hume (1711–1776): “Nothing can be more unphilosophical than to be positive or dogmatical on any subject.”
- William Hazlitt (1778–1830): “The great difficulty in philosophy is to come to every question with a mind fresh and unshackled by former theories.”

⁷According to the *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Encyclopedia*: The Enlightenment was the “European intellectual movement of the 17th-18th cent. in which ideas concerning God, reason, nature, and man were blended into a worldview that inspired revolutionary developments in art, philosophy, and politics. Central to Enlightenment thought were the use and celebration of reason. For Enlightenment thinkers, *received authority*, whether in science or religion, was to be *subject to the investigation of unfettered minds*.” Emphasis added.

- C. C. Colton (1780–1832): “Doubt is the vestibule which *all* must pass before they can enter into the temple of wisdom.”
- William H. Seward (1801–1872): “The circumstances of the world are so variable, that an irrevocable purpose or opinion is almost synonymous with a foolish one.”
- Oliver Wendell Holmes (1841–1935): “To have doubted one’s own first principles is the mark of a civilized man.”
- Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947): “In philosophical discussion, the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is an exhibition of folly.”
- Bertrand Russell (1872–1970): “In all affairs it’s a healthy thing now and then to hang a question mark on the things you have long taken for granted.”
- Wilson Mizner (1876–1933): “I respect faith, but doubt is what gets you an education.”
- Alan Bloom (1930–1992): “The most important function of the university in an age of reason is to protect reason from itself, by being the model of truly openness.”

So we can see that the modern mind set claims neutrality as its general operating assumption. Dr. Bahnsen illustrates this from two influential applications of contemporary thought: evolutionism and deconstructionism.

Evolutionism

All around you see the world's hostility to certainty and absolutes as required in the Christian system. You see this especially in the foundational and all-controlling commitment which dominates all of modern Western thought and culture: evolutionism.

Modern science teaches that man is not the apex of creation, but the ex-ape of evolution. Evolutionary theory is taken for granted *throughout* the college curriculum, just as it is in all aspects of modern thought and experience. Evolution not only influences biological and earth sciences where you expect it, but also psychology, anthropology, sociology, politics, economics, the media, the arts, and all other academic disciplines as well.

By the very nature of the case, evolutionary theory resists stability and certainty, which are demanded in the biblical outlook. Instead it demands relentless, random development over time leading to fundamental and wholesale changes in systems. Oliver Wendell Holmes (1841–1935), former Chief Justice of the U. S. Supreme Court (1899–1902), expressed well the modern evolutionary commitment when he asserted: “Nothing is certain but change.”⁸

Deconstructionism

One influential contemporary application of evolutionary thinking that Dr. Bahnsen mentions is called “deconstructionism.” This complicated new philosophy is not widely known outside of scholarly circles, but it is strongly influencing intellectuals in various fields of study. Deconstructionism first appeared as a theory for interpreting literature in

⁸As is so often the case, this even harkens back to antiquity. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus (540–480 B. C.) declared: “Nothing endures but change.”

1973 in the writings of the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida (1930–2004). His approach to literary criticism gave rise in America to what is called the Yale School of Deconstruction. But what is “deconstructionism”?

Deconstructionism is a principle of modern language analysis which asserts that language refers only to itself rather than to an external reality. It challenges any claims to ultimate truth and obligation by attacking theories of knowledge and ultimate values. This philosophy attempts to “deconstruct” texts to remove all biases and traditional assumptions. Deconstructionists argue, therefore, that no written text communicates any set meaning or conveys any reliable or coherent message. Written texts are always subject to differing interpretations which are affected by one’s culture, biases, language imprecision, and so forth. Written documents always falsify the world due to these and other factors. Consequently, *all* communication is *necessarily* subject to differing, conflicting, and changing interpretations, all of which are irreconcilable. This critical approach is a form of relativism⁹ or nihilism.¹⁰ It has spilled over the academic borders of literary analysis to become a broader principle in much modern philosophy and social criticism.

⁹“Relativism” teaches that knowledge, truth, and morality are not absolute. Rather, they vary from culture to culture and even from person to person. This is due to the limited state of the mind and that there can be no absolutes to give a set meaning or value to any human thought or action.

¹⁰“Nihilism” teaches that the world and man are wholly without meaning or purpose. The world and man are so absolutely senseless and useless that there is no comprehensible truth. The word “nihilism” is derived from the Latin *nihil*, which means “nothing.”

Deconstructionism directly confronts the Christian commitment to Scripture.¹¹ We believe the Bible is the unchanging, authoritative, truthful Word of God. For instance, the psalmist confidently declares: “The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times” (Ps. 12:6). Christ teaches that “the Scriptures cannot be broken” (John 10:35b). Paul informs us that rather than being unreliable and lacking any coherent message, “all Scripture is inspired by God and *profitable* for *teaching*, for *reproof*, for *correction*, for *training* in righteousness; that the man of God *may be adequate, equipped* for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

But the overt teaching of these two unbelieving systems is not the only problem confronting the Christian student. You must also prepare yourself for:

Hidden Opposition

Even when your college professor or the media spokesperson is not *directly* attacking Christianity’s truth claims, he is, nevertheless, *indirectly* warring against them *in principle*. Throughout our secularized culture—especially in the university—anti-Christian principles are taken for granted. Many issues might appear to be wholly unrelated to Christian concerns and seem unopposed to Christian truth claims. Yet because of their hidden nature those can be the most alluring to the Christian and the most injurious to your faith because of their hidden nature. They represent powerful erosive forces quietly seeping into the mind of the believer. They gradually wash away the very foundations for your life and commitment to God and his Word. Like an

¹¹See the following articles in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:1 (March 2005): Andreas J. Köstenberger, “‘What is Truth?’ Pilate’s Question in Its Johannine and Larger Biblical Context”; R. Albert Mohler, “What is Truth? Truth and Contemporary Culture”; “Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn”; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics.”

undetected cancer they eat away at your faith by importing unbelieving assumptions into your thinking. *The Christian Post* reports the following:

Focus on the Family’s Teen Apologetics Director Alex McFarland has been involved in youth ministry for the last 16 years. He says students are generally ill-equipped to fend for their Christian faith because they lack a good understanding of the facts behind Christianity—scientific, historical, or logical.

According to McFarland, “Teens have a sincere child-like faith but have not been exposed to good apologetics,” which he says is “so necessary to being able to defend their faith.”

He warns parents, “I have counseled with many a distraught, even heartbroken, family, who spent 18 years raising a child in the ways of God only to have that faith demolished through four years at a secular university.”

Studies have shown that when students lack good defenses, their faith erodes. And two-thirds will forsake Christianity by their senior year of college. On the other hand, solid faith helps students in all aspects of life.¹²

¹²“What Parents Can Do When College Students Lose Faith,” *The Christian Post* (December 18, 2005): www.christianpost.com/article/ministries/1660/section/what.parents.can.do.when.college.students.lose.faith/1.htm

What a student does not know *will* hurt him. This problem arises in many ways; we will mention just three examples drawn from Dr. Bahnsen's lecture.

1. *Selective considerations.* Even when your college professor does not *directly* criticize your Christian faith, he quietly challenges foundational Christian assumptions. Modern education is effectively subliminal¹³ advertising for atheism. The professor decides which options are serious, which questions are worthwhile, what evidence should be put before you. He selects the reading assignments according to his own outlook which locks out Christian principles. The Christian student eventually becomes adapted to that process and begins leaving large fields of study detached from his faith beliefs. This is a subtle form of secularization.

2. *Neutral tolerance.* The university and the media supposedly encourage neutrality by urging tolerance of all views. The call to toleration is simply the application of the neutrality principle to moral issues. But we are all aware that the Christian view is seldom given equal tolerance. In fact, the call to tolerance is even self-contradictory in the non-believing system. It is intolerant of views that do not tolerate such things as homosexual conduct or feminism or abortion, for instance. As Tom Beaudoin put it: "Generation X¹⁴ is not tolerant of an intolerant God."

¹³"Subliminal" derives from two Latin words: *sub* ("below") and *limmen* ("threshold"). It speaks of that which is below the threshold of consciousness, that which is just out of conscious perception. Advertisers have discovered that people unconsciously pick up on and are influenced by flashes of information just below the normal limits of perception. It is claimed that some advertisers have quickly flashed images of their product on a movie screen to unconsciously suggest to the viewer an urge to buy the product.

¹⁴"Generation X" is the sociological term that speaks of people born in the 1960s and 70s, whose teen years touched the 1980s. It is based on a British study by Jane Deverson who studied teenagers of this era, finding that they tended to "sleep together before they are married, don't believe in God, dislike the Queen and don't respect parents." The letter "X" was a symbol of teen defiance and was adopted by civil rights protestor Malcolm Little who changed his last name to

3. *Censorship claims.* Libraries claim to resist censorship in the name of neutrality. But some form of censorship is always at work in building a library's book collection. By necessity the library must select some books over others—unless that library contains all books ever written in the whole world. Consequently, some set of principles *will* apply to book selection. Neutrality is a false illusion in libraries.

Demonstrating the Problem

Dr. Bahnsen follows his mentor Dr. Cornelius Van Til¹⁵ when he challenges the unbeliever at the very foundations of his thought. In his book *Always Ready*, Dr. Bahnsen laments that “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.”¹⁶ This lecture series encourages you to *avoid* such a practice. Dr. Bahnsen provides philosophically valid reasons why you *must* begin with your Christian commitments.

As Christians we must understand the fundamental importance, wide-ranging implications, and destructive character of the claim to neutrality. We must do so if we are to engage a truly biblical apologetic in a manner that is faithful to God and his revelation in Scripture. Too many apologetic programs require that we suspend our faith commitment in order to allow for a neutral “meeting of the minds” with the unbeliever.

“Malcolm X” because he did not know his real (African) name. “Little” was the name given to an ancestor of his by a slave owner.

¹⁵Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987) wrote voluminously on apologetics, philosophy, ethics, and theology. For a bibliography of his works, see Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Reading and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998), 735–740.

¹⁶Greg L. Bahnsen, *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith* (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Publications, 1996), 3.

This suspending of faith might truly be called a “suspension bridge” to the world of unbelief. Unfortunately, this “bridge” will get you into the world of unbelief, but will not bring you back.

Dr. Bahnsen argues that you must not set aside your faith in God when you consider *anything*—even the proof of the existence of God. Such “neutralist thinking would erase the Christian’s distinctiveness, blur the antithesis¹⁷ between worldly and believing mind-sets, and ignore the gulf between the ‘old man’ [our inborn, fallen, sinful nature] and the ‘new man’ [our new birth-generated redeemed nature]. The Christian who strives for neutrality unwittingly endorses assumptions which are hostile to his faith” (*Always Ready*, 23). Let us see how this is so.

Simply put, you cannot adopt a position of neutrality toward God if you are to remain faithful to Christ. Our Lord never encourages or even allows suspending your faith in order to do anything. Those Christians who attempt neutrality in apologetics actually build their apologetic house on “sinking sand.” Christ, however, teaches that “everyone who hears *these words of Mine*, and *acts upon them*, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock.” He goes on to warn that “everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand” (Matt. 7:24, 26). A wise apologetic method recognizes its Christian foundations and implements them.

Why can you not attempt neutrality in apologetics? The answer is: Because of man’s fall into sin, the world is inherently hostile to the Christian faith. From the time of the

¹⁷“Antithesis” is based on two Greek words: *anti* (“against”) and *tithenai* (“to set or place”). “Antithesis” speaks of opposition or a counter point. As Christians we must recognize the fundamental disagreement between biblical thought and all forms of unbelief at the foundational level of our theory of knowing and knowledge. See Lesson 6 for a discussion of the biblical notion of antithesis.

fall, enmity is the controlling principle separating the believer and unbeliever (Gen. 3:15; John 15:19; Rom. 5:10; James 4:4).

The Christian message is not congenial to the unbeliever, for it confronts him as a guilty sinner who is at war with his righteous Creator and Judge. The Apostle Paul even goes so far as to declare:

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who *suppress the truth in unrighteousness*, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 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*. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became *futile in their speculations*, and their *foolish heart was darkened* (Rom. 1:18–21).

This certainly does not sound as if Paul would endorse the neutrality principle in dealing with unbelievers. He teaches that men are *not* neutral, but are actively *hostile* to God whom they know deep down in their hearts.

To make matters worse for the neutralist approach, Christianity's founding document, the Bible, claims infallible and obligatory authority which *demand*s commitment to its truth claims and obedience to its moral directives: "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: *fear God and keep His commandments*, because this applies to every person.

For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil” (Eccl. 12:13–14). This absolute demand to fear the true and living God and to obey his obligatory law-word grates on the sinner’s central ambition. His sinful desire is “to be as God” determining good and evil for himself, without submitting to God’s command (Gen. 3:5; Rom. 8:7). Indeed, “whatever is not from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23) for “without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb. 11:6).

Sinners seek to escape the *dogmatic truth claims* and *obligatory moral directives* of Scripture by resorting to (an alleged) neutrality in thought. Such neutrality actually amounts to *skepticism* regarding the existence of God and the authority of his Word. Unbelievers complain that “nobody knows for sure, therefore the Bible cannot be what it claims to be.” Interestingly, the biblical narrative explains the fall of man as arising out of the neutrality principle which encourages doubt about God’s absolute authority. You must remember that God clearly commanded Adam and Eve to *not* eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16–17; 3:3). Satan, however, came to them with the temptation to doubt God by assuming a position of neutrality regarding God’s command: “Yea, has God said?” (Gen. 3:1b).

Satan tempted Eve to approach the question of eating from the forbidden tree in a neutral, unbiased fashion. He suggested that she must remain neutral in order to decide who was right, God or Satan. She did not accept God’s word as authoritative and conclusive, but as a true neutralist, determined for herself which option to take (Gen. 3:4–6). Such “neutrality” is dangerous, for as Robert South (1634–1716) expressed it: “He who would fight the devil with his own weapons, must not wonder if he finds himself overmatched.”

Paul relates this historical temptation of Eve to our spiritual failures in our devotion to Christ: “I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3).

Elsewhere he writes of Eve’s attempted neutrality as a failure brought about by Satanic “deception” (1 Tim. 2:14). As Edwin Hubbel Chapin (1814–1880) stated, “Neutral men are the devil’s allies.” You must remember that the devil presents himself as an “angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14).

You must not build your defense of the faith on the principle that led to the fall of mankind. That approach not only failed but it brought sin, death, destruction, and despair into the world. In his book *Van Til’s Apologetic*, Dr. Bahnsen thoroughly explains the role of faith-commitment in apologetics:

As Van Til labored to teach throughout his career (as we have said many times in this book), *there simply is no presupposition-free and neutral way to approach reasoning*, especially reasoning about the fundamental and philosophically momentous issues of God’s existence and revelation. To formulate proofs for God that assume otherwise is not only foolish and futile, from a philosophical perspective, but also unfaithful to the Lord. Reasoning is a God-given gift to man, but it does not grant to him any independent authority. The Christian concept of God takes Him to be the highest and absolute authority, even over man’s reasoning: such a God *could not* be proved to exist by some other standard as the highest

authority in one's reasoning. That would be to assume the contrary of what you are seeking to prove.¹⁸

Elsewhere he added:

We live in a culture which has for so long been saturated with the claims of intellectual autonomy and the demand for neutrality in scholarship that this ungodly perspective [of neutrality] has been ingrained in us: like the "music of the spheres," it is so constant and we are so accustomed to it that we fail to discern it. It is common fare, and we simply expect it.¹⁹

So then, the key point in Dr. Bahnsen's first lecture is his call to non-neutrality in the Christian apologetic enterprise. To operate from a position of neutrality is to have surrendered the Christian faith in principle. He warns us to avoid *the myth of neutrality*, not to adopt it.

Your busy academic and social schedule in college can easily pull you away from God's Word. But remember what Dr. Bahnsen teaches: The Bible calls all believers to the apologetic task. You cannot defend God and his Word if you are not sanctified (set apart) for Him by means of contact with His Word. Too many Christian students drift away from the faith in college. Dr. Gary North once wrote an article advertising a Christian college. The article showed a dejected father who had sent his son off to a secular college. It stated: "I spent \$40,000 to send my son to hell."

¹⁸Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 614.

¹⁹Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 31.

Learning to count is not as important as knowing what counts. Keep yourself before the Lord in Scripture reading and prayer. Unfortunately, as Charles Colson observes: “Our educational establishment seeks to instill a passion for intelligent curiosity and openness, but allows for the existence of no truth worth pursuing.”

While in college do not simply be a passive sponge merely absorbing the material. Rather, be an active filter sorting out the issues through your Christian grid. The comedian Stephen Wright wonders how much deeper the ocean would be if it were not inhabited by sponges. Think how much deeper your knowledge will be if you actively engage it.

Dr. Bahnsen calls on you to think Christianly, to reason as Christians in a “principal” (i.e., principle-based) fashion. You must think God’s thoughts after him, rather than setting aside God’s thoughts as called for with the neutrality principle. God’s Word should be foundational in all your thinking and living, for you have been “bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23) and are “a people for God’s own possession” (1 Pet. 2:9).

Seek to discern your professor’s underlying motives and principles. Dr. Bahnsen’s foundational lecture on apologetics is designed to teach Christians to think *as Christians*, not as neutral observers. No area of life is neutral; even your intellectual life must be surrendered to Christ’s authority. A truly biblical apologetic representing the sovereign Creator of all things requires that you surrender all authority to Christ from the very starting point. First Corinthians 10:31 states that *even whether we eat or drink* we must do so to God’s glory (cp. Col. 3:17; 1 Peter 4:11).

Furthermore, Dr. Bahnsen argues that “the Bible teaches that *every* Christian should be able to deal with *every* problem at *any* time.” He teaches that God *expects* you to deal

with any form of opposition to the Christian faith. The New Testament writers challenge their original audiences—and *you*—to be defenders of the faith. In the verse that serves as the cornerstone of Christian apologetics, he commands you: “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15; see also Jude 3). Note that Christians-as-such (not just the philosophically-minded among us!) are commanded “always” to answer “every man.” Sadly, few evangelical students learn this in their home churches. You must learn apologetics for your own spiritual well-being, as well as for becoming an agent of reform for the untrained Christian.

All of this is effectively portrayed for us in Deuteronomy 6: “You shall teach [God’s statutes] diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deut. 6:7–9). This speaks of God’s law-word guiding our daily labors (governing our “hand”), our thought processes (governing our “head”), and our mundane living for him in lying down, rising up, sitting, and walking.

II. Exegetical Observations

In this section we will reflect briefly on a few additional exegetical observations in a couple of the important biblical passages impacting our apologetic method. Hopefully this study will enhance our understanding of these texts of Scripture, underscoring the

biblical apologetic method. The truly Christian apologist must know God's word to function properly.

Mark 12:30

Mark 12:30 reads: "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." This statement is derived from Deuteronomy 6:5 immediately after Moses declares "the Lord is one" (Deut. 6:5). Israel is reminded that only one God exists, as over against the numerous competing gods in the ancient pagan surrounding her.²⁰ Since there is one God (who created and controls all things), there is one truth system, rather than competing systems of explanation. The ancient world had a god for the sun, for fertility, for this and for that. Consequently, their worldview was fragmented and their knowledge lacked coherence.²¹

We should note that Christ emphasizes his call to love God in all things. He does not simply say: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." Rather, he emphasizes the totality of your love for God by repeating "all" before each noun: "you shall love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, and with *all* your soul, and with *all your mind*, and with *all* your strength." This repetitious emphasis strengthens his call to lovingly obey God in *all* things. Of course, our special concern in apologetics is on the call to love God with "all your *mind*." Non-neutrality is inherent in this charge by Christ.

²⁰For instance, God's ten plagues on Egypt were directed particularly against Egypt's gods (Ex. 12:12; 18:11; cp. Num. 33:4).

²¹Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1967).

1 Peter 3:15

We find the classic apologetics text in 1 Peter 3:15: “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” This text is clearly set over against the neutrality principle.

Notice that Peter commands that you “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts” in order to defend the faith. To “sanctify” means to “set apart, to separate, to distinguish.” A truly biblical apologetic does not *set aside* Christ *from* our hearts, but *sets apart* Christ *in* our hearts. In fact, it sets aside Christ *as Lord* or master. As Paul put it, Christ must “come to have first place in *everything*” (Col. 1:18). Your starting point in reasoning with the unbeliever must be Christ.

You must not miss his specific point: He is calling on you to set apart Christ *in the very process of defending the faith*. His main point is to call you to “make a defense” and “to give an account” of your hope in Christ. Apologetics is not a side issue here; it is the central point. And again: he makes the point by urging that you set apart Christ in your hearts—in your inner-most being.

These are only two samples from God’s Word; we will study more in later sections. But the fact is, the Bible presents a theological outlook and practical worldview which clearly deny that neutrality exists in fallen man and his thinking. The Bible demands that you recognize that neutrality is a myth, and resist it.

III. Questions Raised

Attempt to answer the following questions on your own before looking at the text or consulting the **Answer Key**.

1. What is “apologetics”? Define the term and explain the derivation of the word “apologetics.”
2. What is the central point of Dr. Bahnsen’s first lecture?
3. How is the very principle of evolutionism (even apart from the scientific/biological statement of evolutionary theory) opposed to the Christian faith?
4. What is “deconstructionism”? Where did this philosophy first arise? How does it conflict with basic principles of the Christian faith?
5. List some passages of Scripture that assert the certainty and authority of God’s Word.
6. How does the unbelieving college professor’s worldview subtly confront your faith, even when the professor is not directly mentioning Christianity per se?
7. What does Dr. Bahnsen mean when he speaks of “the myth of neutrality”?
8. What statements by Christ discount the possibility of neutrality?
9. Where in Scripture do you first see neutrality regarding God and his Word attempted?
10. Is the attempt at neutrality simply a methodological issue, or is it a moral one as well?

Explain.

IV. Practical Application

Now what are some practical things you can do to re-enforce what Dr. Bahnsen has taught? How can you promote this apologetic method among Christian friends?

1. Frequently remind yourself of the nature of spiritual warfare. In order to prepare yourself for your college classes, at the beginning of each semester you should re-read the biblical passages that demonstrate the active antagonism of the unbelieving world against your Christian faith. You must not forget the nature of the unbeliever's challenge to your holistic faith.
2. Develop a devotional life that reinforces your call to apologetics. Make a list of the biblical passages used in this study and read them for your devotions.
3. Diligently seek to evaluate every thing you are being taught from a principled Christian perspective. After classes each day, jot down comments on the contradictions to the Christian faith which you encountered. Keep them in a notebook. Writing things down is the best secret to a good memory. Reflect on biblical answers to these supposed contradictions.
4. Develop small Bible study and accountability groups with other Christian students on campus. A part of defending the faith involves promoting its defense even among believers. As a Christian in fellowship with other Christians, you should urge fellow believers to realize their spiritual obligation to defend the faith before an unbelieving world.
5. Seek out any Christian campus ministries that are strongly committed to the Bible and are developing the Christian life. Attend their meetings and involve yourself in their ministries.
6. Find a good church in the area of your college. Commit yourself to attend church regularly. As Christians we must not be "forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another" (Heb. 10:25).

7. Where possible use class assignments to present the Christian perspective on issues.

We would recommend that you avoid narrow testimonial types of papers. You should rather discretely develop worldview oriented themes that work basic Christian principles into the picture. In-your-face testimonials might be an affront to your professor and may appear to be a challenge to him. But working out your biblical principles might alert him to the philosophical implications of Christianity and will certainly help you flesh out your own understanding. You must be about “making the most of your time” while in college (Eph. 5:16).

While you are enrolled in college you are in a full-time, formal educational environment. You are seeking, therefore, to be educated. Dr. Van Til teaches that if education is to be practical it must mold the developing mind of the student so that he is put in the best possible relationship to his environment. Then he explains that man’s ultimate environment is God himself, because “in Him we live and move and exist” (Acts 17:28; cp. Job 12:10; Ps. 139:7–17; Dan. 5:23). You certainly will not find your professors assigning papers that encourage your Christian faith. But you must seek the opportunities—when they are allowed.

8. As a well-rounded Christian seeking to glorify Christ, you must approach your academic studies in a mature and diligent fashion. You are both paying hard-earned money for a college education and spending your God-given time in college; make the most of your investment. Do not cut corners in your studies or simply try to “get by.” Christ calls you to excellence. Some students are naturally lazy, others suffer from voluntary inertia. Do not allow your educational experience to inadvertently teach you to be intellectually lazy. Such laziness is disloyalty to Christ.

Most colleges are liberal arts colleges that are supposed to give you a well-rounded education—even when you are obligated to take a required course that you do not particularly enjoy. As G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936) mused: “Education is the period during which you are being instructed by somebody you do not know, about something you do not want to know.” Remember also that it will affect your overall grade point average and therefore impact your witness as a Christian student. Besides, you will discover, to your surprise later on, that the knowledge you gained even in that course will prove useful.

The following anonymous comments should cause you to smile at their uncovering of foolishness; they should not summarize your approach to education:

- “College is a fountain of knowledge where some students come to drink, some to sip, but most come just to gargle.”
- “All college students pursue their studies, but some are further behind than others.”
- “Some students take up the arts in college, some take up the sciences, while others just take up space.”

VI. Recommended Reading

To enhance your understanding of the antagonism of the unbelieving mind and the dangers of neutrality, we recommend the following additional reading.

Bahnsen, Greg L., *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith* (Nacogdoches, Tex.: CMP, 1996), chapters 1–2.

DeMar, Gary, *Thinking Straight in a Crooked World: A Christian Defense Manual* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2001)

Gentry Kenneth L., Jr., *Defending the Faith: An Introduction to Biblical Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Fountain Inn, SC: KennethGentry.Com, 2001)

Newport, Frank, “A Look at Americans and Religion Today”

<http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/godsofbusiness/galluppoll.shtml>.

Pratt, Richard L., Jr., *Every Thought Captive* (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), chapters 1, 2, 4, 6.

Van Til, Cornelius, “Why I Believe in God.”

http://www.reformed.org/apologetics/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/apologetics/why_I_believe_cvt.html