

## Lesson 2

### The Myth of Neutrality: Part Two

Based on Lecture 1 of

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

**“The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”**

**(2 Corinthians 10:4–5)**

We are continuing our study of Dr. Bahnsen's first lecture on the myth of neutrality. This is a foundational issue for beginning a biblical defense of the Christian faith. And it is an issue largely unknown to the modern world. Therefore, we are offering two full lessons on it.

#### I. Central Concerns

Let us see how Dr. Bahnsen fleshes out and demonstrates the problem of (alleged) neutrality. In his lecture he declares two important truths which impact our apologetic method. One matter is factual, the other is moral: (1) Factually, we must recognize that the unbeliever is *not* neutral. To overlook this it to approach the unbeliever from a position of blindness. (2) Morally, we must understand that the believer *should not* be neutral. If we do not realize this we will engage the defense of the faith in a non-faithful way.

## **First, the Unbeliever is Not Neutral**

Despite their loud and frequent claims to the contrary, unbelievers do not practice neutrality in approaching the question of God's existence. In fact, they do not approach any issue neutrally. Any claim to neutrality is a pretense, and as Dr. Bahnsen will show in this lecture series, it is philosophically impossible.

As a Christian you believe God's Word is true. You also have a Savior who prays for your sanctification (your being set apart for God and His service) by means of God's Word. He declares that God's sanctifying Word is absolute truth: "Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth." And that very Word of God deals directly with the matter of neutrality in the unbeliever's outlook.

### *The Unbelieving Mind is Hostile toward God*

The Bible points out that the unbeliever is *not* neutral towards the question of God. But it goes further, declaring that he is actually *hostile* toward it:

This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart. (Eph. 4:17–18)

Observe that Paul does *not* speak of the unbeliever's mind or heart as neutral. To the contrary, he declares the absolute "futility" of the unbelieving mind. The non-Christian's mind is actually "darkened," not dim. It is even "excluded" from God, not "on the fence" regarding God. This is

because of his “ignorance,” not confusion. It is “hardened” against God, not indifferent toward him. These observations are just what you should expect in light of the fall of man into sin (Gen. 3:1–7; Rom. 3:10ff; 5:12ff) and God’s curse in Genesis 3:15.

Rather than allowing the believer to adopt the unbeliever’s mind (which is characterized in Eph. 4:17–18), Paul states that the believer has *not* so “learned Christ” (Eph. 4:30). That is, you as a believer did not come to a sure knowledge of Christ through fallen thought processes. Such a method, then, is inappropriate for apologetics. Because of this, Paul calls upon you to *put away* the former ways by renewing your mind:

In reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Eph. 4:22–24)

Ephesians 4:17 teaches that you are either set aside for God or alienated from Him. No third option exists, no middle ground—men simply are *not* “neutral.” Men will either follow the world or the Word. They either have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16; cp. Eph. 4:23–24) or a mind of futility (Eph 4:17). His thoughts are either “captive” to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5) or are “hostile” to Him (Col. 1:21). Note that some of Paul’s images of the two minds imply warfare: The Christian’s mind is “captive”<sup>1</sup> to God, whereas the unbeliever remains “hostile”<sup>2</sup> to him. Here we see the enmity of Genesis 3:15 separating the unbelieving mind from the believing.

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<sup>1</sup>The Greek word is *aichmalotizo*, which is a part of a word group often used of war captives, see for example: Luke 21:24; Eph. 4:8; Rev. 13:10. In fact, Paul speaks of the “weapons” of our “warfare” and the “destruction” of “fortresses.”

Simply put: the mind is not neutral. As Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other” (Matt. 6:24), and “He who is not with Me is against Me” (Matt. 12:30).

Paul presents the same problem in Romans 1. This is not a stray thought in his understanding of man’s condition. Notice his forceful depiction of the fallen mind as hostile to God and actively working to suppress the truth within:

For 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. Professing to be wise, they became fools. . . . For *they exchanged the truth of God for a lie* (Rom. 1:18–22, 25).

Later in Romans he also declares that “the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so” (Rom. 8:7).

Any apologetic method that does not recognize the hostility of the fallen mind is not only gravely mistaken is resisting the teaching of the very Scriptures which apologetics should be

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<sup>2</sup>The word “hostile” is a translation of the Greek *echthros*, which is often translated “enemy,” see Luke 1:74; 10:19; 1 Cor. 15:25–26.

defending! Dr. Bahnsen urges you to recognize the reality of non-neutrality in the actual world; you *must* understand that neutrality is a myth.

Contrary to the grievously impoverished theology in much of modern evangelicalism, the Scriptures teach what is known as the “noetic” effect of sin. “Noetic” is derived from the Greek word *nous*, which means “mind” (see: Luke 24:45; Rom. 7:23; Phil. 4:7). This is one aspect of the doctrine of “total depravity,” which declares that the fall reaches deep down into a man’s very being, even to his mind, his reasoning processes. As Dr. Bahnsen observes, “The noetic effect of sin (the depravity of man’s intellect) does not imply, for Van Til, that the unbeliever cannot have a keen intellect. He may be very smart indeed, and thus all the more dangerous to himself and others. Depravity gives a distorted and destructive *orientation* to the sinner’s mental functions.”<sup>3</sup> This is evident in Paul’s writings quoted above.

### *The Unbelieving Mind Denies Reality*

Neutrality strikes at our *faith* in another way. Our faith declares that all things were made by and belong to God, so that there can be no neutrality in such a world. Consider the following biblical truths:

*God made all things.* The doctrine of creation is a foundational biblical doctrine which shows God as the Creator and the Universe as His creation. The Bible rightly opens with the doctrine of creation, and the New Testament affirms it. “In the beginning God created the

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<sup>3</sup>Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Reading and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998), 154 note 17.

heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). “All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:3).<sup>4</sup>

Paul uses the doctrine of creation to condemn men for failing to worship him as their *Creator* (Rom. 1:16–25). God created *everything* in the universe from its smallest atomic particle to its farthest flung galaxy. As God’s creatures living in his world you cannot legitimately be neutral regarding your Creator’s existence. This is especially true in that man exists as God’s image (Gen. 1:26; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; James 3:9).

*God made all things for himself.* The God of Scripture is not the God of deism.<sup>5</sup> That is, God did not simply create the world and withdraw Himself from it. He created it for Himself and positively for His own glory. “For from Him and through Him and *to Him* are all things. *To Him be the glory forever*” (Rom. 11:36). “All things have been created by Him *and for Him*” (Col. 1:16d).<sup>6</sup> God does not welcome neutrality in His creation, for neutrality denies God’s glorious purpose. Caleb Colton (1780–1832) once commented that “Neutrality is no favorite with Providence, for we are so formed that it is scarcely possible for us to stand neutral in our hearts.”

*God owns all things.* One recurring theme in Scripture is found in the words: “the earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it” (Psa. 24:1).<sup>7</sup> No man can trespass on another’s property and claim he is neutral to the other man’s ownership. Neither may man claim such in the earth, which is “the Lord’s.” Human property rights are protected in God’s

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<sup>4</sup>See also: Exodus 20:11; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 104:24; 148:1–5; Isaiah 40:22–28; 44:24; 45:12, 18; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16–17; and Hebrews 11:3.

<sup>5</sup>“Deism” is a natural religion view of God which was very prevalent in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. This belief about God is derived solely from natural revelation and reason and not special revelation. The god of deism created the world, but does not interfere with it by means of providence, miracle, incarnation, or any other Christian affirmation.

<sup>6</sup>See Psalm 82:8; Proverbs 16:4; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Hebrews 2:10; Revelation 4:11.

<sup>7</sup>See Genesis 14:19; Exodus 9:29; 19:5; Leviticus 25:23; Deuteronomy 10:14; 1 Sam. 2:8; 1 Chronicles 29:11, 14; Job 41:11; Psalm 24:1; 50:12; 89:11; 104:24; 1 Corinthians 10:26, 28.

Law (e.g., Exo. 20:15; Lev. 19:11; Acts 5:4). You well know God’s special redemptive ownership of believers (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 1:18). God has property rights over all that He has created, and He has created all things.

*God governs all things.* The world and the universe do not operate randomly by blind chance or under their own inherent power. God actively controls all things and continuously directs them to His own wise end. Everything exists and has its meaning and place because of God. He “*declares the end from the beginning* and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘*My purpose* will be established, and I will accomplish all *My good pleasure*’” (Isa. 46:10). Christ “is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17). Christ “is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3a). We “have been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:11).<sup>8</sup> Thus, everything is controlled by the will of God for *His purpose*, not for the sake of neutrality.

*God will judge all men.* As creatures of God existing in His image, we are responsible to Him and His will. “God will bring *every* act to judgment, *everything* which is hidden, whether it is good or evil” (Eccl. 12:14). “He has fixed a day in which He will judge the *world* in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed” (Acts 17:31a).<sup>9</sup> In fact, you will even give account for *every* “idle word” that you speak (Matt. 12:36). None of your words is neutral; each one is subject to God’s evaluative judgment. Your apologetic methodology, then, will even

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<sup>8</sup>The Westminster Confession calls the doctrine of predestination as a “high mystery” (WCF 3:8). It is a difficult doctrine to understand, but a very biblical one. See: Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1932). Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., “Predestination Study Series” ([www.kennethgentry.com](http://www.kennethgentry.com)).

<sup>9</sup>See also Ecclesiastes 3:17; Matthew 10:28; Acts 17:31; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10; Hebrews 12:23; and Revelation 20:12.

be subject to God's searching assessment. God's judgment is inescapable in all of life, as David discovered when he tried to flee God's presence (Psa. 139:1–17). Dr. Bahnsen explains it this way:

Herein lies the problem: neutrality is impossible. Secularists have no claim to neutrality because everyone has a set of presuppositions that guide their moral and ethical analyses. Contending for any position depends upon this framework in that it is through one's presuppositions that facts are interpreted and related. No one lives or operates in a vacuum where the mind is a "blank slate" and facts are uninterpreted. Were that the case, "brute facts" would exist independently of God and have no logical relation to one another. Accordingly, man could not know them.<sup>10</sup>

Dr. Bahnsen's first point is affirmed in Scripture: We must not work from the assumption of neutrality in man's thinking. The unbeliever is not neutral, why should you be? Let us now consider his next point.

### ***Second, the Christian Should not be Neutral***

As a Christian you are obligated to *deny* neutrality in your apologetic methodology. This should naturally follow from your understanding of sin. Man is not neutral; he is a sinner. Quite obviously you should not adopt a position that contradicts the biblical doctrine of sin. We may,

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<sup>10</sup>Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 38.



however, go further than this in speaking against the neutrality principle. Dr. Bahnsen points out in *Always Ready*:

No such compromise is even possible. “*No man is able to serve two lords*” (Matt. 6:24). It should come as no surprise that, in a world where all things have been created by Christ (Col. 1:16) and are carried along by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3) and where all knowledge is therefore deposited in Him who is The Truth (Col. 2:3; John 14:6) and who must be Lord over all thinking (2 Cor. 10:5), *neutrality is nothing short of immorality*. “Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God’ (James 4:4).”<sup>11</sup>

He notes that the call to neutrality “strikes at the very heart of our faith and of our faithfulness to the Lord” (*Always Ready*, 3). That is, you must balance your objective *faith* (that which Scripture reveals, such as the doctrine of sin and any other revealed doctrine) with your subjective *faithfulness* (that which the Scripture commands, such as your obedience to Christ in all of life); you must balance truth and obedience. As the gospel hymn declares, you must “trust and obey, for there is no other way.”

As noted above, your “faith” warns of the reality of sin which teaches that the fallen mind is not neutral. How then may you discount this fact when developing your method for defending the faith? Now consider your positive obligation: your call to “faithfulness” directs you spiritually to pursue that which is right and good. This positive obligation also forbids adopting the position of neutrality. How is this so?

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<sup>11</sup>Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 9.

*You are commanded to fear God in order positively to gain knowledge.* Attempting neutrality toward God undermines your quest for knowledge. The Scriptures teach that “the fear of the Lord”—*not* neutrality—“is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7; cp. 9:10; 15:33; Job 28:28; Ps. 111:10). In that God has created all things, in His light “we see light” (Ps. 36:9). Therefore, His “word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105). How can we put this light under a bushel basket (Matt. 5:15) and expect apologetic success? Despite the unbeliever’s assumption, God is not irrelevant to the world and life.

As a Christian you are to “avoid worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’” (1 Tim. 6:20). Therefore, in your apologetic method you must “hold fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that [you] may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:9).

People who do not have hearts for God do not know anything *truly*. According to Dr. Bahnsen, “faith is . . . prerequisite for a genuinely rational understanding of anything” for “faith is the necessary foundation or framework for rationality and understanding.”<sup>12</sup> We are not saying unbelievers “know nothing.” We are saying that they do not know anything “*truly*,” because they do not recognize the most fundamental reality: All facts are God-created facts, not brute facts. Things do not simply exist as the result of random evolutionary forces. They are given meaning and significance because they exist in God’s plan, for His purpose, and in order to bring Him glory. Indeed, unbelievers do not acknowledge the biggest fact of all reality—God.

Paul teaches that in Christ “are hidden *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. . . . See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to

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<sup>12</sup>Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 272, 273.

Christ” (Col. 2:3, 8). He warns about being taken captive by “empty deception,” “the tradition of men,” and “the elementary principles of the world.” The Scripture here calls you to non-neutrality when seeking to promote the knowledge of the truth.

*You are commanded to positively bow in submission to the Lord in all things.* Neutrality strikes at your *faithfulness* because you are called to submit to God and Christ in *all things*, not just some things or inner personal matters “religious things.”

In too many places to cite, the New Testament calls God and Christ “Lord.”<sup>13</sup> In fact, both God the Father and God the Son may be called the “Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16). The word “Lord” is a translation of the Greek word *kurios*, which means “master, owner.”<sup>14</sup> Just as the slave must not neutrally weigh the master’s commands, neither should we who are God’s “servants” (Rom. 1:1; 6:22; 1 Cor. 7:22; 1 Pet. 2:16). For instance, Paul commands hearty, total obedience to actual slaves in his day:

- “Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart” (Eph. 6:5–6; cp. Col. 3:22).

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<sup>13</sup>The word “Lord” occurs 497 times in the New Testament. The honorific title “Lord Jesus” occurs eighty-nine times.

<sup>14</sup>Interestingly, the English word “church” is derived from the Greek word *kuriakos*, which means “the Lord’s.” Christians gathered into the “church” are the “Lord’s.” (Do not be confused in this: The Greek word which is *translated* “church” in our English Bibles is *ecclesia*. However, we are here talking about the English *word* “church,” not the *translation*.)

- “Let all who are under the yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine may not be spoken against” (1 Tim. 6:1).

On this master/servant relation, Paul also discounts any compromise with the world through a neutrality principle when he writes: “For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10). You are to be a “slave of Christ, doing the will of God *from the heart*” (Eph. 6:6). You are even positively warned *not* to adopt the ways of the world such as the neutrality principle: “Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2).

As noted before, your Savior calls you to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with *all your mind*, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). Your mind—and *all of its principles and methods*—must display love of God, not neutrality toward him.

Since you have been “bought with a price” you must “not become slaves of men” (1 Cor. 7:23; cp. 6:20). You are saved in order to “walk in *newness of life*” (all of life) that you “no longer be slaves to sin” (in any area) (Rom. 6:4, 6). This involves your not being “conformed to this world, but [being] transformed by the *renewing of your mind*” (Rom. 12:2a). Paul commanded that you “walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of *their mind*”

(Eph. 4:17) but “that you be *renewed in the spirit of your mind*, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of *the truth*” (Eph. 4:23–24).

In fact, “whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do” you must “do *all* to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31)—even your reasoning processes are to be for God’s glory. Whether you speak or act you must do so “that in *all things* God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 4:11). You must “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in *all respects*, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10; cp. 1 Thess. 2:12).

This leads you to hear the classic call to obedience *in your very thoughts*: “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). You are to challenge “every lofty thing” which is raised up “against the knowledge of God” so that you take “every thought captive” to “the obedience of Christ.” This plainly and forcefully calls you to obey Christ in the entirety of our thought processes, including your method for defending the faith of Christ.

To adopt neutrality in apologetics is unfaithful. You must not forget the nature of the unbeliever’s challenge:

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.<sup>15</sup>

Everywhere around you lurks the hidden assumption that life can and should be compartmentalized into religious and non-religious realms. And that the religious issues are narrowly defined within the context of formal Christian worship and various obvious religious exercises. The world believes that these religious exercises are fine—if kept to yourself or within your church life. But in the work-a-day world of everyday cultural activity, life must be neutral towards religious matters. Herein lies the lure to secularism. “More and more people care about religious tolerance as fewer and fewer care about religion” (Alexander Chase, 1966).

Never forget this. You must frequently remind yourself that you are engaged in spiritual warfare that seeks to undermine the absolute, universal lordship of the Triune God. The Bible views the situation just this way:

- Romans 1:18–32 details the unbeliever’s active suppression of the knowledge of God and the moral results of that suppression.
- Ephesians 2:1–10 shows the reality of sin, the nature of redemption, and the Christian’s high calling to walk in good works according to *God’s* pattern.
- Ephesians 4:17–32 highlights the nature of unbelieving thought and practice and sets these over against the way we “learn” Christ.

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<sup>15</sup>Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 31.

- Ephesians 6:10–20 speaks of your equipment for spiritual warfare, reminding you that ultimately your fight is against Satan himself.
- 1 Peter 2:11–25 directs you how to react when under persecution, so that you can follow Christ’s example and leave a strong witness for him.
- 1 Peter 3:15 obligates you to sanctify Christ in your hearts by being prepared to answer those who deny or challenge our faith.

### **The Christian Must be Humble in his Boldness**

In all of this you must not only inculcate knowledge, conviction, and courage, but also humility and wisdom in yourself and your fellow Christian students. Unfortunately, sometimes when the Christian recognizes the nuclear power of the Christian faith, he can develop a boastful or arrogant attitude. Paul condemns prideful boasting: “Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another” (Gal. 5:26; cp. Rom. 3:27; 1 Cor. 1:29; Gal. 5:26).

A boasting spirit and price must be avoided at all costs. “For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (1 Cor. 4:7). The call to apologetics requires humility: “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*” (1 Peter 3:15).

This danger of pride and arrogance is especially a danger in college students. As the humorist Will Rogers (1879–1935) once remarked: “College is wonderful because it takes the children away from home just as they reach the arguing stage.” The derivation of the term “sophomore” is from the compound of two Greek words: *sophia*, which means “wise,” and

*moron*, which means “fool” (see: Rom. 1:22; 1 Cor. 1:20, 25, 27; 3:18 for both words). The second year college student now has a full year of college level academic training; it can go to his head.

As James Barnes (1806–1936) amusingly observed, “You can always tell a Harvard man, but you can’t tell him much.” Max Beerbohn (1872–1956) once confessed, “I was a modest, good-humored boy. It is Oxford that has made me insufferable.” These observations should not characterize you as Christians.

## II. Exegetical Observations

Let’s focus a little attention on a key passage that helps flesh out more of what Dr. Bahnsen teaches. In Paul’s powerful statement in 2 Corinthians 10:3–5, he speaks in terms of a battle. It is a battle with an enemy who is arrayed against Christians in deep enmity and violent hostility: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not *war* according to the flesh, for the *weapons* of our *warfare* are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the *destruction* of *fortresses*. We are *destroying* speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought *captive* to the obedience of Christ.” His repeated emphasis underscores the depth of the enmity that exists between the children of God and the children of the devil from the time of the fall (Gen. 3:15; cp. John 8:44; Eph. 2:1–2; 1 John 3:10).

Here Paul specifically calls upon you to employ “divinely powerful”<sup>16</sup> weapons, not weapons that derive from our fallen flesh such as the neutrality postulate. These intellectual weapons arise from your renewed mind in Christ. Nor does Paul commend *neutrality* in the battle, but vigorous, all-out warfare. In fact, he seeks the absolute *destruction* of the opposing

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<sup>16</sup>“Divinely powerful” is the translation of *dunata to theo*, “powerful to God.”



thought patterns. The word for “destroying” (*kathaireo*) is used in Acts 13:19 of God’s destroying the seven nations of Canaan. It speaks of total conquest, not slightly damaging—and certainly not of compromising through neutrality. In this war, then, we must seek the unconditional surrender of unbelieving sinner.

The warfare Paul mentions is not a physical battle, to be sure. It is a battle of the minds. He calls upon Christians to wage war against “speculations” and “every lofty thing raised up against the *knowledge of God*.” Notice the plurality of “speculations” (or “reasonings”<sup>17</sup>): *all* speculations that resist God are targeted for destruction, *any* “lofty thing” raised up against the “knowledge” of God. Nor does he urge only a destructive warfare, but a re-constructive one: The old fallen world must be overthrown *so that* a new master may be established: We are to take “every *thought* captive to the *obedience of Christ*.”<sup>18</sup> Nothing in all of this suggests his accepting neutrality in the realm of thought; everything suggests otherwise. Bahnsen quotes Van Til’s powerful statement in this regard:

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

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<sup>17</sup>The Greek word here translated “speculations” is *logismos*. It appears as “thoughts” in Romans 2:15. It speaks of careful thought and deliberate reflection, as when translated “considered” in Hebrews 11:19 and 2 Corinthians 10:11, or “take account” in John 11:50.

<sup>18</sup>Herbert Schlossberg wrote an excellent critique and rebuttal of secular humanism titled *Idols for Destruction: The Conflict of Christian Faith and American Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993).

basic assumption, or presuppositions differ. On the non-Christian basis man is assumed to be the final reference point in predication.<sup>19</sup> . . . The Reformed method . . . begins frankly “from above.” It would “presuppose” God. But in presupposing God it cannot place itself at any point on a neutral basis with the non-Christian.”<sup>20</sup>

### III. Questions Raised

Attempt to answer the following questions on your own before looking at the text or consulting the [Answer Key](#).

1. Why does Dr. Bahnsen say that the unbelieving mind is actually “hostile” to the Christian worldview? What evidence does he provide?
2. In Dr. Bahnsen’s lecture on neutrality, he urges you to recognize two important truths about the unbeliever’s claim of neutrality in reasoning. What were those two major points regarding neutrality?
3. What statements by Christ discount the possibility of neutrality?
4. Why do we say that men cannot be neutral toward God? Provide at least three biblical lines of argument supporting your answer.
5. What do we mean by the “noetic effect” of sin?

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<sup>19</sup>Predication is a logical concept borrowed from grammar. In logic predication is either the affirming or denying of something. It is the attributing or negating of something to the subject of a proposition. For instance, consider the following two statements of predication: “The sun is hot”; “The dark side of the moon is not hot.” The first affirms (predicates) hotness of the sun; the second denies hotness of the dark side of the moon.

<sup>20</sup>Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 18 citing Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 15ff.

6. Does Scripture teach that even the mind of man and his reasoning processes are affected by sin? Prove your answer by citing Scripture.
7. In that unbelievers have contributed much to human thought, science, and culture, what does Dr. Bahnsen mean when he states that faith in God is a pre-requisite to truly understanding?
8. Look up 2 Corinthians 10:4–5. With Christian friends, discuss its meaning and significance for apologetics.

#### **IV. Practical Application**

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

1. Organize an apologetics club for the purpose of encouraging fellow Christians to understand the significance of apologetics and to pool your intellectual resources.
2. Discuss with Christian friends the doctrine of sin and its implications in defending the faith. In this study, show the practical usefulness of understanding biblical doctrine.
3. Look for articles on secular websites regarding neutrality and the unbiased mind. Formulate some responses to those assertions, using the material in our first two lessons.
4. Urge members of your apologetics club to jot down professors' statements or class assignments that either assume or assert neutrality. Train yourself to be alert to the presumption of the necessity of neutrality.
5. Begin collecting books on apologetics. Build a small lending library.
6. Have a book-of-the-month discussion in your apologetics club. Assign one person to lead each month; encourage members to review and come ready to discuss books at the meetings.

## V. Recommended Reading

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

K. Scott Oliphant, “The Noetic Effects of Sin,” in *The Westminster Theological Journal*,

63:1 (2001): 199–202:

<http://mywebpages.comcast.net/oliphint/Writings/Moroney%20review%20for%20wtj.htm>

Sarah J. Flashing, “The Myth of Secular Neutrality: Unbiased Bioethics?” (The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity) This web article deals with supposed neutrality in the Terry Shiavo case in Florida in 2005:

[www.cbhd.org/resources/bioethics/flashing\\_2005-08-12\\_print.htm](http://www.cbhd.org/resources/bioethics/flashing_2005-08-12_print.htm))

Michael J. Kruger, “The Sufficiency of Scripture in Apologetics” in *The Master’s*

*Theological Journal*, 12:1 (Spring, 2001):69–87

(<http://websearch.cs.com/cs/boomerang.jsp?query=neutrality+and+apologetics&page=1&offset=0>)

Thomas E. Woodward, “Staring Down Darwinism: A Book Review”:

[www.apologetics.org/articles/staring.html](http://www.apologetics.org/articles/staring.html))