## Lesson 6

## Worldviews in Collision

Based on Lecture 3 of

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

"What partnership have righteousness and lawlessness,
or what fellowship has light with darkness?
Or what harmony has Christ with Belial,
or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?"
(2 Corinthians 6:14b–15)

In the last three lessons we studied worldviews fairly carefully. We are now familiar with what worldviews are, who has them, why they are important in themselves, and their function in apologetics:

- Worldviews may be defined as a network of beliefs and commitments which help us intellectually understand and practically and morally operate in the world.
- Worldviews are universally held throughout the human race. Every sane person has a worldview, they are not just narrowly religious constructs.
- Worldviews are based on foundational philosophical presuppositions that are essential to maintaining them.

- Worldviews attempt to resolve issues regarding the big three philosophical questions: What is the nature of reality (metaphysics)? How do we know (epistemology)? How should we behave (ethics)?
- Biblical apologetics must operate at the worldview level, challenging unbelief
  with the totality of the Christian system. Apologetics should never succumb to
  piecemeal analysis, allowing the unbeliever to maintain his worldview
  assumptions.

We now will be discussing Dr. Bahnsen's third lecture, "Worldviews in Collision." In this study he focuses on the conflicts that occur between believing and unbelieving worldviews. Worldviews do not simply offer interesting options as personal preferences for understanding life, several of which can be held simultaneously. Worldviews are all-or-nothing propositions.

## I. Central Concerns

Dr. Bahnsen urges you to recognize the unavoidable, unrelenting, unqualified conflict between Christianity and the worldview of unbelief. The Christian worldview does not simply differ with the unbelieving worldview at some points, but absolutely conflicts with it across the board on all points. The unbelievers' "epistemology is informed by their ethical hostility to God,' as Van Til said. Thus, Van Til held that there are no main points, systematically basic principles, or central truths in philosophy where the disagreement between the believer and the unbeliever will

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>You should be aware that in the final analysis, when all things are considered, "there are only two fundamental outlooks: the Christian and the non-Christian." Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998), 277.

not be seen. . . . [T]he antithesis between the thinking of the believer and the thinking of the unbeliever must be systematic and total."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, Presuppositional Apologetics requires that you recognize the antithesis between Christianity and all variations of the non-Christian worldview, whether religious or secular. The neutralist perspective plays down the antithesis, and in the process ends up arguing only the probability of the existence of a god—a far cry from Presuppositionalism's argument for the necessary existence of the God of Scripture.

As Dr. Bahnsen will demonstrate more fully in the remaining lectures, the antithesis is such that "faith is thus prerequisite for a genuinely rational understanding of anything" and "faith is the necessary foundation or framework for rationality and understanding." That is a bold claim—a claim you must understand if you truly want to challenge the unbeliever's worldview. As he argues in this lecture, unresolvable conflicts exist between the two outlooks on reality, knowledge, and ethics. Consequently, "presuppositional apologetics calls for believers to be steadfast about the antithesis if they would defend the uniqueness, exclusivity, and indispensability of the Christian faith." So then, he carefully explains the Christian worldview in his earlier lectures so that you will grasp this bold concept when he focuses on it later. Hence, our emphasis on worldviews.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Bahnsen, Van Til's Apologetic, 273, 274.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Bahnsen, Van Til's Apologetic, 272, 273.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>Bahnsen, Van Til's Apologetic, 276.

#### **Redemptive History and the Antithesis**

In order to understand the philosophical antithesis necessary for biblical apologetics, you must consider the story of Scripture itself. The antithesis is traced throughout the biblical record as an unrelenting theme of man's rebellion against his Creator.

Adam in Eden. The historical narrative of Adam and Eve in the Garden is the foundational, defining story of the human race and its current predicament. After outlining the creation of all things by *Elohim* the powerful Creator in Genesis 1, Moses emphasizes the covenantal relation between God and man in Genesis 2. He does this using God's covenant name (*Jehovah*) in the context of the intimate creative formation of man: Adam's body is lovingly created by the hand of God and life is intimately breathed into him by the Spirit of God (Gen. 2:7), whereas animals were "massed produced" (1:20, 24).

Genesis 2 shows the Lord's joyful preparation of a tranquil environment (2:8) with abundant provisions of water (2:6, 10, 13–14), food (2:9 16), peaceful animals (2:19–20)—and a bride for Adam (2:21–24). In all of this beautiful environment there was no shame (2:25)—indeed, all was "very good" (1:31).

In that glorious, peaceable, loving context described in Genesis 2, man rebels against his covenantal Creator. Rather than walking with God as he once had (Gen. 3:8), he hides from him in fear (Gen. 3:10) so that God must call him out of his hiding (Gen. 3:9). Spiritual death had now overcome him. In rebelling against God he immediately senses enmity where amicability once existed. In running from God Adam expresses his alienation. "Adam wanted to be like God but without God, before God, and not in accordance with God" (Maximus the Confessor, 580–662). Peter Kreeft has commented that "the national anthem of hell is, 'I Did it My Way."

God's holy response to man's disobedience is to curse the rebel and his environment.

Genesis 3:15 establishes the theme of antithesis that will continue throughout Scripture and history:

"And I will put enmity

Between you and the woman,

And between your seed and her seed;

He shall bruise you on the head,

And you shall bruise him on the heel."

Rather than peace and harmony, man's history becomes characterized by conflict and struggle. The "seed of the woman" points to the lineage of the saved which eventually issues forth in Christ the Redeemer; the "seed of the Serpent" speaks of the lineage of the lost who are controlled by Satan (cp. 1 John 3:10).

Cain and Abel. This antithesis expresses itself immediately in the affairs of the human race; brother arises against brother when Cain slays Abel (Gen. 4:8). In Genesis 4:25, though, we learn of the line of the redeemed issuing from Seth, another son of Adam: "And to Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. *Then men began to call upon the name of the Lord*" (Gen. 4:26).

**The days of Noah.** Despite righteous Seth's offspring, the enmity and the antithesis persist among men. The redeemed seed (believers) intermarry with the unredeemed (unbelievers) blurring the antithesis and putting the progress of redemption in history at risk. The "sons of God" (those who "call upon the name of the Lord," Gen. 4:26) begin marrying the daughters of

(unbelieving) men (Gen. 6:2) leading to the breakdown of righteousness even within the believing community: "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5).

God intervenes to save Noah's family, the last remaining family of believers, as he destroys the earth with the Flood: "And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. And the Lord said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them.' But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:6–8). Peter summarizes this event which demonstrates the antithesis: God "did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly" (2 Peter 2:5, cp. 1 Peter 3:20; Eze. 14:14, 20).

**Israel's Exodus.** We see this antithesis in Israel's exodus from Egypt. When Israel enters the Promised Land she is commanded to destroy those who dwell in it and to make no covenant with them (Deut. 7:1–6). By this holy war God pre-empts the washing out of the antithesis as occurred in Noah's day, securing the believing lineage and community of Israel:

"Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and He will quickly destroy you. . . . For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:3–4, 6).

Satan v. Christ and Christians. Skipping ahead, we see this antithesis in Christ's incarnational coming as the ultimate Seed of the Woman (Luke 3:38; Gal. 4:4). Satan attempts to destroy Jesus as a young child by the hand of Herod,<sup>6</sup> causing his family to flee to Egypt (Matt. 2:13–14). We see the antithesis in Satan's demonic opposition to Christ throughout his ministry (Matt. 4:1–11; 12:24–28). We see it in Christ's opposition from the religious leaders who are of their father the devil (John 8:31–44). We see it in Christ's crucifixion which was inspired by Satan (John 13:2). We see it in the assault upon the Christian church in the remainder of the New Testament (e.g., Acts 8:1; 11:19; 2 Cor. 12:10; 1 Thess. 2:16–17), as Satan walks about seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).

Jesus views the world as in two camps. He designates these camps in antithesis as either sheep or goats (Matt. 25:32–33), righteous or unrighteous (John 5:28–29), wheat or tares (Matt. 13:29–30). He warns that your commitment to Christ sets you in opposition to the world (Matt. 10:22; John 15:18–19; 17:14).

Paul teaches us of the antithesis, reminding us of our past alienation and enmity with God in our minds: "You were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds" (Col. 1:21). He vividly emphasizes the antithesis in 2 Corinthians 6:14b–15, warning us to "not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>As an aside, Christ was probably between one and two years old (not a newborn) when Herod attempted to destroy him, as the following evidence suggests: (1) It would have taken the Magi some time to travel from the East (Matt. 2:1); (2) Herod inquires about the time they originally saw the star announcing his birth (Matt. 2:7), then has his men seek for a "child," not an "infant" (Matt. 2:8); (3) Herod sends out a decree to kill the children up to two years old (Matt. 2:16); (4) When the Magi found Christ, they saw a "child," not an "infant" (Matt. 2:11); (5) The Magi found Christ in a "house," not in a "stable" (Matt. 2:11); (6) Joseph and Mary gave the temple sacrifice associated with poverty (Luke 2:24; Lev. 12:8), though after the Magi came they would have had gold and other valuables (Matt. 2:11).

believer in common with an unbeliever?" Ultimately, he deems men either in Adam or in Christ (1 Cor. 15:22).

James therefore warns us that "friendship with the world is hostility toward God" (Jms. 4:4). For this reason he directs you to "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 Jn. 2:15).

John divides mankind into two opposing groups: "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother" (1 Jn. 3:10). He warns that because of this the world will hate us (1 Jn. 3:13).

Hell as the final antithesis. The antithesis is exhibited in its starkest form in ultimate separation from God in eternal Hell. At the Day of Judgment, which Dr. Bahnsen calls the "Great Day of Antithesis," the lost enter into an existence that becomes absolutely and utterly meaningless in Hell.<sup>7</sup> The ungodly enter final Hell at the Second Coming of Christ which issues forth in the Day of Judgment (Matt. 25:41–46).

At Christ's Second Coming the unbelievers' condition is characterized as "destruction" because of the absolute ruin that befalls them as they are separated from God forever: "When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of *eternal destruction*, *away from the presence of the Lord* and from the glory of His power" (2 Thess. 1:7–9).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>The doctrine of the Hell is under assault today, even from among evangelicals. This is another evidence of an attempt to blur the antithesis, an attempt found even among God's own people. For a defense of eternal Hell, see Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Hell* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995).

#### **Biblical Apologetics and the Antithesis**

Dr. Bahnsen teaches you that to be a good, faithful, and effective apologist you must be aware, be diligent, be observant.

First, be aware of the antithesis. The biblical record exhibits the antithesis as basic to the outworking of redemption; your biblical worldview demands it as the application of your view of God and sin. "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). You must understand the Bible in order to understand both the Christian and the non-Christian worldviews.

In that the Presuppositional Apologetic is biblically-based and worldview-oriented, Dr. Bahnsen emphasizes the biblical aspects of your worldview. The biblical angle is generally downplayed in non-presuppositional apologetic systems. You will always find in Dr. Bahnsen's apologetic writings frequent reference to Scripture. And this is not just to baptize his approach with the mere tipping of his hat to the Bible. His apologetic method is rooted firmly in Scripture and requires the Bible in order to flesh it out. His survey of the antithesis in redemptive history is crucial, not only for your understanding of the message of Scripture but for the method in apologetics.

Second, be diligent in pressing the antithesis. Do not blur the antithesis or overlook it. This is your main apologetic tool. This confronts the unbeliever with his dire condition before God. Dr. Bahnsen, therefore, urges you to press the Christian faith very particularly (not simply by means of a generic, vague theism or morality-in-general) when challenging the unbeliever. The unbeliever must be made to realize the stark difference between his worldview and the Christian faith so that he can be made to see the utter meaninglessness in his own outlook.

The Bible presents the unbeliever as *dead*, not simply wounded or ill. Speaking to Christian converts, Paul reminds them: "you were *dead* in your trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1; cp. 2:5; Col. 2:13). This is why salvation is often viewed as a passing from death into life: "Even when we were dead in our transgressions, [he] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph. 2:5; cp. John 5:24–25; Rom. 6:4; 1 John 3:14). Other images speak of your salvation in terms of a radical new life wherein you are born all over again (John 3:3; 1 Peter 1:3, 23) and your being re-created as an all new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15).

You must prod the unbeliever to understand that he cannot explain being good, helping a stranger, having meaning, and so forth, on his worldview. He must understand that ultimately he has no law governing reasoning, no predictability in his system. He lacks meaning, purpose, and value on his worldview foundations.

The unbeliever does not acknowledge the foundational antithesis; nor does he admit his own prejudice. He will profess neutrality, reason, and innocence. He will charge that you are simply making a leap of faith. You must show him the error in his reasoning.

Third, be observant in noting inconsistencies. You must challenge the unbeliever to recognize the inherent contradictions in the outworking of his life, in the very foundation of his worldview. Dr. Bahnsen's previous lecture on worldviews will be crucial to your being able to do this.

You must show him that he proclaims one thing, such as materialism, but then lives in a way that contradicts materialism. For instance, ask him why the unbelieving materialist scientist kisses his wife good-bye in the morning. Why does the "free love" advocate or the homosexual rights crowd decry right and wrong obligations being imposed upon sexual relations, but then complain in utter moral indignation about the war in Iraq, or America's unfair balance of wealth,

or the indebtedness of Third World nations to the West? How can they argue for a relativist view of sexual ethics but an absolutist view of war ethics? C. S. Lewis noted that "the moment you say that one set of moral ideas, can be better than another, you are, in fact, measuring them both by a standard, saying that one of them conforms to that standard more nearly than the other."

Dr. Gary North once noticed a blatant and ultimately amusing contradiction in a left-wing public protest. He saw a person carrying a two-sided sign. On one side it read: "Down with capital punishment." On the other side, it stated: "Up with abortion rights." Thus, one side of his placard called for prohibiting putting a person (the murderer) to death, while the other called for allowing putting a person (the unborn) to death. Dr. North realized there was a unifying principle in this protestor's worldview, a unity he didn't realize and would be loathe to admit. His unifying principle was: "Condemn the innocent and free the guilty." That is, condemn the murder victim (by not effecting true justice) and the unborn child (by not protecting him), but free the murderer and the aborting mother.

You will want to show the unbeliever that to a certain extent he really wants to see the world around him just as you do, but that he doesn't want to accept your Christian foundations which are necessary to that end. As Van Til argues, the unbeliever lives on borrowed capital, that is, he knows the truth deep down and even secretly assumes it, but he has no right to believe it on his own presuppositions—he must borrow from the Christian worldview.

In philosophically arguing against God, the unbeliever must depend upon a worldview that supports logic—which only the Christian worldview can account for (as Dr. Bahnsen will begin forcefully demonstrating in the next lecture). Therefore, according to Van Til, the unbeliever is like the child who has to crawl up into his father's lap to slap him.

# II. Exegetical Observations

Romans 1 contains a key insight for building up and understanding Presuppositional Apologetics. In this passage we see that believers are *self-deceived* in their denying God so that their very real accomplishments contradict their professed worldview. Let us reflect briefly on Romans 1:18–20.

As Dr. Bahnsen urges in this lecture, when arguing Presuppositionally for the existence of God, you *must press the antithesis* between your own worldview and the unbeliever's. You must show him that only on the basis of your Christian worldview can anyone make sense of reality, logic, and morality, and that the unbeliever himself must, therefore, operate on the principles of the Christian system even when he doesn't realize it.

Paul teaches us that the unbeliever does actually "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). That is, he actively must hold down, constrain, and resist his own internal awareness of God. The word "suppress" in the original Greek is the present active participial *katechonton*. The word itself indicates forceful effort. The stress of the present active participial emphasizes a *constant*, *active* suppression. In fact, the context repeatedly states that the ungodly are unsuccessful in holding down this glorious truth (vv. 19, 20, 21), which also proves ongoing effort is constantly being put forth.

Paul continues, declaring that the unbeliever knows God exists in that the evidence comes to him in two basic forms: "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" (vv. 19–20). He knows God both internally and externally.

The unbeliever knows God *internally*, deep down inside in his heart-of-hearts, for Paul says God is evident "*within* him" in that they are the image of God (Gen. 1:26). Paul follows up on this line of evidence a little later when he mentions the unbeliever's God-given conscience within (Rom. 2:14–15). On Romans 1:19 John Calvin (1509–1564) comments: "And he said, *in them* rather than *to them*, for the sake of greater emphasis, for . . . he seems here to have intended to indicate a manifestation, by which they might be so closely pressed, that they could not evade; for every one of us undoubtedly finds it to be engraven on his own heart."

And the unbeliever knows God externally from divine revelation in nature all around him, because Paul says God is "evident *to* them." His "invisible attributes . . . have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made."

In all of this we must understand that it is *God* who makes himself known, not man who seeks God (for "no one seeks after God," Rom. 3:11): "for *God* made it evident to them" (3:19). And God does not fail.

As odd as it may sound, as vehemently as atheists may deny it, Paul insists that they really do *know* God, but that they refuse to honor him by suppressing the truth: "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. 1:21). Truly, as Jeremiah lamented: "The heart is more deceitful than all else" (Jer. 17:9).

This truth is vitally important in the Presuppositional method. Presuppositionalism involves whole worldviews, including metaphysics and epistemology simultaneously. Dr. Van Til writes: "there can be no more fundamental question in epistemology than the question whether or not facts can be known without reference to God . . . [and consequently] whether or not God

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup>John Calvin, Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles (Grand Rapids: Baker, [2003]), 69–70.

exists." Therefore, God's existence (a metaphysical issue) directly impacts man's ability to know (an epistemological issue). This is significant because it explains how the unbeliever can accomplish so much while denying God: deep down within, without even self-consciously realizing it, he actually is depending upon the world as God created and sustains it.

It is your duty as a Christian apologist to show the unbeliever that even in his denying God he is actually presupposing him. As Van Til succinctly expresses it: "Anti-theism presupposes theism." Unbelievers cannot be true to their professed disbelief in God, for if they did so and acted consistent with that profession they could not make sense out of the world, they would have no reason for reason. Consequently, Paul finds his point of contact with the unbeliever, not in neutrality but in reality: even though he denies it, the unbeliever knows God exists.

# **III. Questions Raised**

- 1. What is the concept of "antithesis" in apologetics?
- 2. Where do we see the problem of antithesis begin in Scripture? What is the key verse that sets the pattern of antithesis throughout Scripture? In what other contexts do we see it?
- 3. How does Genesis 2 set up the horrible character of Adam's Fall in Genesis 3?
- 4. Where do we see the ultimate antithesis?
- 5. Why is it important to understand the Bible in order to bring a *philosophical* challenge against the unbeliever?
- 6. Give some samples of evidence of contradiction within the unbeliever's worldview as it plays out in his life.

Cornelius Van Til, A Survey of Christian Epistemology (den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1969), 4.

Van Til, A Survey of Christian Epistemology, xii.

- 7. What is the basic image of sin which the Bible employs of the catastrophic nature of sin?
- 8. What biblical passages show that unbeliever does know God but that he actively suppresses that knowledge?

# **IV. Practical Applications**

- 1. Sit down with your Bible and think through its story from Genesis to Revelation. Jot down some additional stories from the Bible that point out the antithesis at work in history.
- 2. Using your notes from the first practical application above, draw up a one lesson Bible study on biblical antithesis and teach it to Christian friends. Invite their discussion and interaction.
  Challenge them in realizing the significance of this Bible-structuring concept.
- 3. Choose one biblical sample of the antithesis and look it up in Scripture. Read the whole story in its context and explain the antithesis more fully in your own words.
- 4. Dr. Bahnsen gives a few samples of contradictions at work among unbelievers. For instance, he notes that though a scientist may be a materialist, he treats his wife affectionately by kissing her good-bye in the morning. Think of some other common contradictions in unbelieving worldviews.
- 5. Read Romans 1:28–2:12 and jot down a detailed outline of Paul's argument. Study the flow of argument and note how suppressing the knowledge of God leads naturally to immorality—when consistently followed out.
- 6. Discuss with some Christian friends whether they believe that atheists truly exist. That is, ask them their views about the reality of absolute unbelief in God. Have a brief study on Romans 1 prepared so that you can show them the biblical view.

- 7. Go to the American Atheist website and read Robin Murray O'Hair's "Wedding the Atheist Way" (http://www.atheists.org/comingout/weddings/atheistweddings.html). Draw out of this article several internal contradictions.
- 8. Search on the web for ex-atheists who have become evangelical Christians. Read their testimonies, then copy them into a file for future reference.
- 9. Read the article "Atheist Becomes Theist" about famed atheist Anthony Flew becoming a theist (http://www.biola.edu/antonyflew/). Note deficiencies in his new worldview.

# V. Recommended Reading

- Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998), 272–287.
- Greg L. Bahnsen, "Apologetics In Practice":

  www.reformed.org/apologetics/index.html?mainframe=/apologetics/index\_apol.html
- John H. Gerstner, "Does God Love the Sinner and Hate Only His Sin?": <a href="www.the-highway.com/lovesinner\_Gerstner.html">www.the-highway.com/lovesinner\_Gerstner.html</a>
- G. Zeineldé Jordan, "Birth and Death of an Atheist":

  www.theism.net/authors/zjordan/docs\_files/birth\_files/02birth.htm

Ron Rhodes, "Strategies for Dialoguing with Atheists": (http://home.earthlink.net/~ronrhodes/Atheism.html)

Brian Schwertley, "The Biblical Doctrine of Hell Examined": www.reformed.com/pub/hell.htm

Russell Grigg, "What's In a Name?": <a href="https://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v23/i4/name.asp">www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v23/i4/name.asp</a>

Michael Bumbulis, "Christianity and the Birth of Science,"

(http://www.ldolphin.org/bumbulis/)