

# APOLOGETICS: GIVING A REASON FOR OUR HOPE

TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (PCA)

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# A CASE FOR PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS

- Outline
  - Presuppositionalism in theory: principles
  - Presuppositionalism in practice: practice (arguments and strategies used)
  - Advantages of Presuppositionalism

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRINCIPLE

- Two fundamental principles that follow from a biblical theology
  - The No Neutrality Principle
  - The No Autonomy Principle
- The No Neutrality Principle: there can be no intellectual or epistemological [concerning knowledge, truth, rationality] neutrality in apologetics.
  - It is impossible to approach any issue in apologetics from a religiously neutral perspective.
    - Is there a God? What is God like? Was Jesus really the Son of God? Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Is the Bible really divinely inspired?
    - When a person considers these issues, they do so with a worldview that is either Christian or non-Christian.

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRINCIPLE

- The Biblical Basis for the No Neutrality Principle
  - Matthew 12:30: “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”
    - Question: Does Jesus leave any room for a neutral or indifferent perspective on him?
    - The opposition involves mind, heart, and will.
  - Colossians 2:8: “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.”
    - Question: Does Paul leave any room for a religiously neutral mindset?
    - There are basically two philosophies: (1) The philosophy that depends on Christ and his word (2) The philosophies that rely on human tradition and the basic principles of this world

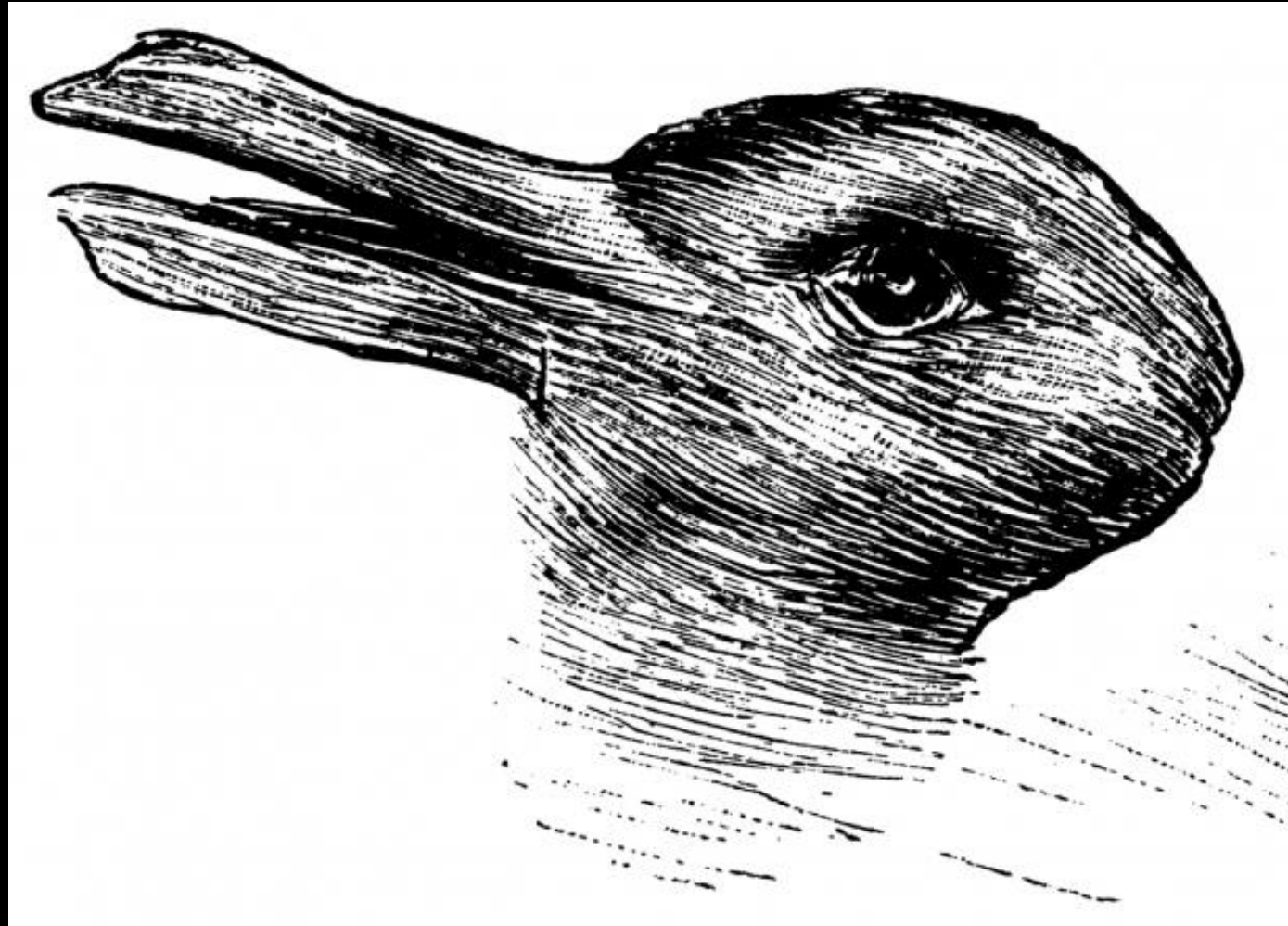
# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRINCIPLE

- The Biblical Basis for the No Neutrality Principle
  - Romans 8:5-8: “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”
    - Question: Does Paul leave any room for a religious neutral mindset?
    - Two basic mindsets: (1) The sinful [fleshly] mind that is hostile to God (2) The spiritual mind that submits to the things of the Spirit
    - There’s no third mindset that is indifferent to God
  - Conclusion: There is a biblical basis for the no neutrality principle

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRINCIPLE

- Argument for the No Neutrality Principle
  - Any kind of meaningful intellectual activity requires presuppositions [foundational assumptions, commitments and convictions that guide your beliefs, your judgments, your reasoning, your interpretation of evidence, and your actions].
    - In order to reason at all, a person must rely on a host of presuppositions (logic, knowledge, values, nature of reality, truth)
  - There are no such things as “uninterpreted facts”
    - Illustration: duck-rabbit image
      - You can't see the rabbit and duck simultaneously
      - The image itself is constant, but interpretations can differ based on the same raw sense experience.

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRINCIPLE



# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRINCIPLE

- Argument for the No Neutrality Principle
  - Our presuppositions about God play a central and defining role in our view of the world and our experience in it.
    - Illustration: debate over the evidence for Darwinian evolution
      - People are coming to the evidence with radically different presuppositions
      - Phillip Johnson: the debate over Darwinism isn't really a scientific debate; it's a philosophical debate about the naturalist worldview.
      - The naturalist worldview says that if you are doing science, then you cannot allow any supernatural explanations. Only natural explanations are permissible.



# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRINCIPLE

- “We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our *a priori* adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is an absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.” (Richard Lewontin, “Billions and Billions of Demons,” *The New York Review of Books*)

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRINCIPLE

- Argument for the No Neutrality Principle
  - Illustration: *The Meaning of Jesus* – a dialogue between N. T. Wright and Marcus Borg on the identity of Jesus
    - Wright examines the data as a committed Christian
    - Borg examines the data as a panentheist and with a modern social concerns
    - Each author examine the Gospels and draw conclusions about Jesus' identity
      - Result: each person ends up with a Jesus that fits their prior presuppositions
      - Wright: Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God incarnate
      - Borg: Jesus is a pacifistic, egalitarian, social-justice advocate

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRINCIPLE

- Argument for the No Neutrality Principle
  - Illustration: the old Christian lady and her atheist neighbor
  - Conclusion: There is no neutrality – everyone has worldview commitments that shapes and determines how they look at the world.

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRINCIPLE

- The No Autonomy Principle: There can be no intellectual or epistemological autonomy in apologetics.
  - Autonomy – self-law, self-rule, a law to one’s self, not subject to higher authority or standard
  - A biblical theory of knowledge requires us to renounce intellectual autonomy – the belief that our minds serve as the final standard of truth and what is reasonable.
    - Our minds are not the final authority and standard for human thought.
    - Protagoras (5<sup>th</sup> Cent), “Man is the measure of all things.”
      - God is the measure of all things!
      - God truth as it has been revealed to us is the final authority and standard for human thought.
      - Therefore, we cannot be a rule unto ourselves (individually or collectively); all human thought must be submissive to God’s revelation (natural and special).

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRINCIPLE

- The Biblical Basis for the No Autonomy Principle
  - Colossians 2:8: “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not *according to Christ*.”
    - Question: What does Paul take to be the standard and authority for human thought?
  - Romans 12:2: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”
    - Our mind [thinking] needs to be renewed so that it no longer conforms to worldly standards; it needs to be transformed so that is conformed to God’s standards.

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRINCIPLE

- The Biblical Basis for the No Autonomy Principle

- 2 Corinthians 10:4-5: “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and *take every thought captive to obey Christ...*”
  - Paul is writing of the comprehensive Lordship of Jesus Christ, including the intellectual realm. Every thought must be made obedient to Christ.
  - Therefore, our thinking must submit to the mind of Christ as our standard and ultimate authority.
- Conclusion: the no autonomy principle is grounded in Scripture.
- Implication: we do not stand in judgment over God’s word; God’s word stands in judgment over us. His word is the final standard, not our reason.

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRINCIPLE

- Argument for the No Autonomy Principle
  - The no autonomy principle follows from the idea of an Absolute Personal Creator who reveals himself to his creatures.
    - The Creator's mind is definitive and normative.
    - The creature's mind is derivative and subordinate.
  - God's revelation must have no less authority than the God whose word it is.

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRINCIPLE

- Implications for Apologetics

#1 There must be no pretended neutrality in our apologetic method.

- Neutrality is impossible – we don't reason in a vacuum.
- Those things that are typically taken to be neutral are not (laws of logic, scientific method, historical method).

#2 There can be no appeal to neutral facts.

- There are no uninterpreted facts – facts that are simply neutral givens without any process of interpretation.

#3 There is *common* ground in every apologetic encounter, but there is not *neutral* ground.

- The common ground is *Christian ground*
- “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’” (Abraham Kuyper)

#4 An apologetic encounter involves a clash of entire worldviews.

- We need to deal with unbelievers at the worldview level.



# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRACTICE

- A three-step method in practice

#1 Identify the non-Christian's presuppositions (worldview).

- Remember TAKES
- Discussion Question: *Why is it important to recognize this step?*
- Discussion Question: *How do we accomplish this in practice?*

#2 Show the inadequacy of the non-Christian's presuppositions (worldview).

- Show that the unbeliever's worldview cannot account for what they want to affirm (some kind of truth; some kind of morality; dignity and equality of humanity, science, etc.)
- Show that unbelieving worldviews undermine the things we all take for granted (reason, truth, morality, science, etc.)

#3 Show the adequacy of the Christian's presuppositions (worldview)

- Why is this third step necessary?

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRACTICE

- Critiquing worldviews
  - Why believe the Christian worldview rather than some alternative?
    - We need to provide reasons for believing that Christianity is true and other worldviews are false
- 8 Tools (4 head, 4 heart) to show that Christianity is the only reasonable worldview
  - 4 Head tools – using our intellects to determine whether something is true
  - 4 Heart tools – showing that Christianity is experientially fulfilling

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRACTICE

- Four 'Head' Tools: Four *theoretical* (more intellectual) tools for critiquing worldviews:

## (1) Consistency – is the worldview internally consistent?

- Are the tenets/presuppositions of the worldview logically consistent?
- Are the tenets/presuppositions consistent with a person's other beliefs?
- Explicit contradictions are rare
  - *Example:* "God exists" and "God doesn't exist" or "All truth is relative" and "Truth is absolute."
- Implicit contradictions
  - *Example:* "All truth is relative." - Where's the implicit contradiction?
  - *Example:* "There are no objective moral values." and "Religion is evil."
- Self-defeating claims
  - *Example:* "All perspectives are equally valid" (relativism) – How is that statement self-defeating?
  - *Example:* "Science is the only source of knowledge" (scientism) – How is that self-defeating?

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRACTICE

- Four 'Head' Tools: Four *theoretical* (more intellectual) tools for critiquing worldviews:
  - (2) Coherence
    - *Question:* Do the tenets/presuppositions of the worldview cohere (fit together) well?
    - *Illustration of incoherence:* propositions that are consistent but lack coherence
      - (1) Donald Trump is the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States.
      - (2) The chemical composition of water is H<sub>2</sub>O.
      - (3) The capital city of Uzbekistan is Tashkent.

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRACTICE

- Four 'Head' Tools: Four *theoretical* (more intellectual) tools for critiquing worldviews:
  - (2) Coherence
    - *Illustration of coherence*: propositions that are consistent and also cohere well
      - (1) There is a personal, all-powerful, all-good God who created man in after his own image.
      - (2) There are objective moral duties that apply to our everyday choices.
      - (3) Human beings are not merely complex meat machines.
    - *Example: Christianity versus Islam on divine justice and divine forgiveness*
      - In Islam there is no atonement, yet Allah is said to be forgiving. But how can he be both? It lacks coherence.
      - How can God be both just and forgiving? How does Christianity answer this?

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRACTICE

- Four 'Head' Tools: Four *theoretical* (more intellectual) tools for critiquing worldviews:

## (3) Explanation

- *Question:* How well does this worldview explain things about us and the world?
- *Example:* naturalism and the existence of the universe
  - Physical things do not exist necessary. So why does the physical universe exist?
  - Christianity: God freely chose to create the physical universe.
  - Naturalism: Has no explanation. There is nothing beyond the universe to explain its existence. It's a brute fact.

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRACTICE

- Four 'Head' Tools: Four *theoretical* (more intellectual) tools for critiquing worldviews:

## (3) Explanation

- *Example: naturalism and the moral value of altruism [making sacrifices for the sake of others that do not arise out of self-interest]*
  - According to naturalist worldview [survival of the fittest], altruism doesn't make any sense. Why would evolution introduce a principle that works against itself?
  - So to say evolution brought us to where we are and gave us morality contradicts itself. If survival of the fittest is true, why do we honor altruism as a moral virtue?
- *Example: secular environmentalism and why you should care about the environment*
  - Naturalism: this world is doomed for destruction
  - Christianity: this world has been entrusted to image bearers who rule with care

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRACTICE

- Four 'Head' Tools: Four *theoretical* (more intellectual) tools for critiquing worldviews:

## (4) Evidence

- *Question:* Does the worldview account for the available evidence?
- Different kinds of evidence: empirical, logical, intuitive, self-reflective, testimonial
- *Example:* naturalism and the fine-tuning of the universe for conscious life
  - Which worldview best explain the evidence? Naturalism, pure chance.  
Christianity, a divine designer.



# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRACTICE

- Four 'Head' Tools: Four *theoretical* (more intellectual) tools for critiquing worldviews:

## (4) Evidence

- *Example: Islam and the textual integrity of the New Testament*
  - Islam: Koran is the last in a series of Scriptures given by Allah (accepts OT and NT, but they have been corrupted)
  - If corruption really took place, we would expect evidence of those textual changes. However, the manuscripts show a remarkable degree of consistency, stability, and reliability.

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRACTICE

- Four 'Heart' Tools: Four practical tools for critiquing worldviews

## (1) Conscience

- *Question:* Does the worldview account for our basic moral convictions?
- *Example:* postmodernism (morality is a social construct) and pedophilia
  - If a society agreed that pedophilia is morally permissible, would that make it socially acceptable to engage in pedophilia according to postmodernism?
  - Can postmodernists really say that chattel slavery was morally wrong?  
Segregation?
  - The Point: Their own worldview undermines the moral convictions they have.

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRACTICE

- Four 'Heart' Tools: Four practical tools for critiquing worldviews

(2) Livability – whether this worldview can consistently be lived out

- *Question:* Is it possible to live out the worldview consistently in practice? **Is there consistency between theory and practice**
- *Example:* monism (all is ultimately one, Hindu) and money. Is there a real distinction between what's mine and yours?

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRACTICE

- Four 'Heart' Tools: Four practical tools for critiquing worldviews

## (3) Fulfilment

- *Question:* Does the worldview satisfy our deepest desires and instincts about life?
  - God has placed in us certain needs and desires that require fulfillment (Ecclesiastes 3:11)
  - C. S. Lewis: The fact that we have a desire for food indicates that there is such a thing as food.
- *Example:* Christianity and the human instinct to worship
  - Calvin, seed of religion; Augustine, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you."
  - Acts 17 – Athenians worshiped; the gospel tells how we can approach the true, transcendent God

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRACTICE

- Four 'Heart' Tools: Four practical tools for critiquing worldviews

## (4) Hope

- *Question:* Does the worldview offer real hope, both for the future and in the present?
  - In this fallen world, people need a reason to get out of bed.
- *Example:* atheism and honest hopelessness
  - Will the atheist really live up the bleak implications of their worldview?

# PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IN PRACTICE

“That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man’s achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul’s habitation henceforth be safely built.” (Bertrand Russell, “A Free Man’s Worship”) – Hopelessness is our only hope.

# ADVANTAGES TO PRESUPPOSITIONALISM

- It closely connects our apologetics to our theology.
- It honors the biblical principles of no neutrality and no autonomy.
- It recognizes that the common ground between the believer and the unbeliever isn't *neutral* ground but rather *Christian* ground.
- It defends Christianity *as a whole*—as an integrated self-contained worldview.
- It doesn't separate natural revelation from special revelation.
- It allows you to argue for Christianity from *any* aspect of human experience.
- It helps to show how arguments against Christianity often beg the question against it.
  - Bart Ehrman's, *Jesus Interrupted* – miracles

# ADVANTAGES TO PRESUPPOSITIONALISM

- It confirms that unbelievers are suppressing knowledge they already possess; they live on the basis of Christian truth (Romans 1:18-32).
- It enables you to show that even *objections* to Christianity must presuppose the *truth* of Christianity at the deepest level in order to be meaningful in the first place.
  - Example: Objections to the morality of the God of the Bible
  - Example: Transgender arguments rely upon created categories of male and female in order to rebel against them.
- It can deal with *postmodernist* worldviews as well as *modernist* worldviews.
- It allows for the use of evidences while avoiding the pitfalls of naïve evidentialism.
- It helps unbelievers to better understand (1) what Christianity is and (2) what's at stake.
- It encourages us to keep our apologetics Christ-centered and gospel-centered.