

KNOWING WHAT YOU BELIEVE

Bonus Content for
Every Believer Confident

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THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

Many Christians who are interested in evangelism and apologetics make the common mistake of thinking that they don't need to know more than the basic plan of salvation to be a good evangelist. They believe that knowing just a little about Jesus is enough. They may even think that too much knowledge will be a hindrance to effective outreach. As a result, they proclaim a message about Jesus without knowing very many of the details. Consequently, they don't know how to deal with objections to the Christian faith because they are relatively ignorant of the faith they are defending. They are easy prey for an unbeliever who knows even a little of the doctrinal content of the Christian faith and its complexities.

It is no surprise, then, that many Christians avoid interaction with unbelievers because either they have had an unpleasant encounter in which they could not give an answer for an objection raised by an unbeliever, or because they know that they really don't know what they believe. Even worse, they may have serious

doubts about some of what they have been taught, because they haven't given the time to study their faith.

Surprisingly, the key to becoming an effective evangelist and apologist is to know the Scriptures and sound doctrine! Knowing what you believe thoroughly provides a sure foundation to confronting the worldviews of others who reject the truth of the gospel. Instead of rushing off to evangelize before they even know what they are proclaiming, Christians would be better served if they would begin to take the time and effort to gain a systematic understanding of their beliefs and the Scriptures on which they are based.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN APOLOGETICS AND THEOLOGY

Theology is, at its heart, the study of God. The word *theology* is the combination of two Greek words, *theos* (God) and *logos* (a word about, or the study of). Christian theology studies all that God has revealed about himself, his creation, and his divine plan. While theology can be understood in its basic form even by children, because it is the study of the infinite, eternal, divine God it can also occupy the greatest minds with its complexity, depth, and beauty.

Apologetics is primarily a biblical and theological endeavor. This surprises many people who think of it first as a philosophical enterprise. While apologetics often deals with the same questions posed by philosophers, and at times incorporates contributions from philosophy, it is not primarily a philosophical activity. Philosophy rejects divine revelation; therefore, it can never provide a true picture of reality or a solution for the redemption of all creation.

Our apologetics, then, must be in agreement with our theology. Even more, it should flow from and be controlled by our theology. Our apologetic method is determined by our theology, not the other way around. If our theology tells us that the fall corrupted man completely, so that even his intellect is damaged and his heart totally depraved, we cannot develop an apologetic method that counts on the objectivity and goodness of humanity. By knowing sound doctrine thoroughly, therefore, we will possess more powerful intellectual arguments against unbelief.

Our doctrinal convictions begin with a faithful study of the Bible. We should move from the text of Scripture to our theological system, then to our apologetic methodology. This has the benefit of making us logically consistent, which is important since we aim to reveal the logical inconsistency and contradiction of the unbeliever's worldview. The more we know Scripture, the stronger our theological conclusions will be, which in turn will make our defense of the faith more robust.

THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

The doctrine of Scripture is one of the most important doctrines to know in depth, since the Bible serves as our foundation for knowing what we know. The Bible is also the target of many attacks on Christianity, so the better we know how it was written, what it says about itself, its historical nature, and place in Christian theology, the better we will be able to defend all of the Christian faith.

What Is the Bible?

There are many ideas about what the Bible is. Some believe it is like many of the rest of sacred religious books from around

the world—pious people’s reflections on their experiences of the divine. Others believe the Bible is simply a collection of myths that some people mistakenly take to be true. The Christian view, however, is that the Bible is the revelation of God about himself and his divine plan to redeem the world. The Bible, then, is the very Word of God to his creatures for the purpose of redeeming them. Second Timothy 3:16 tells us that the words of Scripture are the very words of God breathed out by God himself. This is what we call the doctrine of *inspiration*. God the Holy Spirit moved human authors to write his words so that each word, and the final finished product, are exactly what God wanted to be written and without any errors. This is what we call the doctrine of *inerrancy*.

Because God is the ultimate author of Scripture, all his power and authority are invested in it. The Bible is not a dead book or an inert substance that has no power. Rather, the words of Scripture, being the very words of God, have incredible power to expose, convict, and transform the human heart (Heb. 4:12). Unbelievers often think that Christians merely follow the instructional teachings of a lifeless two-thousand-year-old book of facts and commandments. In reality, Christians follow the living God who has spoken through his Word, which is a living and powerful document. When we defend the Bible, we should do it with this in mind.

Our relationship to the Bible is not like reading instructions on assembling a bicycle, but rather is like reading a personal, handwritten invitation by the president of the United States to dine weekly with him at the White House. Such an invitation would contain some instructions, of course, but its primary intent would be to invite you into a relationship with a kind and powerful ruler who wants to invite you to serve him in a prestigious

position. Even more, it is like receiving legal papers informing you that you have been adopted into a family who loves you and wants you to come home and be part of the family.

Sometimes unbelievers will fault Christians for believing in the Bible while missing this very point. Christians don't believe the Bible because they want to live with as many rules as possible. No, Christians believe the Bible because they have discovered that it lays out the path to a restored relationship to God. And the Bible goes further, clearly teaching how we can participate in God's great work of redemption in this life, and how we can have peace and joy for all eternity in the next life.

Another detail about the Bible many unbelievers don't know is that while it is a single book, it is also a collection of sixty-six books with a unified message. It is a library of books bound by a single theme of redemption. The Bible was written over the course of 1,400 years by more than forty authors, and yet is unified in its message. The Old Testament was written over a thousand-year span, and the manuscripts were carefully preserved by the Jewish people to ensure accuracy. The New Testament was written over a fifty-year span and was carefully preserved by the Christian church. (The reliability of the Bible will be covered in more detail in a later section.)

In addition, the books of the Bible are comprised of many writing styles, or *genres*. In the Old Testament these include law books (Genesis–Deuteronomy), history (Joshua–Esther), poetry and wisdom literature (Job–Song of Songs), and prophets (Isaiah–Malachi). In the New Testament we have the Gospels, or biographies (Matthew–John), history (Acts), epistles (Romans–Jude), and apocalyptic literature (Revelation). Each of these genres serves a different purpose in the unfolding story of redemption.

This is important, because unbelievers often know nothing about how the Bible came to be or about its various genres, let alone how to properly interpret them. They know that the Bible is old, but don't know much else about it, except perhaps that there are miraculous stories written in it. The Bible is actually an amazing piece of literature in its own right, in addition to being the revelation from God, so we can be rightly restored to him. One of our goals in apologetics is to get unbelievers to read the Bible for themselves. Countless people through the ages have been saved simply by reading the Bible for themselves.

How Did We Get the Bible?

The Bible did not fall from heaven as a finished product placed in the hands of men. Neither was it, like the claims of both Mormonism and Islam, translated from golden plates found in a hillside or cave. Rather, God communicated to human authors in various ways, and guided their writing so that what was written was what God wanted to reveal to them. While 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us what Scripture is, the clearest passage that describes this process is found in 2 Peter 1:16–21.

In this text we see that those human authors who wrote the books of the Bible did not do so on their own initiative (2 Peter 1:19–21). They did not decide to sit down and write sacred texts. Rather, as the Holy Spirit moved in their hearts and minds, they wrote divine thoughts, mediated through their personalities and styles. The end result is Scripture that accurately communicates what God wanted to say, with humans as the instruments of God's revelation. The word translated "carried along" or "moved" is also used to describe the effect the wind has on sails. The wind blows into the sails, which moves the ship forward. Peter is

saying that as the Holy Spirit initiated revelation to the authors of Scripture, they wrote under his influence and guidance.

One question often raised pertains to the reliability of the Bible after all these years. Many critics charge that we could not possibly know what the original words of Scripture were, because of errors in the copies. Two examples help dispel that notion. First, the Old Testament was carefully preserved by trained scribes in Israel whose main duty was to preserve the ancient texts. Their success in this is demonstrated in the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 in Israel. Among the scrolls found was a copy of Isaiah that was dated to about 100 BC. Before this discovery, the oldest known copy of Isaiah dated back to 900 AD. The difference in the copies, then, was about 1,000 years apart. Scholars were amazed to find that these copies were virtually identical to each other, showing very little difference. The only differences were minor spelling mistakes that did not in any way affect the meaning of the text of Isaiah. And Jesus held people accountable to the words of the Old Testament, demonstrating his belief that they had been faithfully preserved down to his day.

The New Testament manuscripts are equally reliable. When we compare the more than 5,100 Greek manuscripts from the second to the fifteenth centuries, they are 98–99 percent identical to one another, and the remaining 1–2% of differences are mostly spelling variations and simple errors made by later scribes that can be clearly identified as copy mistakes.

The conclusion to this is that the Bible is extremely reliable, even though parts of it are 3,500 years old. That means that when we confess that the Bible is our source of truth for doctrine and life, we can hold it confidently.

What Role Does the Bible Play in Christian Doctrine?

Since the time of the Reformation, Christians have summarized their beliefs about the Bible in four words. These attributes of Scripture form an acrostic, SCAN, which stands for sufficiency, clarity, authority, and necessity.

First, the *sufficiency* of Scripture means that the Bible contains everything we need to know for salvation and living in a way that pleases God (2 Peter 1:3). Nothing needs to be added in order to make up for a lack in it. It is a finished, complete document that communicates all that Christians need to know about God in order to be rightly related to him and to live godly lives in this world (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

Sufficiency also means that Scripture is the final word from God (Heb. 1:1–2). Just as Jesus is the final revelation of God, and is the living Word of God, the Bible objectively declares all that God wants us to know about him. This is why nothing can be added or deleted from the Bible (Rev. 22:18–19). While tradition can help us understand how faithful Christians of the past have understood the Scripture, and gives us a pattern for faithful Christian living, the Bible is the final arbiter of truth.

Second, the *clarity* of Scripture means that the teaching of Scripture about salvation and godly living can be understood by all who seek to study it in belief. This does not mean that everything in Scripture is equally clear, for there are some parts that are difficult to comprehend. It does mean, however, that God has not hidden the meaning of his revelation behind vague and esoteric language. Most of the Bible is written in rather plain, straightforward language. It is pictured as a lamp that lights one's path (Psalm 119:105), leading clearly to truth and understanding.

Clarity also means that we do not need a religious expert to interpret the Bible for us. Every Christian possesses the

indwelling Holy Spirit, who leads us into truth (John 16:13). This does not mean that we can determine the meaning of the Bible for ourselves, or that we don't need to build on the community of the church or theological understanding of Christians of the past; rather, it means that the Bible is not incomprehensible to us unless a priest or religious authority tells us what it means.

Third, the *authority* of Scripture means that the Bible is revelation from God himself, and that we are obligated to listen to it and obey it. Whatever the Bible speaks about is the truth, and it should arbitrate between competing truth claims. This does not mean that other human endeavors do not help us know our world, but if they contradict a clear statement in Scripture, the determination of truth lies with Scripture. The reason for this is that the Bible is the very Word of God, so it possesses the authority of God himself.

The authority of Scripture implies that it is also trustworthy, without error, and reliable. This has been challenged in countless ways by science, history, archaeology, philosophy, and others, but the Bible has always proven itself to stand the scrutiny of the human mind. Unbelievers want to elevate their own reason and authority over the Bible, but this has failed them every time. Whatever man considers to be wiser than God is shown to be foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18–21).

Fourth, the *necessity* of Scripture means that apart from God revealing himself to us, we could not know God. While many things about God can be known by *general* revelation—what can be seen in the created order (Rom. 1:19–20)—the Scriptures are necessary for us to know that Jesus died and rose again to save us. God is divine, perfect, and infinite. We are creaturely, fallen, and finite. God is so different from us that we would have no way of knowing him. But God condescended to reveal

himself so that we might be restored to him. God has spoken to us in a way that is clear, translatable, objective, and able to be preserved.

If God had not revealed himself in the Bible, we could not possibly know all the story of redemption that he has worked on our behalf. Because he has given us his Word, we can know the full riches of his gift of salvation through Christ. The necessity of God's Word for salvation means that unless someone brings the Word of God to unbelievers they won't know how to be saved (Rom. 10:13–15).

CONCLUSION

In order for us to defend the Christian faith, we must know what the Bible teaches about itself, and what Christians have always believed about it. The Bible is the bedrock of all that we believe and serves as the foundation for all that we call knowledge. It is important that we firmly grasp the truth about Scripture, especially in light of the many misconceptions and challenges raised against its reliability.

In addition, it is important for Christians to read and know the Bible on a personal level. It does no good to defend the Christian faith, share the gospel, and proclaim the truth of the Bible if we are not daily reading and meditating on it ourselves. The Bible is not a fact book to memorize; it is the revelation of the living God that is to be understood, believed, and lived. Only then will it have the transformative effect that it is meant to have. The Scriptures transform more than just our knowledge; they completely renovate our hearts and minds, our words and actions, and our very being.

This is one reason why earlier in this book we learned that one of the best ways to become a good apologist and evangelist is to know the Scriptures and sound doctrine thoroughly.

When we eat, sleep, and breathe the Scriptures, our senses are sharpened to discern and refute arguments that are false and idolatrous (Heb. 5:11–14). The Holy Spirit uses our knowledge of the Scriptures to give our minds the sharp ability to know what to say at the right time. As you consider the role of the Bible in apologetics, it is my hope that you will become a thoroughly biblical apologist.

2

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

Now that we have established the authority of the Scriptures to reveal God to us, we move on to what God tells us about himself and ourselves. Sadly, the doctrine of God is one of the most ignored subjects for many Christians. The very God we are defending is virtually unknown to us. As we said in the previous chapter, theology is the study of God. But we don't study God like we study bacteria under a microscope. Rather, we study God as finite, fallen creatures learning about an infinitely greater being who has revealed himself to us for the purpose of relationship. We study God as desperate, needy people who receive a message of peace and blessing from a benevolent king who has showered us with grace upon grace.

Since there is limited space in this book, we can only touch on a few points about God and man. We will focus on the theological truths that serve as the foundation for our apologetic endeavors.

THE TRIUNITY OF GOD

Most Asian religions, animism, and the ancient Greek, Roman, and Babylonian religions taught polytheism, the existence of many gods. Judaism, Islam, and Mormonism, on the other hand, teach that God is one without distinctions. The God of the Bible, Yahweh (Jehovah), on the other hand is both one and three. This is what we call the triunity of God, or the Trinity. This is one of the most difficult concepts to grasp for anyone, because there is nothing in our world to which we can compare this doctrine.

There is no human analogy that adequately pictures the relationship between God's oneness and threeness. Analogies such as the three states of water (liquid, gas, and solid) or the three parts of an egg (shell, white, and yolk, yet one egg) fail to properly picture the triunity of God. It is something we believe because Scripture teaches it, not because we can fully understand it. Because we are creaturely, finite and fallen, we should expect that some attributes of God will be beyond our ability to comprehend. Our minds are similar to a calculator, and God's nature is like a supercomputer operating system. We can't download and run the operating system because we simply do not have the capacity. If God did not exceed our ability to comprehend, how would he be worthy of our worship? Therefore, we accept the Bible's teaching on the Trinity and explore its depths as much as we can, but we realize that at some point our ability to comprehend it fully falls short.

For the purpose of this study, only a few points about God's triune nature will be emphasized here. First, God is equally three and one. He is not more one than he is three, and not more three than he is one. We speak of one essence in three persons

and three persons in one essence. God as one thinks, feels, and knows as an individual being. When Jesus cried out to the Father on the cross, he was not speaking to himself, but rather to the Father. Yet, both are God. All three persons of the Trinity are called God in the Scriptures, yet they are distinguished from one another.

The Father is called God (Rom. 1:7; 15:6; 1 Cor. 1:3; 8:6). The Son is called God (2 Peter 1:1; Titus 2:13), calls himself God (John 5:18), and accepts worship as God (John 20:28–29). The Spirit is equated to God (Acts 5:3–4) and is the one who searches the mind of God (1 Cor. 2:10–11). Clearly, then, the Scriptures teach that each of the persons of the Trinity is God. Yet, God is one God. The unity of God was the foundation of Jewish religion, in contrast to the polytheistic religions of the nations around Israel (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 44:6–8). The New Testament likewise repeatedly emphasizes that there is only one God (John 1:18; Eph. 4:6; 1 Cor. 8:6; 1 Tim. 2:5).

Some would say that the Trinity is a contradiction, but it is clearly not. A contradiction would be to say, “God is one and God is not one.” The Christian doctrine of God, however, states that God is one and three, and his oneness and threeness are understood in different ways. God is one in essence, and three in person. These terms cannot be reversed. God is not three essences. That would make our understanding of God polytheistic—a belief in three gods. Rather, there is only one divine essence. Within the one divine essence are three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

This makes the Trinity a paradox, an *apparent* contradiction, not an actual contradiction. A paradox is something that is difficult, but not impossible, to reconcile logically and intellectually. Certainly, the Trinity is one of the most difficult doctrines

that Christians believe; yet we do believe it, because the Bible teaches it.

One of the strengths of the Christian view of God is that it can answer the fundamental question of philosophy—the question of “the one and the many.” The problem of the one and the many addresses the question of how existence (the one) relates to every individual thing that exists (the many). This is universally recognized as the most basic question with which philosophers wrestle. While there is no room here to develop this idea, we will simply note that in the triune God the one and the many exist in perfect harmony. In other words, God’s being is the basis for an answer to philosophy’s most pressing conundrum.

THE ABSOLUTE PERSONALITY OF GOD

Second, God is the absolute, personal God. The God that Christians trust and defend is a personal God—that is, he possesses rationality and self-consciousness. This is apparent in that God does things that persons do. He creates, speaks, leads, judges, gives, loves, controls, punishes, wills, and many other actions. He can be pleased, grieved, angered, betrayed, saddened, and appeased. God relates to us as a person who understands, communicates, and responds to us. God is not a force or an idea, but a personal God who is intent on pursuing those made in his image to restore relationship with him. So each member of the Godhead is personal, and the triune God is also personal. These concepts are beyond our understanding, but they are comforting in that we know that there is no impersonal aspect of God. God is never a mere force or “thing.” He is fully personal and relates to us in a personal way.

Third, the Christian God is absolute. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere at once. He does not share power

with anyone else. He is the only God in the universe, and all authority resides in him. There is no yin-yang relationship between God and Satan. There are no equally dark and light sides of the force. God alone is uncreated, eternally God, and everything else that exists is created, finite, and fallen.

The attributes of personal and absolute stand in sharp contrast to the impersonal gods of philosophy, Islam, Buddhism, and deism. These belief systems hold to a God who is not much different than the law of gravity—very powerful, but not a being to whom one relates. On the other hand, many religions have personal gods who are not absolute. The Greek, Roman, and Egyptian pantheon of gods are a good example, as are the 330 million gods of Hinduism, and the spirit beings of Asian religions and tribal religions. All false gods are either personal or absolute, but not both. Only the Christian God is personal and absolute.

THE ASEITY OF GOD

Finally, God is *a se*. Aseity means that God is self-existing, all-sufficient, and supreme. God needs nothing outside himself. Unlike the pagan gods, the Christian God does not need a single thing from us. Paul made this a central point of his address to the philosophers in Athens in Acts 17. In pagan religion the people needed the gods and the gods needed the people. Paul informs his hearers that the true God needs nothing from us. On the contrary, we need everything from him. “In him we live and move and have our being” (17:28).

God did not need to create the world, nor did he have to save us. He does not need us to become fully God, as some would argue. We need him for everything, including the upholding of the entire universe (Col. 1:15–20). Before creation the persons

of the Trinity were in eternal, perfect, personal, loving fellowship with one another. There was nothing lacking or incomplete. The fact that God created a world that he knew would rebel against him and eternally chose to save unworthy sinners by the death of the Son shows that at his essence, God gives and loves for the good of others and for his glory. This is the Christian God we seek to share and defend in our apologetic efforts.

It is important, therefore, that when Christians defend God, they have these distinctive attributes of God in mind, so they are not tricked into trying to defend a God in which they don't, in fact, believe. For example, if an unbeliever says, "I can't believe in a God who would create the world and walk away while it falls apart," our response would be something like, "I don't believe in that kind of God either." We don't want to defend a distortion of God as revealed in Scripture, but rather, the true God of Scripture.

CONCLUSION

Not only is the truth of God important for apologetics, but it is also important for the fullness of Christian faith. That is, these truths of God's triune nature and personality are precious to believers because they show us who God is. As a result, we come to God more truly and that brings us closer to him. Knowing someone in great detail makes for a stronger relationship. The more we know God through the Scriptures, the more our relationship will strengthen our apologetic efforts. In the next chapter we will look at one more doctrine—the doctrine of man and his fall into sin.

3

THE DOCTRINES OF MAN AND SIN

We are unique from all the rest of creation by being made in the image of God. We are not like animals or angels because we were created to reflect the glory and image of God. Humans alone in creation are made in God's image and likeness. This partly explains why all people are without excuse before God—their very purpose is to be in relation to God. To deny God when we are designed to reflect his glory is to rebel against everything that we are. To deny the existence of God is to deny our very humanity.

For the sake of brevity, we can only touch on a few points about man and sin. We will once again focus on the theological truths that serve as the foundation for our apologetic endeavors.

MAN AND SIN

The view that a particular religion or worldview has about human beings tells a lot about important issues, such as the meaning and purpose of life, human dignity, what is wrong with

the world, and the nature of right and wrong. In many world-views, man is nothing more than a product of the blind force of evolution. This makes him an accident of nature, since there can be no intelligence in the universe. In this view, man is nothing more than an animal, and no purpose or meaning can be derived from random forces. This view, however, makes human dignity and ethics impossible to argue. If man is just an animal, then violence, disease, and calamity are just the nature of life.

In other views, such as New Age religion, Hinduism, and most of the Asian religions, man is divine and a spawn of the gods. Man finds his dignity in having a spark of the divine within himself, or else he is just as much god as anything else. One of the problems with this view, however, is that these supposedly divine humans commit evil acts. If a divine being does evil, what makes it evil? And considering the amount of evil in the world, what good does the divine do in the world? These questions cannot be answered in a meaningful way if everything is equally divine.

The biblical view of man, however, provides answers to the most pressing questions of humanity, such as where did I come from, why am I here, what is wrong with the world, who am I, what is my purpose, and where am I going?

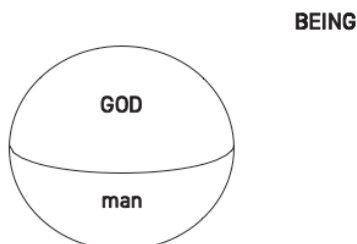
As with the doctrine of the Trinity, only a few areas can be addressed here. First, man is created in the image of God. The Bible teaches that man is a special creation of God, different from the animals by virtue of being made in God's image (Gen. 1:26–27). In this sense, man is greater than the angels who do not bear the image of God. Because man is made in God's image, he bears intrinsic value and dignity, apart from anything he does. This dignity is so basic that because of the image of God, to murder is to commit a crime that strikes against God himself. As a result, God demands that the life of the murderer be taken

by proper authorities, to demonstrate the heinous nature of such an act (Gen. 9:6).

The image of God is never explicitly explained in Scripture, but most theologians agree that it pertains to rationality, a sense of right and wrong, and the implanted knowledge of God. These inherent qualities demonstrate that God is a personal, moral being who has revealed himself to all people. Our calling as human beings is to know God through Christ, live a life marked by wisdom and obedience to God, and share the good news of Jesus Christ, which is the wisdom of God. This feature of humanity—being made in God’s image—is the key to human identity and understanding our place in God’s world. The image of God in man also means that God is the original and we are the copy. God is the eternal I AM, and we are an icon, or picture, that reflects the glory of the I AM. The reflection is not praised or worshiped; rather, the reality is worshiped. Resuming the analogy from earlier in this book, if a soldier has a picture of his wife with him on the battlefield, he stares at her image to remind him of her beauty. But the picture can fade and be wrinkled in a day. When he returns to her, he does not stare at the picture anymore, but gazes upon the beauty of his wife, who is now right in front of him. In the same way, we are to so reflect the glory of God that people want to worship God when they see our lives.

Second, man is different from God. Many world religions, especially the Asian religions, have a monistic view of the world. That is, they believe that all things that exist are the same at the core. All things participate in *being*, and God or the gods possess more being than we creatures. The goal in these religions is either to erase the distinctions between man and the gods, or to be swallowed up into the Great Divine and cease to exist.

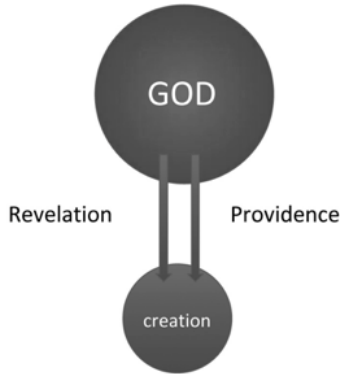
Regardless of the details, man is not at all or not much different in his essence than God. This view can be depicted as follows:



The Christian view of God is quite different, in contrast. We believe in what is called the Creator/creature distinction (CCD). The CCD teaches that God is wholly other than us. God is infinite, holy, and divine. In contrast we are finite, fallen, and creaturely. God has always been God and always will be God. We are creaturely (created beings), and will always be creaturely, even when we obtain our glorified bodies in eternity.

Since we are finite, fallen, and creaturely, we could know nothing about the infinite, holy, divine God unless he revealed himself to us. And this is what makes the Christian God unique. God not only tells us who he is, but he continually comes down to us to reveal himself. We call this the condescension of God. All through the Bible God stoops down to his creation to show and tell us who he is and how we can be reconciled to him. In addition to his revelation, God providentially guides all things by his sovereign power. These two things—revelation and providence—are how we as creatures know the triune God.

The Christian view can be depicted as follows:



In Genesis 1:2 we are told that the Holy Spirit was hovering over the waters as God was creating. In Genesis 3:8 God comes down to confront Adam and Eve about eating the forbidden fruit. In Genesis 7:16 God closes the door of the ark himself. In Genesis 32:24–32 God wrestles with Jacob and gives him a new name. In Exodus 3:7–8 God comes down to see the suffering of his people before he leads them out of Egypt. Over and over throughout the Bible God comes down to his people, protecting them, speaking with them, rescuing them. This culminates in the incarnation of the Son of God adding a human nature to his eternal divine nature with the birth of Jesus. In this ultimate sense God has come down and revealed himself and reconciled us to God.

The CCD reminds us that God is not like us, and that his ways are not our ways (Isa. 55:8–9). One of the distinctions of Christianity is that we do not make images of God, because those who do invariably make idols in the likeness of other created things (Rom. 1:22–23). But God is so different than us that he forbids the making of idols because they cannot represent him. However, God has revealed himself to us in his Word and

through his Son. This means that we can know him, because he has chosen to reveal himself to us.

Some, such as agnostics, like to argue that even if God exists, we can't know anything about him. Such would be true, if it weren't for the fact that God has revealed himself to us. This is why a clear doctrine of Scripture is so important for Christians. We are able to escape ignorance by acknowledging the Bible as God's Word to us.

Third, man was designed to represent God on earth. Not only are human beings made in the image of God, but also from the beginning man was given purpose through the tasks given to him in the garden of Eden. Genesis 1:28–30 reminds us that man was to rule over the earth and cultivate it. That is, Adam and Eve were to develop all the natural resources on earth for their enjoyment, pleasure, and comfort. Everything we have in our modern world today—the Hubble Space Telescope, computers, robotic surgery, skyscrapers—was in the ground when Adam and Eve were created. God gave man the commission to cultivate the potential of the earth. This is a noble calling!

Fourth, because of sin, man is completely fallen. In contrast to many worldviews and religions, Christianity believes that man is fallen and his heart is corrupt. Since the fall into sin, every person is born with a depraved heart that will not choose God apart from the Holy Spirit's supernatural drawing to Christ (Rom. 3:10–18; John 14:6; 6:44). In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve tried to do without God in every respect. By rejecting God's evaluation of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they asserted their right to interpret the world as they saw fit. In the case of the forbidden fruit Eve determined that it was "good" for food, even though God declared it to be spiritually and physically poisonous.

The motivation for Eve's disobedience, however, was not simply to try a new flavor of fruit, but to transcend her humanity to become divine, as the serpent had promised her (Gen. 3:5). In other words, Eve wanted to escape her creaturely limits and become like God—infinite and divine. This was all a lie, however, and her actions resulted in death. Many false religions and worldviews are based on a desire to become divine, or to escape death like God. What they promise, however, can never come true. Humans will always be created beings, finite and limited.

In eating the fruit Adam and Eve also attempted to decide for themselves what is right and wrong. They tried to establish their own ethics in rebellion of God's declaration of right and wrong. Here is another common aspect of non-Christian belief systems: They want to reject God's laws and establish their own. These false ethical standards often lead to a removal of any restraint whatsoever, which leads to violence, abuse, and anarchy. We see this most clearly in the days of Noah (Gen. 6:5, 11–12), the time of the judges (Judg. 17:6; 21:25), and the last days predicted in the New Testament (2 Tim. 3:1–9).

The result of the fall is that every one of natural man's intellectual and spiritual functions operates wrongly. Man's thinking is now slanted away from God in rebellion and ignorance (Eph. 4:17–19). Man is not objective, because his sinful, evil heart turns away from God, truth, beauty, and goodness, and seeks to satisfy self. The result is that man embraces lies, ugliness, and evil. He loves the darkness of sin rather than the light of truth (John 3:19–21; Rom. 1:25).

Cornelius Van Til used two pictures to illustrate this truth. Imagine a woodworker who sets his table saw to exact measurements to cut boards at a right angle. He leaves the workshop for a few minutes to get the wood, and while he is gone his

ten-year-old son enters the room and changes the angle of the saw. Every board that the woodworker cuts after that will be wrong and will be damaged. In the same way God created us holy and perfect, with our intellect, emotions, and will operating rightly. After the fall, these faculties are now damaged, and while they resemble the original design, they are damaged and do not function properly.

Van Til's second illustration helps us understand the unbeliever's bias against God and the truth. Imagine yellow-lensed goggles glued to the face of the unbeliever. Everything he sees now has a yellow hue. He cannot see colors correctly because of these goggles. Yet he insists he is wearing no goggles and sees colors correctly. In the same way, the fall has distorted man's intellectual understanding, and he cannot see truthfully until the Holy Spirit removes the goggles in salvation. It takes the regeneration of man's reason to correct the damage done by the fall. When a person is saved, the Holy Spirit replaces his unbelieving heart of stone with a "heart of flesh" that now functions properly (Ezek. 11:19–21; 36:26–27). He takes away spiritual blindness and replaces it with sight (John 9:39).

CONCLUSION

Having a biblical understanding of God and man provides many powerful avenues for apologetics. We avoid defending concepts we don't believe. We tap into the powerful truths of the wisdom and power of God (1 Cor. 1:24). The more we know the Scriptures and sound doctrine, the more weapons we possess in the war of ideas. We are able to more effectively destroy arguments and pull down strongholds of unbelief (2 Cor. 10:3–5). Knowing what we believe is the best foundation for apologetics

and evangelism, because it gives us the ability to answer unbelief from any direction.