***Truth Claims - CA-002***

**Teleology**

I'd like to read you a selected passage from a book called Evolution in the Christian Faith. This is a relatively old book. It came out in 1969. And please understand that this is bad enough, but this is over 50 years old. Teleology has to do with purpose – things being planned for a purpose.

"'Science, the Journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science' carries an article which begins: 'Each of us is for good and against evil.' This is a rather unusual beginning for an article in 'Scientific Journal'. However, the reader is naturally inclined to respond with whatever his vocabulary contains for the equivalent of a man. But in our day and generation, it is necessary to be cautious before endorsing a statement which is even as apparently straightforward as this.

"The author's next sentence is, 'For most teachers of science, teleology and anthropomorphism are not issues to be debated, but to be deplored. We stand against the evil.' In deploring and standing against the evil of teleology, the author is deploring, opposing, and calling evil the concept of purpose in the world. Of course, a Bible believing Christian cannot take such a position. God created with a purpose and His purpose in creation continues.

"Calling teleology evil leads to the conclusion that a concept of God acting in nature is evil. The author of the article does take that position, for he says that he finds objectionable language habits in teaching which may imply the activity of a supernatural being. Note that by calling language habits, he implies that teachers should not intentionally imply any divine activity, but would do so only by careless habits of speech. He further clarified this by saying that a teacher should not say anything about natural law, for this might cause some students to conclude that if there is a natural law, there should also be a law giver, and that would be bad.

"The answer to the author's use of the terms 'good' and 'evil' is found in Isaiah 5:20: 'Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil.' By quoting from current text books, the author of the article illustrates his contention that the writers of textbooks are unduly careless in making teleological implications. For example, he quotes as follows from a textbook: 'One purpose of food is to act as a fuel for our bodies, supplying us with heat and muscular energy.' According to him, it is unfortunate that the writer of the textbook said that food had a purpose.

"He recommends that teachers say that some plants accumulate starch, not that they store starch, because the latter may connote a purposeful laying away of something for the future. He urges teachers to refrain from saying that hydrogen and oxygen combine to form water. The proper way is to say that hydrogen and oxygen combine *and* form water."

Did you catch that? "Not in order to form water, but they do form water."

"To say that they combine *to* form water has teleological implications. He denies that this is quibbling because he says, 'If a teleological interpretation of a statement is possible, some students will make it, even though it seems obvious to the teacher that this is merely a convenient way of saying something with no teleological implications intended. If it can be misunderstood, it will be misunderstood by some."

Of course, to this author that he quoted, a misunderstanding means that there is reason and purpose behind creation, and the author of that article considers that bad. So this is what we're up against today as Christian apologists. This is the type of mentality that has had over 50 years to grow since this was written.

In Ephesians 4:11, we're told of one of the purposes of the local church through spiritual gifts: "He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors-teachers for the equipping of the saints, for the working of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." So we are equipping ourselves to edify the body of Christ by having a study of Christian apologetics.

**"Apologia"**

We saw in the last session that the word apologetics is from the Greek word "apologia" which means "a reasoned defense." You might have noticed that the English word "apology" comes from this word. Apology originally did not mean, "I'm sorry." It meant a defense. It meant. "I'm innocent. I really didn't do what I'm accused of." And later, it came to mean, "I'm sorry for doing it." When we pronounce the word "apology" in English, we Anglicize it, and we change the hard "G" to a "J."

I heard about a radio talk show in which there was a debate between a couple of people over whether or not God existed. Then they opened the lines up for people to call in. One lady called in and said, "What's the matter with you folks? Can't you open up your window and look out and see all that stuff out there? Where do you think it comes from if there ain't no God?" Now, this lady had a reason to believe, and she had a good apologetic, but she could probably get more credibility if she knew a more elegant way to express it.

So this is what we do when we study Christian apologetics. We learn to give a credible answer (a credible and a reasonable defense) for Christianity.

**Reasons for Apologetics**

Someone might ask, "Why don't we just proclaim the gospel? Why do we have to defend it? There are two answers for this. The first answer is that our God is an apologetical God. And there are apologetical models, as we saw in the last session, all through Scripture. Let me give you a few more now.

**Reasoning**

The first one is in Isaiah 1:18. God himself says, "'Come now and let us reason together,' says the Lord." God is the one who gave us reason. He gave us our abilities to reason (the faculty of reason), and He expects us to use them. He doesn't insult us by treating us as though He never gave us the faculty of reason. So God Himself says, "Come and let's reason together."

Isaiah 41:21-23 is an apologetical model. The Lord is talking about idols. He says, "'Present your case,' says the Lord. 'Bring forth your strong reasons,' says the king of Jacob. 'Let them bring forth and show us what will happen.'" He says, "If these idols are so smart, and if they're divine, then let them predict the future. Let them show former things, what they were, that we might consider them." If they know the future, then surely they know the past, and know the latter end of them, or declare to us things to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods. Yes, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and see it together."

Of course, the conclusion is that idols can do none of those things. "Indeed, you are nothing, and your work is nothing. He who chooses you is an abomination." This is a very apologetical Scripture.

Then in Deuteronomy 18:22, God has Moses to say, "If someone says that he's a prophet, how do you know if he really is or not? And the answer is when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet who has spoken it presumptuously, you shall not be afraid of him." You shall not have respect or fear for that prophet.

So you just apply your apologetics.

In Exodus 7, God tells Moses, "I'm going to send you to Egypt, and you're going to ask Pharaoh to let my people go, and he's going to say, 'No.'" But in Exodus 7:5, He says, "The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord when I stretch out my hand on Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them." So because God is going to do what He said He was going to do (He's going to back up what He says), they will know that He is who and what He says He is.

Then there are a couple more from the apostle Paul in Acts 19:8-9: "And he (the apostle Paul) went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for about three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God." So he ran an apologetical ministry in the Jewish synagogues. Then in verse 9, "But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew his disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus."

So apparently somebody named Tyrannus had an academy (a college, or some kind of school), and Paul rented a classroom there and ran a Christian apologetical ministry there. So that's the first reason that the Bible is apologetical. We have many models of God Himself and His servants running an apologetical ministry.

**God Commands us to be Apologists**

Then the main reason (the big reason and the most important reason) is, as we looked at in the last session, God has commanded us to be Christian apologists. 1 Peter 3:15: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give an "apologia" to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." And that part about meekness and fear should remind us that this is not about winning arguments. This is about speaking the truth in love.

**The Role of Apologetics**

What about the role of apologetics? Some people say, "You've never argued any one into the kingdom." I know people who would disagree with that. But be that as it may, I want to share this with you. Some of you may be aware of this. I realize there are problems with this. In John 3:8, Jesus, speaking of being born again, says, "The wind blows where it wishes. You hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the spirit."

So I think that Jesus is implying here that we can't always analyze, pinpoint, and dissect the work of God the Holy Spirit. When does a person become born again? Well, when they believe in Christ. Well, when you try to pinpoint that, do you receive the new birth when you become convinced that the gospel is true, or when you say, "Yes, I personally trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as per the gospel?" Let me show you what the some of the reformers came up with. I think this is helpful.

**Elements of Faith**

First of all, they broke down faith. You may ask, "What is faith?" Faith is a rich word with a lot of subtleties of meaning. So they said there are three elements of faith, and they gave them Latin names." Notitia" is the first one. That means the content of your faith – the information. Before you believe something, you've got to know it. You can't believe something that you don't know. So the first part of faith is content, or "notitia."

The second part is "ascensus." I bet you know what that means. It means "mental assent." That's when you hear something and you say, "Yeah, that makes sense. I can see. I believe that." Now you've known people, and I have too, who, you'll go over the gospel with them, and they'll say, "Oh, yeah, I believe that." But you think, "Now, wait a minute. I don't think they believe that. They give it their mental assent, but I see nothing in their behavior; in their speech; or, anything else that would make me think that this person is born again." So we evangelical fundamentalist Christians have a saying. We say, "Really believe." You can believe, or you can really believe. Now, when you really believe, you're saved, but if you just believe, you're not really believing, so you're not saved.

Well, the reformers said there is another element of faith: "fiducia." Now there is an English word "fiduciary," and this means "personal trust in someone as a knowledgeable person." For example, when you trust a lawyer or a doctor, he has fiduciary trust.

I was on a jury once in which a financial advisor was being sued because he was accused of irresponsibly investing a client's money. The case that the prosecutor made was this man had betrayed his fiduciary trust. His client trusted this man personally to be an expert in finances, and he let him down. He wasn't worthy of his trust. So the word "fiducia" means personal trust. Someone tells you the gospel; you know the gospel; you know what the information is; and, you give it mental assent. You say, "Yeah, I can see where that makes sense. I believe that." Then "fiducia" is trusting only in the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

This is a model of faith. It's man-made, and I know that there are problems with it, and we could pick through it and find some problems. For example, some people say there's no warrant for breaking faith up in different sets. You either believe or you don't believe. However, I think this is helpful. When we think of apologetics, we think, "Yes, our role is to bring them the information and offer the proof that it is reasonable. There's nothing unreasonable about it. Then encourage them to exercise personal faith (personal trust) in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ." But first of all, they've got to have the information and they have to believe that it's reasonable; it doesn't contradict reason; and, that it makes sense.

I heard someone explain the difference between "ascensus" and "fiducia." They said that "ascensus" is believing *that* Christ died on the cross for sinners. "Fiducia" is believing *in* Him – not believing *about* him, but believing *in* Him. So our role as Christian apologists is to bring people the information; present it to them in a way that is reasonable; and, then urge them (commend them) that they make personal trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Truth Claims**

In Christian apologetics, we are concerned with truth claims. Every world view and every system claims to be the truth. So we examine the truth claims; we find holes to poke in other truth claims; and, then we show (we demonstrate) that Christianity is consistent and it corresponds with reality.

**Truth Tests**

These are the two tests that we give to truth claims. First of all, we test that it corresponds with objective reality. You can eliminate so many world systems just by putting this one truth claim to them.

**The Book of Mormon**

For example, the Book of Mormon talks about places that you can't find on a map. It talks about languages and civilizations that even Mormon archaeologists say have never existed. The Mormons claim that the American Indians are descendants of a Hebrew tribe. Modern DNA tests have shown that there is absolutely no similarity between Hebrew and American Indian DNA, but it is identical to the DNA of people in Northern Asia. So it doesn't correspond to reality, and it's easy to refute.

**The Quran**

The Quran, for example, doesn't correspond with reality. Muslims tell you that they accept parts of the Bible. They accept the first five books of Moses. We just read that Moses said that if someone claims to be a prophet, and then they make prophecies that fail, then he's not a prophet. In the Quran, Muhammad made several prophecies that turned out to be false. Muhammad made several mistakes in the Quran. For example, Muhammad said that Christians believe in the Trinity – three gods: the Father; the Son; and, the Virgin Mary. Christians don't believe that. That is not the Trinity.

In Arabic, the name Jesus and Esau are very similar. Muhammad got Jesus and Esau confused in several passages, and he attributed to Esau saw some of the work of Jesus, and vice versa. Again, in Arabic as well as in Hebrew, the name Mary is Miriam. As you know, Moses' sister was named Miriam, which was also the name of Jesus' mother in Hebrew and in Arabic. And Muhammad confuses the mother of Jesus and the sister of Moses several times as the same person. So the Quran does not correspond to objective reality. He makes mistakes, and this (not corresponding to reality) is a test that you can knock a lot of the world's cults and false religions out of the water in a hurry.

**The Jehovah's Witnesses**

Concerning the Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, Charles Taze Russell, the founder of the Watch Tower Society, claimed to be a prophet. Well, he prophesied several times that the world would end during his lifetime. He wrote a book called Many Are Living Now Who Will Never Die. I understand that there was a Baptist pastor who wrote an answer to the book, aimed at Jehovah's Witnesses, saying something like, "Many who are spiritually dead now will never live." But Charles Taze Russell taught that the end of this age was going to come during his lifetime. He set several dates, and it didn't happen. So we know that he was a false prophet.

And then the second truth test is: is it internally consistent? Is it a system that is consistent with itself, or does it contradict itself? So many false systems, world views, and religions have the seed of their own destruction within themselves. For example, if I said, "I cannot speak a word of English," I think you would think that I had lost my mind, because here I am speaking English, and I said to you in English, "I cannot speak English." So this was self-contradictory.

So if we just apply this same principle to the truth claims of cults, false religions, and world views, it's amazing how many of them we can shoot down just by the fact that in their truth claims, they contradict themselves.

**Agnosticism**

For example, agnosticism just means no knowledge. "A" means without, and agnosticism is a belief that there is no knowledge. There are different kinds of agnostics. It just means, "I don't know." That can be a sign of openness and humility. A soft agnostic might say, "Well, I don't really know. Would you tell me about it?" If you've ever met someone like that, you've met someone who is open, and probably ready for enlightenment.

But there is such a thing as hard agnosticism. That is typified by the person who says, "I not only do not know the truth, but I believe that it is impossible to know the truth. I believe that it is impossible to know anything about God." Think a minute about what I just said. That's a claim of hard agnosticism: "I know that it is impossible to know anything about God. Having a knowledge of God is impossible, and I know that." I just said that I know something about God, and that is that it's impossible to know anything about Him.

So agnosticism has, within its very structure, the seeds of its own destruction because it is self-contradictory.

**Relativism**

Another one is relativism. I heard a story once about a Christian apologist who was speaking at an open forum, and a lady got up and said, "I just don't agree with what you've said. You've been very dogmatic that there are absolute standards of right or wrong. I disagree. I think everything's relative. Something may be true for you, and it may not be true for me. A value may be good and right and proper for you, but not for me. We all have to come up with our own values."

The speaker said, "Sit down and shut up. I don't want to hear anything from you. Somebody else who's got something sensible to say, stand up."

She said, "Wait just a minute. That was rude. That's not fair. That's not right."

He said, "Oh, it isn't. I thought you just said there's no such thing as right and fair. It's all relative."

So when someone says, "I don't believe there are absolute standards," it is usually pretty easy to show them gently that they do believe in absolute standards. Some college student asked their pastor, "How can I show my philosophy professor that there are absolute standards of right and wrong?" And the pastor answered, "Steal her stereo." Think about that one: "I'm absolutely certain that nothing is absolutely certain, until you steal my stereo, and then it's wrong to steal, at least for me."

So many systems and world views have the seeds of their own destruction within them. And if we will just be discerning; turn our discerning eyes; turn the tables on these; and, turn their own truth claims on themselves, it's amazing how many of them will not stand up because they are internally inconsistent.

**Atheism**

Let's look at atheism. Someone called me down last week because I used the term "atheist," and I said, "Some people were atheists." According to Romans 1, we all have a knowledge of God, but we suppress that knowledge. We'll get to that in a minute. But there are people who are convinced that they are atheists. In the word "atheist," "a" means "no," and "theism," of course, means "belief in God." So atheism means, "I believe that there is no God."

Incidentally, one of the first Christian apologetical works was written by Justin Martyr in about 165 A.D. to refute the belief that Christians were atheists. This was because in the Roman Empire, if you didn't believe in the Greek and the Roman gods, then you were considered an atheist, and Christians did not believe in them. So Justin Martyr (or Justin – he was later named Martyr because he became a martyr) wrote a book on Christian apologetics to explain, "Yes, we Christians do believe in God, just not the gods that are popular in the Roman Empire."

Let's turn the claims of atheism on itself: "God does not exist." We could say, "Who did you say does not exist?" They would say, "God." Well, you have to assume a God before you can disbelieve in Him.

Let me read you something by C.S. Lewis, a noted Christian apologist. This is basically about how he got to thinking along the line which led him to receive Christ as Savior. He was an atheist. He didn't believe that there was a God.

C.S. Lewis said, "My argument against God was that the universe seems so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? Of course, I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too. Thus, in the very act of trying to prove that God did not exist, I found I was forced to assume that one part of reality, namely my idea of justice, was full of sense."

Do you see what he's saying? He's saying that if God does not exist, then terms such as right and wrong; truth and lie; and, justice and injustice are meaningless, because God is the standard of right or wrong. So if I say that I know there is no God because things seem so unjust, then I'm arguing in a circular argument. So you have to believe that there is a God before you can say there is not a God.

C.S. Lewis says, in short, "The atheist assumes God to disprove God." If a person says, "I am an atheist, and I know that there is no God," then do you know what the person is saying? Just turn his own assertion on him. He's saying, "I am God, because I know everything. I have looked at everything in the universe, and there is no God out there." If he admits the possibility that there may be God out there who is hiding from him, then guess what. He can't be an atheist. He's an agnostic.

So atheism itself is irrational, and self-defeating, because if you say, "I know there is no God," what you're essentially saying is that I know everything, so I must be God. And if I believe I'm God, then I'm not an atheist.

Let's turn to Romans 1:18. Rather than being intimidated by false religions and world views, we should just turn their own assertions (their own truth claims) on themselves, and examine them in their own light, and we will see them crumble before us. Romans 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth and unrighteousness." So they have knowledge of God, but they suppress that knowledge. The word suppress means to hold something or to hold something back in a bad sense – to suppress or to hold something illegally. So they're holding down their instinctive knowledge of God. This is like the woman who said, "Can't you just look out the window and see all that stuff and know it's got to come from somewhere? Somebody has got to have made it."

So this is universal in the human race. You have never met a five-year-old atheist. I taught high school Sunday school class for a few years, and I know how high school students are. They go to public schools, and they hear evolution, and they learn critical thinking skills, which usually just means teaching them to be cynical. So I tried to always have all my apologetic stuff laying out, and all my arguments and everything.

Then I started working in beginner church, and I was prepared to do the same thing. You don't need it with those kids. I mean: what's the first thing that children do when they hear the idea of evolution? They laugh. Have you ever been in a classroom when students hear for the first time that some people believe in evolution? They think it's laughable. So you never meet any five-year-old atheists. You used to not meet any 12-year-old atheists, but the way our civilization has declined over the years, sometimes now you do meet a 12-year-old who has persuaded himself that there is no God. He has suppressed his natural knowledge of God. But there has never been a society which doesn't believe in someone or somebody (something out there) who's responsible for everything.

The knowledge of God is inherent in the human being. Human beings suppress this. We hold it back because of reasons of what God is angry at – ungodliness ("asebeia" in Greek), opposition to God. If there is a Creator, then He owns us, and we don't like to be owned. We like to do our own thing. So the wrath of God is against ungodliness and unrighteousness ("adikia") – actions which are immoral. We rebel against God, and then we act it out. The reason that we rebel against God is because we don't want Him putting restrictions on us.

There are really no intellectual reasons to reject the God of the Bible. There are only reasons of immorality. People reject the God of the Bible not because of intellectual problems, but because of problems of the will. They don't believe because they don't want to. There are moral reasons – not intellectual reasons.

You have probably heard of the German philosopher Nietzsche. I'm going to read you a quote of his: "We deny God as God. If one were to prove the God of the Christians to me, I should be even less able to believe in Him." Another time he was asked, "What would you do if someone could prove to you beyond a doubt that God existed?" He answered, "I would disbelieve in Him that much more strongly."

Then Dr. Norman Geisler, who used to teach at Dallas Theological Seminary, quotes Nietzsche. Then he says, "The real cause of atheism is not lack of rational proof for God, but the presence of rebellious pride against God. It is the spectacle of the creature shaking his fist at the Creator and declaring, "I refuse to believe in You, even if You are there. Atheists have forsaken the only Lord who could have rescued them from their own self-centeredness, and are left with nothing but false pride."

Listen to this. This is a very interesting, true story:

"French atheist and existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (who died in 1980), confessed to giving up belief in God when he was convicted of wrongdoing. These are the words of Jean-Paul Sartre: 'Only once did I have the feeling that He existed. As a child, I had been playing with matches and had burned a small rug. I was in the process of covering up my crime when suddenly I sensed that God saw me. I felt His gaze inside my head and on my hands. I flew into a rage against so crude an indiscretion. I blasphemed. He never looked at me again.'

"Sartre's story of rebellion against God does not end here. The hound of heaven kept chasing him. Sartre had managed to dismiss God the Father, but the Holy Spirit was relentless in His pursuit. Sartre wrote, 'I had all the more difficulty of getting rid of Him so that He installed Himself at the back of my head. But I collared the Holy Ghost in the cellar one day, and I threw Him out. Atheism is a cruel and a long-range affair. I think I carried it through.'

"But," Dr. Geisler asked, "did Sartre win against God once for all? Perhaps not. Shortly before Sartre's death, he spent a great deal of time with the theist (a theist, of course, is a person who believes in God – not necessarily a Christian) Pierre Victor, who had a profound effect on the old philosopher's bitter atheism. In a dialog between the two, which appeared in the pages of the "Nouvel Observateur," Sartre abandoned utterly his existential atheism, saying, 'I do not feel that I am the product of chance, a speck of dust in the universe, but someone who was expected, prepared for, and prefigured – in short, a being whom only a Creator could put here. And this idea of a creating hand refers to God.'"

So we can hope that not only did Sartre come to believe in God before he died, but we can hope that he followed it to its logical conclusion, and became a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, although we have no reason to believe that he did.

The final point on atheism is that people do not believe in God because they choose not to believe in God. Unfortunately, there are many Christians who, although they believe in God, we might say that many Christians in the world today are practical atheists because they believe in God, but they live as though whether or not God exists is irrelevant. It doesn't make any difference in their lives. We, of course, understand that because the God of the Bible exists, and because He sent His Son to die for us, and He rose from the dead, He has made us members of His family for all of eternity. Our commission is, as Paul says, the ministry of reconciliation, through which we give the gospel, and we provide reasons to believe the gospel.

Leon Adkins, 2003

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