

How Do We Connect?

Lesson 7

If the unbeliever is a walking contradiction, then how do we even connect with them in any substantial way?



Presuppositionalism

- Presupposition - An assumption that you believe about where you start and its relation to where you end. It is a basic heart commitment or precondition for knowledge. Presuppositions are deeply religious because they take precedence for our thoughts, words, and actions.
- The presuppositional approach aims for the root of an unbeliever's core commitments which fundamentally object to Christianity. The goal is to expose their false beliefs (contradictions, irrationality, untenable and unworkable claims) which prove the consistency, rationality and livability of Christianity. The false belief demands the need to repent and believe the gospel.
- Example: "Women must be able to do whatever we want with our bodies. My body, my right."

No Brute Facts

- Christians and non-Christians speak and act based on different presuppositions, but often the unbeliever (and even a Christian) is convinced that their claims are unbiased. They state "facts" as if they are just simply there and everyone must accept them.
- The problem is that "facts" are interpreted.
- There is no neutral, unbiased (brute) fact. No one is unbiased or without prejudice. All people are constantly interpreting the facts in our world, and they borrow "facts" as if those facts are neutral. Yet those very "facts" exist within their own interpretive grid.
- Even though unbelievers seek to refute Christianity based on "neutral facts," they need to see that they have a biased commitment. That commitment needs to be exposed, brought to the light.
- The apologist seeks to help the unbeliever discover, maybe for the first time, that they actually have assumptions about life that make up a framework for how they view the world around them.
- In reality, they actually have *the truth* (knowledge of God), but they hold it incorrectly. It is as if they're holding a pen upside down, knowing they have a pen but unable to recognize that they hold it incorrectly. This is the work of a walking contradiction.

Point of Contact

- Given that everyone has presuppositions and there is no neutrality in the facts, "How do we build bridges with unbelievers if we stand on different religious assumptions?"
- The answer is the *Point of Contact*. God's revelation is where he makes contact with the natural man.

Common Notions

- Common Notions are the proclivities to the truth that are common to the natural man.
- Calvin on Romans 2:14-15:

Since then, all nations, of themselves and without a monitor, are disposed to make laws for themselves, it is beyond all question evident that they have some notions of justice and respect rectitude, which the Greeks called preconceptions, *prolēpseis*, and which are implanted by nature in the hearts of men. They have then a law, though they are without law: for though they have not a written law, they are yet by no means wholly destitute of the knowledge of what is right and just; as they could not otherwise distinguish between vice and virtue.¹
- The points of contact (common notions) are the “light of nature, the works of providence and creation” (WCF 1:1). God has generally revealed to everyone that he is there.
- These are those points that you agree with your neighbor. You agree because what they are believing, what they are saying, accords with God’s common notions.
- These are the points of contact for you to have substantial dialogue, and these points of contact are already there for you. Your job is to find them.
- This is a kindness of the Lord that his common notions get through to men and women.
- This is why the world is not as bad as it could be. God’s truth is present, men and women embrace it, and it restrains them toward goodness, virtue, truth, beauty, order, etc...
- Remember, you’re the mailman delivering the mail, which is reminding them of the truth of God that they too acknowledge.

The Indirect Method of Conversation

- It is the job of the Christian to be both self-conscious of what he knows and force the unbeliever to be self-conscious of what he knows.
- We need to press the non-Christian to be more self-consciously aware of how his non-Christian system fits together and make him be consistent with it. Simply put, we are trying to indirectly push them to live consistently with their principles (presuppositions) and show why it ultimately doesn’t work.

Step 1 | Internal Critique

- Based on their own assumptions, show that they can’t make sense of their own positions.
- How does this unbelieving position self-destruct based on his or her own assumptions? Every unbeliever suppresses the truth somewhere. It will self-destruct somewhere. We know that going in, so we don’t have to be intimidated.
- A persuasive “indirect” argument takes something the non-Christian already claims to be true and uses it to the advantage of the Christian defense.
- For example, “I know that you believe murder to be wrong, so I’m not denying that you know that to be true. I’m asking you to account for how *you know* that murder is wrong.”

¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*, Vol II., Ed. H. Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 96-97

- Dr. William Edgar:
 - [We are] moving onto the ground of an unbelieving person in order to uncover the inner dynamics of his or her worldview. The purpose is to help the person see how that position cannot provide the crucial answers for the human predicament. Strategies that seek to unmask the inner dynamics of someone's belief system may range from direct confrontation to gentle appeal, depending on the kind of resistance to the gospel that our interlocutor may have.
- Since the Christian position is true, then however consistently an unbeliever may appear to be living out his or her position, it cannot hold together.
- Remember Romans, "their conscience also bears witness, and *their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them*" (Romans 2:15, *emphasis mine*).
- *Borrowing Christian Capital*: Van Til pointed out unbelievers are borrowing Christian capital when they take from God for their own glory. The natural man must borrow what belongs to God to make sense of the life he lives. What we must do is show how the natural man's starting position cannot account for his conclusions, or his conclusions cannot account for his starting position, unless he borrows from the Christian worldview.

Step 2 | External Critique

- You invite the unbeliever to come over to our side, and you show them that Christianity makes sense of "the facts."
 - Show them how Christianity will apply to the questions they are asking.
 - That is why this is sometimes called an indirect method. This is an approach that applies gospel pressure to the opponent's position.
 - We don't try to *prove* Christianity but instead show that Christianity alone makes sense of what they already know to be true.
- One | Adopt the other person's worldview for the sake of argument. Give his worldview a test drive and try to determine where you will end up if you follow his instructions faithfully. When you arrive at an odd destination, respectfully point it out.
 - Two | Winsomely invite the person to reconsider his starting point. Bring him to the Christian position to bring clarity to his folly.