

Holy Trinity Presbyterian Church
Apologetics Sunday School— Summer, 2018
The Place of Philosophy; “Humble Boldness,” and The Non-Christian’s Knowledge

I. The Place of Philosophy

A. Principles:

1. **“Philosophy”** [Gr.] *“love of wisdom”*: making *true* sense of the world and our place in it. (Heraclitus: “Wisdom is to speak the truth and act in keeping with its nature”)
2. Historically important branches of philosophy for Christian apologetics:
 - a. **Metaphysics**: What is the nature of things in reality, especially ultimate reality?
 - b. **Epistemology**: Why or how can we know something is true?
 - c. **Ethics**: Given true knowledge of ultimate reality, how should we live? What should we approve or disapprove (“judgments of value”); What are we obligated to do or not do (“judgments of obligation”)
3. **“Know Thyself”**: The Delphic maxim: how much agreement have secular philosophers reached on the subject of self-knowledge after 4,000 years of speculation?
4. Secular philosophy is like a **road map**. The Christian response: we need a **GPS**. Why?
5. **What is the Proper Relationship** between philosophy and Christian theology? How is philosophy useful to the Christian?

B. Passages:

1. **Colossians 2:1-8**: What metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical statements are being made in vv. 2 -3? What kind of philosophy is Paul contrasting in v. 8?
2. **Proverbs 1:7**: Same question as above. How is this passage related to Col. 2: 1-8 above?

II. “Humble Boldness”

A. Principles:

1. **First critique** of a Christian theistic apologetic approach: “it’s arrogant and prideful.” Why so?
 2. The Christian theistic apologetic response: it’s actually arrogant and prideful not to believe in God or submit to him. Why? What should be our attitude as we make such claims?
 - a. **Boldness** in challenging unbelief and compromised epistemologies is essential for Christians. Prov. 15:32; Acts 17:30
 - b. **Humility** in recognizing that any wisdom we have as Christians is not inherently our own but rests upon the undeserved grace of God, received as a gift. Prov. 15:33; Eph. 2:8-9
- B. **Passage:** Acts 17:22-34. What aspects of this passage demonstrate Paul’s “humble boldness.”

III. The Non-Christian’s Knowledge

- A. **Principle:** Although a non-Christian denies God’s authority over all of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, some level of knowledge-in-common is possible (and essential for life in the world).
1. The non-Christian in art, literature, science and mathematics. 2+2 still equals 4. Is this “true knowledge”?
 2. **Presuppositions: Belief commitments upon which we base decisions and actions.** Example: a teenager bouncing a basketball: what metaphysical, epistemological and ethical presuppositions are in effect?
 3. **Religious presuppositions: belief commitments about God,** which affect our view of ultimate reality, knowledge, and ethics, and direct future decisions and actions.
 4. **Suppression:** The non-Christian:
 - a. Presupposes that God does not exist;

- b. Can agree with Christians on certain propositions (2+2=4, for example) on a limited basis; and
 - c. Actually has some knowledge of God and His authority (through the witness of creation and conscience, if not Scripture), but suppresses the knowledge of this truth (including the knowledge that God is the source of all true reality, knowledge, and ethics).
5. **As a matter of God’s common grace upon the creation**, He “suppresses the suppression” so that men and women can still function in the world.
6. **The non-Christian therefore “borrows knowledge” from God.** The non-Christian is indebted to God for the *intelligibility* of all things, but will not recognize or acknowledge God as source.

B. Passages:

1. **Romans 1:18-32, 18-20:** Does Paul assert that humans might know there is some god or another? How does the non-Christian know and not know God at the same time?
2. **Romans: 2:14-15:** How does this passage illustrate God’s suppression of the non-Christian’s suppression of knowledge?



HOLY TRINITY
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Apologetics
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Philosophy Defined

- Greek: *philosophos* – “love of wisdom”
- Major Branches:
 - Metaphysics: nature of reality, being
 - Epistemology: what is true knowledge
 - Ethics: how should we live?
- “Know Thyself” – major classical objective

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Uses and Limitations of Philosophy

- Modern philosophers use philosophy as a road map.
- So, are we there yet (after 4000 years)?

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Quote

“In the end, we must confess we have no idea why there is no established body of metaphysical results. It cannot be denied that this is a fact, however, and the beginning student of metaphysics should keep this fact and its implications in mind. One of its implications is that the author of this book is not in a position in relation to you that is like the position of the author of [a] text...in geology.... In metaphysics, however, you are perfectly free to disagree with anything the acknowledged experts say --- other than their assertions about what philosophers have said in the past or are saying.”

Peter van Inwagen, *Metaphysics* 2d Ed. (2002)

What we need is not a roadmap, but a GPS. Why?

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Usefulness of Philosophy in Christian Apologetics

- Enables analysis of secular ideas in competition with God’s truth (e.g., logic);
- Confirms matters revealed by God through natural revelation;
- Trains human reason in the application of Scripture; and
- Can prepare the mind for the higher level study of theology (but not in a Scriptural vacuum).

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Scripture Passages

Colossians 2:1-8, 2-3, 8

...that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.... 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.

Proverbs 1:7:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

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The Non-Christian Response

- Christian view is “arrogant and prideful.”
- Because it presupposes the word of Christ as foundational to all knowledge.
- Christian view is the antithesis of:
 - individual intellectual autonomy; and
 - factual neutrality;
- Christian response: unbelief is arrogant and prideful. Why?

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The Christian's Attitude in Response: "Humble Boldness"

- **Boldness**

- to challenge unbelief and compromised epistemologies.
- Prov. 15:32; Acts 17:30

- **Humility**

- To recognize our wisdom not inherently our own, and
- Our wisdom results from the free and undeserved grace of God.
- Prov. 15:33; Eph. 2:8-9

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Scripture Passage

Acts 17:22-34, 22-23

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you...."

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The Non-Christian's Knowledge

- Despite non-Christian denial of God's authority, some level of knowledge in common with Christians is possible.
- $2+2 = 4$. Is this the same for all persons?
- Presuppositions: definition
- Religious Presuppositions: definition

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The "Suppression in Unbelief" Doctrine

- Non-Christian presupposes no God exists;
- Can still agree with Christians on a limited basis; and
- Implicitly knows God and His authority through the witness of:
 - Creation
 - Conscience
- Suppresses the knowledge of this truth (in all dimensions of knowledge), because of the *noetic effect* of sin.

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God's Response to Suppression in Unbelief

- God “suppresses the suppression” in unbelievers as a matter of common grace to humanity.
- The non-Christian “borrows knowledge” from God to function in the world.
- The non-Christian is indebted to God for the intelligibility of all things.
- But will not recognize or acknowledge God as the source.

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Scripture Passages

Romans 1:18-32, 18-20

...For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse....

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Scripture Passages

Romans: 2:14-16

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

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Exercises

1. A popular beer commercial in the 20th century concluded with the slogan “You only go around once in life, so you have to go for all the gusto you can get!” *Philosophical Presuppositions?*
2. Suppose your unbelieving roommate criticizes your Christian faith as superstitious and gullible. He says “My physics teacher said we can only trust our senses in deciding what to believe in this world: ‘seeing is believing’.” *Discuss.*

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Relationship Between Philosophy and Theology

- Possible relationships: either
 - Philosophy governs theology;
 - Philosophy to be integrated with theology;
 - Philosophy is theology; or
 - **Theology governs philosophy** (Reformed Christian View): God's revealed truth is the foundation of all understanding and knowledge