Disciples Church

A Firm Foundation – Series Introduction & Ultimate Standard

Week of June 6th, 2018

**TEACHING NOTES**

*Series Introduction*

Welcome to midweek. This week we venture into the realm of apologetics. Specifically presuppositional apologetics.

Now – before you run for the door, just wait. These big words shouldn’t scare us. Let me break it down for you.

Apologetics is simply the process of arguing for something, or giving a defense for something. For our study, it will be the study of defending the Christian faith.

The word apologetic comes from the Greek word apologia. We see Paul give an apologia to the Jews in Acts 22.

Paul says, (22:1) “Brothers and fathers, hear the defense (apologia) that I now make before you.”

So, an apologetic is simply a defense of the faith. It is, quite literally, arguing for truth.

Many of you have probably attempted to share your faith. You’ve seen or read something that really gives you pause and encourages your faith. You see this evidence, and it’s compelling.

Let me give you a scenario to highlight a few points.

Imagine you sit down with a nonbelieving atheist. You present to this person C.S. Lewis’ famous trilemma: Jesus was either a Lunatic, Liar, or Lord.

You quote C.S. Lewis to your atheist opponent:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him [Jesus]: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. ... Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.”

You drop that bomb and sit back and wait for your atheistic opponent to pick his jaw from the floor. But – his jaw isn’t on the floor. His arms are crossed and he tells you that your evidence is not compelling because, after all, in his mind the accounts of Jesus in the gospels are probably or possibly an invention by the early church to deify Jesus for various unspecified reasons.

I’ve been in this situation. Many times, the opponent is not impressed and quick to regurgitate some evidence that they claim invalidates your evidence.

Now, to be clear, I’m not saying that what Lewis wrote was bad or wrong. No, not at all. But it highlights something that is massively important. What Lewis did was present evidence. Many times, for very noble reasons, those defending or arguing for our faith will give evidence to the non-believing world and allow them to be the judge of the evidence.

When it comes to presenting evidence like this, there are two major problems with this train of thought. The first problem is that when the Christian gives evidence to the unbeliever, we place them on the throne as the judge. We are allowing them to put God on the stand and question Him. But, God is the judge of man, man is not the judge. Secondly, when we appeal to man as if he has the ability to know truth apart from depending upon God for truth, we make man the ultimate standard.

Evidence is useful for the Christian, it is useful for emboldening our faith. But, evidence is not capable of convincing nonbelievers to trust in Jesus.

What does Scripture tell us about this?

In the book of Job, Job is protesting God’s treatment of Him. He demanded an audience to God. And God gave him what he asked for.

Job 38:1-10 (ESV2011)

(38:1) Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: (38:2) “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? (38:3) ​Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. (38:4) “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. (38:5) Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? (38:6) On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, (38:7) when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (38:8) “Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, (38:9) when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, (38:10) and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors.

When Job requested to God to plead his case, God showed up in a major way and simply told him that because Job was not God, he had no right to question Him.

We see this again in Romans 9:20 when Paul says, But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?”

And again in James 4:12 There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy.

It wouldn’t make sense to put God on trial since God is the one true judge. When we present evidence to men we are essentially saying they have the ability/authority to be the judge of whether God exists or should be obeyed. This is the root of sin in the garden. Eve decided that she could independently judge between right and wrong. She wrongly assumed that she did not need to depend on God as her ultimate standard for truth!

So, it’s necessary to realize at this point that natural or sinful man cannot rightly question God. We are not to present evidence to non-believers as a lawyer would present evidence to a judge. The nonbeliever is not the judge. God is. But why can’t natural man judge the evidence and make a profession of faith?

Turn with me to Romans 1:18.

The Apostle Paul says, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”

Also look with me at: 1 Corinthians 2:14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

And also in Romans 3:11, “no one understands; no one seeks for God.”

Man, apart from God, is sinful. He is dead in sin. He suppresses the truth. He cannot discern truth. And not only that, he is incapable of pleasing God. If man is dead in sin, he *WILL NOT* be able to truly see the truth in Scripture apart from God doing sovereign work to regenerate the man.

You see – many people come to these conversations with the belief that if they just argue good enough or present the best evidence for God, then the nonbeliever will use his “so-called” free-will and choose Jesus. Or, they argue that we ought to convince them that there is adequate evidence to believe in the generic concept of god and then we can show them that Christianity is the most reasonable of all of the religions. This idea stems from bad theology. CS Lewis believed in the freedom of the will and that’s why his apologetics flowed from evidence appealing to mans’ mind.

This is man-centered, man-capable idea is patently false. No nonbeliever can savingly understand truth and put their trust in Christ unless the Lord of Light regenerates his/her heart first. Make sure you track with this clarity: No one can have true knowledge of spiritual things unless God reveals it to them.

1 Corinthians 2:10-16 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. (2:11) For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. (2:12) Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

(Eph 2:8) For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God

We cannot assume that we are on a level playing field with the nonbelieving world. This is similar to a game in which the opposing team is blind and deaf, yet they insist that they aren’t blind and deaf. When sitting down to play the game, the game cannot even be played fairly because the deaf and blind team qualitatively experiences a different reality in their gameplay.

You would say, move the blue piece. And they would protest, it’s not blue – it’s obviously black. You see, because they are blinded by sin, they cannot see truth. We have to get this before we venture into the study of presuppositional apologetics.

When we give evidence to convince the unbeliever that the God of the Bible is real and that they should believe and obey him we fail to see what the Bible has said about the unbeliever. Namely, that they already believe and know certain truths, but suppress the knowledge. We place them on the throne to decide and judge, but you must understand that they are incapable of this position for it belongs to God alone.

Proving God exists by giving evidences is like trying to prove the sun on a hot summer day in the middle of the Sahara while sitting under a magnifying glass. God exists or we could not have a foundation for knowledge at all. Men don’t need us to prove they sit under the sun, rather they need us to show them that their denial of its existence is inconsistent with the fact that they are putting on sunscreen to protect themselves from the very thing they are denying. This is putting on display the inconsistencies of their worldview. They know the sun is there, they simply suppress the truth of it. This is why we aim at their presuppositions.

There’s that word again… presuppositions. I said it before and quickly moved past it. But – fear not. This is not something that is difficult to understand. You see, the nonbeliever and the believer all have these things called presuppositions. So, before we get to the bulk of our lesson, it is necessary to define this.

What is a presupposition?

According to an online dictionary the definition of a presupposition is: a thing tacitly assumed beforehand at the beginning of a line of argument or course of action.

I believe this definition is sufficient. It is the lens by which we interpret what we observe. For example, the Christian’s fundamental presupposition is that the God of the Bible is the one true God and we can know about God through His creation and His revelation. The holy Bible is the true and final source for our understanding of God and His will for His creation.. The Scriptures are inspired, infallible, inerrant and fully authoritative. They are the very Word of God. We interpret the universe, culture, society, science and everything else by Scripture as the final authority because it is what God has given us as the final authority. This is a presupposition. And, it is the primary presupposition that shapes our study tonight.

Quickly – it is easy now to understand that the nonbeliever has presuppositions as well. They would examine the evidence with the presupposition that God is not real. This greatly changes how they view what they perceive to be true.

When we are armed with a presuppositional apologetic or defense, we can really talk to anyone and not worry about their credentials or intelligence. We can speak with the most intelligent atheist with 3+ Ph.D.’s, and it does not need to affect our confidence. Why?

Because we stand on the Word of God and this person does not need compelling evidence (as if he could rightly judge the word – remember he is blinded spiritually and incapable of being an ultimate standard in and of himself), rather, this person needs to hear the gospel. God will, in his sovereign timing, regenerate his/her heart if He (God) so chooses.

Although it is not bad to know how the word of God is perfectly compatible with rightly done science and the world we have, we are not necessarily called not to know all the science, or pagan philosophies, or… fill in the blank. Rather, we are called to know what God says. And there is only one ultimate source of revelation from God which He has spoken through men. It’s the Holy Scriptures.

What we need to do is calmly and boldly explain to our atheistic friend that they simply cannot argue for anything according to their worldview. The unbelievers’ presuppositions reveal an inconsistency with the way they live out their life. This happens because whether they agree or not they were made as image bearers and cannot escape the truth of God. You see, in order for the nonbeliever to make sense of the world, they must admit that they hold some very basic beliefs. Perhaps they admit that they believe that there are abstract laws that govern the universe. They believe in logic, reason, science, gravity etc. They champion these things and claim that they are better than the Word of God because they (the unbeliever) can verify the results. They believe they have some degree of certainty whereas God cannot provide that same certainty.

But – let’s consider this for a moment. How can this person possibly believe in objective truth? To them, they evolved from star dust, from goop, or whatever they believe. How can star dust make a truth claim? Can star dust possibly revolt against the wholesale slaughter of humans in the holocaust? How can an atheist be angry at anything? To be angry assumes a moral position. But, if we’ve just evolved from monkeys, which evolved from blue algae, which evolved from … nothing, then our disgust or distaste for anything is simply an evolutionary trick that has no moral meaning. They live in a meaningless world. But, think back to Romans 1:18. They believe these things because they have not submitted themselves to the revelation of God, indeed they see the world, and know that God exists, but they suppress the truth. So we must see that when an atheist argues for truth they have no foundation for caring or even knowing the difference between truth and a lie. They cannot be consistent because they don’t have objective truth.

You see, objective truth is something that is 100% true. It is a foundation upon which we build a view. As Christians, what do we know to be 100% true? We know God is truth as He has revealed this to us in the Scriptures. We know the Scriptures are 100% true because they are God’s very words. In fact, we can only know that logic, reason and science are true BECAUSE we have a foundation built upon God’s word. God’s word reveals to us what logic is. God’s word reveals to us physical properties of the world. God’s word reveals to us morality. God is all-wise, all-knowing, and unchanging. Therefore, His words are the objective truth.

Psalm 12:6 ​The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.

Let me tease this concept out a little bit so you understand better. Why should a nonbelieving scientist interpret data with truthfulness? In his/her world there is no truth that says lying is wrong. So, it is morally neutral to misinterpret data. The Christian, however, should be committed to truthfulness because he/she is instructed by God to not lie.

Proverbs 12:22 ​Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who act faithfully are his delight.

Indeed, we cannot know how to rightly reason apart from Scripture. We find examples of a brilliant logician in Scripture. The Apostle Paul!

Romans 1:20 (1:20) 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.

We can destruct his argument and see the logical components of them. He gives us a proposition, and then he gives us the consequent.

For example: if P then Q.

P is “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.”

And Q is “So they are without excuse.” This is logic. This is taught by God to us, through Paul.

A famous presuppositional apologist, Van Til said, *“it is the Christian’s task to point out to the scientist that science needs to stand on Christ and his redeeming work if it is not to fall to pieces. Without Christ he has no foundation on which to stand while he makes his contradictions. A scientific method not based on the presupposition of the truth of the Christian story is like an effort to string an infinite number of beads, no two of which have holes in them, by means of a string of infinite length, neither end of which can be found.”*

So – when we’re speaking to the nonbeliever, we ought to challenge their presuppositions. How is it that they can argue evidence when indeed, they are blind to rightly understand the evidence? Our job is to point out their foolishness (their sin) and then present the gospel.

A quick note is important here. We are using what may seem like strong language. Words that might even make some of us uncomfortable, like “challenge,” “argue,” etcetera, but know we are not talking about a anger laden argument. We’ll talk more about this through the series, but we’re talking about speaking “truth **in love.”** The principle that Paul commands to a teacher of the word applies to all of us in these thing, which is someone (like me or you) who is defending the faith and preaching the gospel must "[correct] his opponents **with gentleness.** God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.” (2 Timothy 2:25)

Correct opponents with gentleness. Let us be wise and loving in our speech.

We ought to critique the atheist’s foundation as ultimately flawed because in their view of the world, they cannot account for any truth. They must borrow from our world view to make the very arguments they make. They cannot know *ANYTHING* with certainty. They cannot even state that nothing is certain, as that is a truth proposition and they cannot possibly exhaust all knowledge to know this. They are caught in a foolish cycle.

Let me explain this a bit more in detail. Because the atheist or nonbeliever does not exhaustively know everything, then the things they do not know could possibly prove to invalidate or debunk the very things they claim to know. Since they have no omniscient God to reveal truth to them, they are incapable of really being able to claim to have any truth. Ultimately the unbeliever is claiming to be the ultimate standard. This is why the cycle they are in is foolish.

Indeed, we have a scriptural mandate to answer them this way: Prov 26:5 ​Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

Our job is to show them the futility of their worldview and its inconsistencies. We do this while making great efforts to show them that the only way to escape the futility of an atheistic worldview is by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is a very basic overview, but I wanted to whet your appetite as we dig into this topic. Keep these things in mind as we progress forward in this series.

So, that was all introduction. Let me spend the remainder of our time speaking about scripture and why it is our foundation.

***Our Ultimate Standard***

Because we submit to God as our ultimate standard, it is necessary to discuss that by which we build our defenses on. My aim for our remaining time tonight is to quickly help you formulate a presuppositional biblical worldview.

I want to cover 2 main topics:

1. What is our ultimate standard?
2. How do we know that the Word of God is truly His Word?

What is our ultimate standard? The Word of God.

First, I want to discuss what it is I mean by ultimate standard. Let me provide you with a working definition of ultimate standard.

Ultimate Standard: Something that we hold to be unquestionable but cannot prove from anything more foundational.

Jason Lisle says, “For any belief that a person has, we can always ask, "How do you know that to be true?" The person will then supply an argument that supports his belief. In his argument, the person will appeal to another proposition that he believes supports his conclusion. But since he has appealed to another proposition, we now must ask the question, "Okay, but how do you know *that* is true?" In his defense of this, the person will appeal to yet another proposition, which we can again question, leading him to suggest another proposition, and so on. Ultimately, any such chain of reasoning must come to an end. It must terminate in an ultimate standard.”

We do not use a lesser standard to prove a greater standard. It would be absurd for me to show you a picture of hot sauce in order to prove to you that the hot sauce is real when there is a bottle of hot sauce in my hand, similarly it would be absurd for me to attempt to prove the existence of God with logic because logic is a lesser standard than God.

For the Christian, the ultimate standard is God and His revelation to us through His Word. We do not prove Scripture true by arguing for its truthfulness with another (lesser) standard.

We must understand that there are two standards in our world. We have God and His word which is the Christians’ ultimate standard, and then we have the foolishness of the world. Foolishness of the world cannot prove the word of God. Rather, the Word of God instructs or guides all man. So called creaturely wisdom is ultimately foolish because it is based on falsehood and it must be regarded as subsequent and not authoritative.

One theologian says of this, “So we live under God’s authority. Among other things, this means that we are to draw a sharp distinction between the Word of God and fallen human wisdom. Deuteronomy 18:20 pronounces a curse upon a would-be prophet who “presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say.” Isaiah 29:13 attacks the people as hypocrites because “their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.” Jesus quotes this passage in Matthew 15:8ff. and Mark 7:6ff. in his attack upon the “traditions” of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Paul attacks those who submit to human ethical rules as if they were God’s (Col. 2:20-23; cf. Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8–10). See also Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; Ecclesiastes 12:13ff.; Isaiah 33:6; Jeremiah 7:24; 11:8; 13:10; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17; 1 Cor. 1:18-2:16; 3:18-23. To confuse God’s Words with mere human words is to leave ourselves with no clear divine authority.” – JF

This goes back to our scenario in our series introduction. I used C.S. Lewis’ trilemma to illustrate evidence that we may present to a nonbeliever. But, in reality, what we’re doing in that moment is introducing a lesser standard to prove a greater standard. We are also supporting the false idea that the nonbeliever is the ultimate standard in and of themselves. They are the judge, they get to choose. And, we must prove God’s existence to them. When we present evidence to defend the faith we are using a logical argument or creaturely wisdom to try and prove the existence of God. But to do so would be using a lesser standard to try and prove the greater standard.

“God has made all creatures, including ourselves, for his own glory. He is the lord; we are his servants.” This is really the point of this lesson. Because God is Lord, He sets up our world. He speaks, we listen. We cannot escape His world, even if we want to.

* Matt 28:18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
* 2 Cor 10:5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.
* Prov 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.
* Prov 9:10 ​The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

We see in these various verses that our Triune God has ultimate authority. We see that opinions that are apart from the knowledge of God are to be repudiated. And we see that to submit to our ultimate standard (Scripture) is how we actually know truth and wisdom. To reject the ultimate standard is to reject truth and is foolish.

If God is our Lord and authority, then how do we understand Him? We do so by the very word of God in His special revelation.

All men and women know God exists. The scriptures plainly express this.

Rom 1:18-23 (1:18) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. (1:19) For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. (1:20) 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. (1:21) For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (1:22) Claiming to be wise, they became fools, (1:23) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

But, it’s not enough for fallen man to just know the law that is written on their hearts or to know God as He has revealed himself through nature (general revelation). God’s word is His special revelation that is sufficient to equip us for a life of faith and service. His word is truly His ultimate standard.

And we see this in scripture, look with me at the following texts:

* Matt 4:4 But he answered, “It is written, “‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”
* John 17:17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.
* 2Tim 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness
* Ps 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;

So far we’ve seen that Scripture is our ultimate standard by which we build our presupposition. But -

3) How do we know that the Word of God is truly His Word? The Bible is Self-Authenticating.

* ~~Exod 3:14 God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”~~
* ~~John 5:26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.~~

The Christian knows that the word of God is the word of God because God has saved the Christian and revealed to the Christian this truth in Scripture through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

At this point, we must talk about circular logic for a moment. Every worldview will terminate on itself. If we constantly ask the question, “according to what standard” we will eventually be caught up in a loop on circular reasoning.

For instance: How do you know the Bible is true? Because God said it is. How do you know that God is true? Because He saved me. How do you know He saved you? Because I see the truth in Scripture. How do you know what you see is truth? Because God has said it is… So on and so forth.

To the atheist or nonbeliever, they also have circular reasoning. We would query them: How do you know reason is true? Because it works. How do you know it works? Because we can verify it. How do you know if your results are accurate? Because we verify it by our observation. How do you know you can trust your observation?

Have you ever felt a bug crawling on your skin, but, there was nothing there? Have you ever heard someone say your name, but they did not? You see, often what we observe through our senses are not actually real. Our senses are not infallible.

Ultimately the unbeliever must admit that they are the ultimate standard themselves and they have decided these things are trustworthy.

Between these two circular arguments we can see the downfall of the unbeliever. They may claim that their authority is reason or observation, but who says that these things are the ultimate authority? It comes down to them stating unequivocally that whatever they decide to accept is the standard. So, if they are the ultimate standard, then their foundation is faulty because they cannot exhaustively know all things.

In contrast, the Christian says God is their ultimate standard and He is omniscient (all knowing) so the truths God reveals to us can be trusted since there is nothing God will learn one day that will prove Him to be wrong. Do you see the difference?

What we ought to be doing is challenging the premise of the nonbeliever and showing them that their circular reasoning is quite a vicious circle because they assume the objectivity of their ultimate standard. Since their ultimate standard is ultimately themselves, they cannot be truly objective. Again they may tell you that they believe in science or reason. And when we run the ‘reductio ad absurdum’ (which is to disprove a proposition by showing an absurdity to which it leads when carried to its logical conclusion) on the nonbeliever, we really are reducing their arguments to absurdity. That’s what a reductio is. We are challenging the very sand upon which they’ve built their argumentation. We aren’t engaging in the judgment of the evidence, we are simply pointing out that their foundation is flawed, therefore they cannot hold anything to be true.

***Conclusion:***

I want to finish tonight by discussing why we are studying presuppositional apologetics.

Turn with me to 1 Peter 3:15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.

We must be ready to always give a defense to anyone who asks us. The point of this series is to embolden us to share our faith. I know I’m not alone when I say that I really have struggled to share with people who are smarter than I or with people who have different experiences than I’ve had because I simply don’t know what to say or how to defend my faith.

Apologetics is not just to help us share, but it’s really to help us grow our own faith and reliance on our ultimate standard, the Bible. And, when we grow our understanding of scripture, we grow in our affections and love for our God.

If you feel a little out of sorts tonight, hang in there as we’ll take the next 7 lessons to help you grasp these things. And We’ll close with some Q & A time as well. You don’t need to leave here tonight having this all down pat . We are giving you an overview and will help you grasp it all in the coming weeks. We hope what you have heard tonight makes you excited about what is coming. We look forward to helping you have confidence in what you know and how to share it.

Let’s pray.