

# THE CONVERSION OF AN EVOLUTIONIST

How I came to know the Lord at  
Princeton University in February, 1943

John C. Whitcomb

co-author of  
THE GENESIS FLOOD

## THE CONVERSION OF JOHN WHITCOMB AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

I look back in total amazement at the providence of God in bringing me to Princeton University in the summer of 1942. I was not a Christian, and neither were my parents. Knowing something of the academic standards of that university, they wisely sent me to a prep school in Tennessee for two years. What they did not know was that the headmaster, Dr. J. P. McCallie, was a strong Christian.

Only two weeks after I began my study of evolutionary geology at Princeton in June, 1942, a previous graduate of McCallie School invited me to a Sunday afternoon Bible class taught by Dr. Donald B. Fullerton, a former missionary to India and Afghanistan, who had graduated from the university in 1913.

I politely rejected his invitation at least twice. But between these times he did something I later came to understand -- he prayed for me in the Name of Christ the Lord! Finally, I agreed to attend the class at Murray-Dodge Hall, the student center on campus. Dr. Fullerton gave an outstanding message from the Bible, but I was not convinced that this was God's Word.

Finally, after several months of hearing his presentations, he sensed that I was ready for a visit to my room at Pyne Hall. He did not discuss the theory of evolution, but carefully and graciously presented the way of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ, the unique and eternal Son of God. He knew from many years of Christian ministry that "the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:12-13).

That was enough! I accepted Christ as my Savior! I now realized that He died on that cross to pay the full penalty of my sin, and rose from the dead to confirm that the price had been paid! When I emerged from that dormitory the next morning, everything looked different. The sunshine came from a star that God had created. The green grass, the colorful flowers, the stately trees, the marvelous birds, and, especially, human beings! Time and chance were no longer my "god". How I praise God my Father, Christ His Son, and the blessed Holy Spirit, for creating the universe, and for providing eternal salvation for all who believe His Word.

JACK WHITCOMB  
742 PYNE HALL  
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY  
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

(age 18 1/2)

FEBRUARY 16, 1943

DEAREST MOTHER AND DAD,

I HAVE FINALLY AND DEFINITELY DECIDED WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO BE AND DO AFTER THE WAR! YOU MAY BE AT FIRST SURPRISED WHEN I SAY THIS, BUT I AM SO SURE OF IT THAT EVERYTHING ELSE I HAVE EVER DONE IS BLACKED OUT IN COMPARISON. I WANT TO STUDY THE BIBLE, UNTIL I KNOW IT WELL, AND THEN EITHER BE A TEACHER OF THE BIBLE IN THE UNITED STATES, OR BE A MISSIONARY ABROAD. I HAVE WAITED A WEEK TO THINK IT OVER BEFORE WRITING TO YOU ABOUT IT, BECAUSE I KNOW HOW MUCH OF A CHANGE IT IS. AND THE MORE I HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT IT THE MORE CONVINCED I AM THAT THIS IS EXACTLY THE THING I WANT TO DO, AND THE THING I WILL BE HAPPIEST IN DOING.

IF YOU WOULD SPEND ABOUT TWO DAYS DOING SOMETHING FOR ME BEFORE ANSWERING MY LETTER, YOU MAY GET AN IDEA OF WHAT HAS HAPPENED. READ IN THE NEW TESTAMENT OF THE BIBLE THE WHOLE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT JOHN, AND ESPECIALLY THE SECTION

JACK WHITCOMB  
742 PYNE HALL  
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY  
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE GOSPEL. AND IF YOU BELIEVE EVERYTHING THAT IS WRITTEN THERE, YOU WILL UNDERSTAND. I DON'T KNOW ANY MORE ABOUT THE BIBLE THAN ANYONE ELSE, BUT IF YOU JUST READ IT, YOU CAN'T HELP BUT KNOW THAT EVERY WORD IS TRUE AS IT IS WRITTEN! IF YOU DON'T HAVE TIME IN TWO DAYS, PLEASE TAKE MANY DAYS TO READ AND BELIEVE WHAT IS WRITTEN IN THAT GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN, AND IN OTHER SECTIONS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT THAT FOLLOW IT. I WOULDN'T WANT TO MAKE SUCH A SUDDEN CHANGE IN PLANS LIKE THIS IF I WERE NOT ABSOLUTELY SURE, AND I KNOW THAT YOU WILL BE TOO.

THIS DOESN'T MEAN THAT I WANT TO BE A CLERGYMAN OR A BISHOP IN THE CHURCH. THE THING THAT I WANT TO BE IS AN EVANGELIST, BECAUSE THESE ARE THE PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE IN THE BIBLE ITSELF, AND IN EXACTLY WHAT IT SAYS. MOST CHURCHES AND PREACHERS DON'T EVEN TEACH THE BIBLE IN ITS TRUE, ABSOLUTE MEANING, AND IF YOU WILL READ THE FOLLOWING VERSES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, YOU

JACK WHITCOMB  
742 PYNE HALL  
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY  
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

WILL SEE HOW THE BIBLE WARNS AGAINST THEM:

- I TIMOTHY 1:4 and 1:7
- I TIMOTHY 6:3-5 and 6:17-21
- II TIMOTHY 2:16-18
- II TIMOTHY 3:4-5

THIS LAST VERSE (II TIMOTHY 3:5) IS WHAT I WANT TO BE, AND THAT IS WHY I WANT TO BE SURE ABOUT NOT ENTERING "A DOUBTFUL CHURCH."

I HAVE BEEN ATTENDING BIBLE CLASS HERE IN PRINCETON DURING THE SUMMER, FALL, AND WINTER, AND NOTHING HAPPENED UNTIL LAST WEEK WHEN EVERYTHING CHANGED. NOTHING BETTER COULD POSSIBLY HAVE HAPPENED THAN MY COMING TO PRINCETON, BECAUSE IF I HADN'T COME HERE I PROBABLY NEVER WOULD HAVE FOUND OUT ABOUT THIS. MR. FULLERTON, MY BIBLE CLASS TEACHER, HAS HELPED ME A GREAT DEAL IN SEEING WHAT THE BIBLE REALLY MEANS (IT MEANS EXACTLY WHAT IT SAYS, WHICH MOST PEOPLE REFUSE TO ACCEPT). HE HAS ALSO SHOWN US HOW MANY OF THE CHURCHES DON'T EVEN PERMIT PREACHERS WHO TEACH WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS, AND THIS IS SOMETHING I NEVER THOUGHT MUCH ABOUT. THOSE VERSES

JACK WHITCOMB  
742 PYNE HALL  
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY  
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

I LISTED SHOW THIS, BUT I NEVER HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO READ THEM AND SEE THAT THEY MEANT WHAT THEY SAID, AND ARE TRUE! ALL THE BIBLE EVER ASKS OF A PERSON IS THAT HE READ IT, AND THINK ABOUT IT, AND BELIEVE IT. AND THAT IS WHAT I WANT TO DO.

DR. McCALLIE WAS A TRUE BELIEVER IN THE BIBLE, AND THAT IS WHY I AM SO GLAD I WENT TO McCALLIE, AND STUDIED UNDER HIM. HE SAID THE EXACT SAME THING THAT MR. FULLERTON SAYS, ABOUT PEOPLE REFUSING TO READ AND ACCEPT WHAT IS SAID IN SCRIPTURE, AND IN STEAD OF STUDYING IT, THEY LISTEN TO PREACHINGS ABOUT THEORIES, PERSONAL IDEAS, AND ANYTHING THAT MAY SOUND GOOD, WHICH IS EXACTLY WHAT THE BIBLE WARNED ABOUT!

THE LANGUAGES I HAVE STUDIED IN PRINCETON WILL BE A GREAT HELP, AND MY GEOGRAPHY TOO, IF I CAN BECOME A MISSIONARY AFTER THE WAR. AND MY GEOLOGY COURSE HELPED TOO, BECAUSE IT PROVED TO ME THAT THERE IS NOTHING IN SCIENCE TODAY THAT PROVES ONE STATEMENT OF THE BIBLE

JACK WHITCOMB  
742 PYNE HALL  
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY  
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

TO BE FALSE. But I will be able to tell you about that later.

It is not just a case of choosing a profession or finding something that seems more interesting that makes me want to do this. It is just that I have discovered something that I never even thought possible, and something that for some reason I know is true!

About the Army, I can study the Bible in my spare time while I am there, and learn many things that will help me if I ever become a missionary later on. I can save most of my pay to help towards a Bible school if possible after the war.

But now I am so happy that I have found this, and I know that you will be too when you read those scriptures.

Don't hurry about writing back, and I will send you any news about the Army that may arrive.

With much love, Jack

# **Priorities in Presenting the Faith** **(The Conversion of an Evolutionist)**

By Dr. John C. Whitcomb



**How much do we need scientific evidence and intellectual arguments in Gospel witness? This powerful yet highly readable article, typical of the author, captured the minds of many preachers when first issued in 1984. From the co-author of *The Genesis Flood*, this establishes the necessity of the Word and the power of the Spirit in conversion.**

**(Metropolitan [Spurgeon's] Tabernacle, London, England. 2007)**

My personal experience with Christian apologetics began in February, 1943, when I was a student at Princeton University. It had not been my privilege to be raised in a Christian home nor to attend a Bible-teaching church. But God, in His grace, used a couple of Christian students at the university to invite me time and time again to attend a weekly Bible class being taught by a Princeton alumnus and former missionary to India, Donald B. Fullerton, '13.

The Gospel message was graciously presented, and after several months of such teaching, I surrendered to the claims and the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As far as I could tell there were no other Christians in the student hall where I stayed at that time, but I had made several good friends, one of whom was a sophisticated intellectual from a wealthy home. I was convinced that the conversion of such a man could bring great changes in the student hall, so one day I invited him to attend our Bible class.

My hopes were high, because I was prepared to convince him that no one else could match this Bible teacher who had led me to the Lord. The conversation, as I recall over the years, proceeded as follows: "Harry, here is a teacher who can really make the message of the Bible clear and convincing. Why not come with me on Sunday afternoon and see for yourself?"

"The Bible?" he replied. "Why should I take time to study a religious book that is already nearly two thousand years out of date? You know yourself that there isn't a single science professor here at Princeton who takes the Bible seriously on the origin of the world. The idea of creation by divine fiat is no longer held by intelligent people. I really have no interest in the Bible."

Stung by this flat rejection of God's Word on the basis of a scientific consensus, I retreated to my Christian friends. Were there any publications of a scholarly nature, I asked, that could help my friend see the weaknesses of evolutionism and thus the possibility of supernatural creation?

Except for a few small booklets, nothing came to hand; but armed with these I approached Harry again. He was surprisingly gracious. "Thanks for going to all the trouble of collecting



**Princeton University, New Jersey**



these booklets for me. I really didn't know that anyone who takes Genesis literally could write a book. I'll tell you what I'll do. Someday, if I ever have the time, I'll look into it."

That was it. It was a polite but final brush-off.

I was deeply dismayed at this and similar failures to convert my friends to Christianity, and discussed the problem with my Bible teacher. "What's wrong with me? Is it my personality, or do I need more time to collect better arguments?" Instead of lecturing his new disciple on the intricacies of biblical apologetics, he very wisely invited me to join him in a brief visitation to one of the other dormitories where a new student had five months earlier somewhat rashly filled in a survey card indicating his interest in attending our Bible study class.

As the door swung open in response to our knock, pipe smoke poured into the hallway. "I'm John Whitcomb and this is the Bible teacher of the Princeton Evangelical Fellowship. Is Tom Smith here?" A trampling of feet and the crash of a table lamp were heard as various figures fled in terror, leaving our victim to fend for himself against unwanted intruders.

"The Princeton Evangelical Fellowship? Oh yes, I guess I did sign a card last fall; but I'm not interested in the Bible anymore. I used to think it was true, but five months of study here has been enough to convince me it is full of errors."

"I'm fascinated to hear you say that," my teacher quietly commented. "Tell me, what particular errors did you discover in the Bible that convinced you it is not true?" This was unexpected. Was a firm rebuff not sufficient to end this uncomfortable conversation? Surely the general consensus of this great university was sufficient to silence anyone who still believed the Bible to be true.

Tom thought for a moment and answered, "Jonah and the whale! There's your proof. No educated person today could believe for one moment that a whale could have swallowed a man and then spit him out on the shore alive three days later!"

Here was the crisis for me. How could we handle this direct challenge to the historicity of the book of *Jonah*? Perhaps we could find in the university library some books on whales that would demonstrate their ability to swallow men alive. Perhaps we could even find historical evidence of men who had actually survived such an ordeal. That would convince him that the book of *Jonah* is as infallible as the rest of the Bible! (cf. *Jonah: God's Discipline & Love*, Whitcomb Ministries, 2015)

Providentially, it was my teacher who answered him first. "Tom, I'm frankly very thankful that it is the book of *Jonah* you seem to be struggling with. There is no more fascinating book in the Old Testament than *Jonah*. Someday, if we have time, I would like to discuss with you the entire message of that book, which was alluded to by Christ Himself for a very important reason."

"In the meantime, however, would you mind if I explained to you why I have come to believe that the Bible is the Word of God and therefore true in all its parts?"

Impressed with the irresistible graciousness and confidence of this man who seemed to know from personal experience the God of Whom he spoke, Tom gave his cautious consent.

"Tom, I felt the way you do about God's Word when I was a student here thirty years ago. I thought I had all the answers I needed concerning life. But I was wrong. In His infinite love, God reached down to me in my deep personal need and showed me through the familiar words of His matchless Book that my root problem was sin, deliberate alienation from God Himself (Romans 1:20)."

What he heard was not a scientific, historical, or philosophical defense of Christianity, but a Gospel-saturated testimony directed prayerfully to his heart.

As I recall the conversation, Tom did raise some questions about Christianity and the Bible. The questions were not totally ignored, but the answers were always amplified by new

perspectives on the Gospel and appeals for surrender to Christ. It was this approach that ultimately led to a proud university student acknowledging the lordship of Christ in his life.

All of this forced me to take a new look at some basic factors of Christian apologetics that I had seriously neglected. I have come to believe that my initial ignorance concerning these biblical principles also characterizes many frustrated and fruitless Christian workers today.

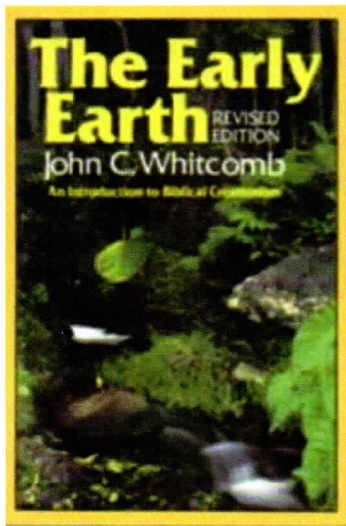
My problem was basically two-fold. I had underestimated the depth of man's rebellion against God, and I was unaware of the absolutely crucial part which the Word of God must have, through the convicting and illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, in bringing sinful men to Christ.

In our efforts to make the Bible and Christianity attractive and acceptable to men, we find ourselves immediately confronted with two stupendous obstacles: man's fallen nature and the Satanic forces which surround him. Though these facts should come as no great surprise to one who is even superficially acquainted with Christianity, it is astonishing to me how few of the better known evangelical works on Christian apologetics today give them serious consideration.

One is almost led to believe when reading such books that what we *really* need to win intellectuals to Christ (in addition to the Gospel) is an arsenal of carefully developed arguments against various false religious and philosophical systems. We also seem to need an impressive array of evidences from, say, archaeology and history, that the Bible and Christianity are true.<sup>1</sup>

But if we are to be truly honest with the biblical perspectives on this question, we must admit that we have too often been guilty of building our systems of apologetics upon other foundations than the one set forth in Scripture. Instead of giving us the impression that men are eagerly waiting for proof that Christianity is true, we find the Bible exposing men's hearts as sealed shut against any and all merely human intellectual pressures for conversion.

The basic problem of the non-Christian is not merely academic and intellectual, it is moral and spiritual. The Bible indicates that *all* unbelievers (including so-called honest doubters) are enemies of God, under divine judgment because of their deliberate distortion of all reality to fit into their own spiritual frame of reference.



**Dr. Whitcomb himself  
has written  
excellent books all honoring  
his principle of Gospel  
priority.**

There is not the slightest desire in the natural man to seek Him, find Him, and acknowledge Him for Who He is – “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts” (*Psalms 10:4*). On another occasion, the Holy Spirit informs us by the pen of David that – “The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God” (*Psalms 14:2*). But what did He see? “They are all gone aside, they are all together filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (*vs 3, quoted in Romans 3:10-12*).

Not only does the unbeliever not seek and practice truth, he consistently suppresses whatever truth he does receive: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold [*suppress*] the truth in unrighteousness... they are without excuse” (*Romans 1:18-20*).

In fact, the Scriptures make it clear that fallen men, so far from being open to arguments about God's claims upon them, are in a

<sup>1</sup> For example, John Warwick Montgomery boldly asserts: “Non-Christian positions must be destroyed factually and the Christian religion established factually. Any lesser procedure is the abrogation of apologetic responsibility to a fallen world.” “*Once upon an A Priori*”, in *Jerusalem and Athens*, edited by E R Geehan (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1971), 388.

state of enmity against Him, because “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (*Romans 8:7*).

Christian apologetics has been traditionally concerned with giving rational answers to the challenges of unbelievers concerning God’s special revelation in Scripture. But what kind of minds are we appealing to? To what extent have sin and spiritual rebellion against God affected man’s rational capacities?

Ponder these statements: “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world... fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (*Ephesians 2:1-3*). “Walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts” (*Ephesians 4:17-18*).

But is the human “mind” not capable of detaching itself from the so-called “heart” and drawing its own conclusions about God independently of the downward direction of our fallen nature? The answer is – no. Mark our Lord’s explanation of the unbreakable relationship between the mind and the heart – “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts” (*Matthew 15:19*; cf. *Mark 7:21*). The Scriptures offer us no hope of bringing about a fundamental change in a man’s thinking about God apart from a profound change in his “heart,” the moral and spiritual center of his personal being.

In addition to the obstacle of the human “heart-mind” being in utter opposition to the truth of God, there is the obstacle of Satan, “the god of this world,” and his demonic forces. This leads me to realize that when I speak to an unbeliever about Christ, I am not really speaking to one person but to two or more persons, all but one of whom is invisible.

The apostle Paul spoke of this fact several times. He explained that – “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (*Ephesians 6:12*).

He knew that Christians formerly “walked... according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” (*Ephesians 2:2*). He recognized that – “if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of ... God should shine unto them” (*2 Corinthians 4:3-4*).

In the parable of the sower, our Lord also spoke of this obstacle to the reception of His Word when he identified the birds that devoured the seed – “When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side” (*Matthew 13:19*).

A system of Christian apologetics that underestimates the power of Satan in the minds of unbelievers may not exactly be guilty of reviling angelic majesties as Jude warns us, but by ignoring the extent of Satan’s power, it is unable to follow Michael’s example and to say effectively: “The Lord rebuke thee” (*Jude 9*). What we desperately need today is an apologetic with power.

If the Biblical picture of man’s enmity against God and control by Satan is correct, then how can Christians ever persuade men to turn from sin and Satan to the true and living God? The biblical answer, of course, is that they cannot. The Scriptures do not say that it is difficult for the unbeliever to accept spiritual truth. They say that it is impossible. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (*1 Corinthians 2:14*). When our Lord once made a similar

pronouncement concerning an entire segment of society, “his disciples... were exceedingly amazed, saying, ‘Who then can be saved?’ ” His answer provides for us the key to all truly effective Christian apologetics today: “With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible” (*Matthew 19:25-26*). It seems quite obvious, then, that God never intended that Christians should win the lost through purely philosophical and academic arguments, or even that they should by this means remove the mental obstacles within unbelievers so that the Word of God might penetrate their hearts.

If this had been God’s plan, the vast majority of Christians throughout history would have been automatically disqualified from effective witness, for they would have been unable to meet highly educated unbelievers on their own level in intellectual debate. “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise... that no flesh should glory in his presence” (*1 Corinthians 1:26-29*).

The Biblical method of winning men to Christ (including the intellectuals of our day) is to lovingly, patiently and prayerfully present the true Gospel “according to the scriptures” (*1 Corinthians 15:3-4*) from the context of a godly life (*1 Thessalonians 1:5; 2:3-12*). Only the “quick and powerful” Word of God can penetrate the unbeliever’s shield of defense and pierce into his heart (*Hebrews 4:12*), and thus only God may receive the glory for the genuine conversion of sinful men.

Once converted by God’s Holy Spirit, a man for the first time in his life enjoys the proper perspective and frame of reference for analyzing his intellectual problems concerning Christian doctrines, even if he never finds the complete answers this side of Heaven.

Paul’s own conversion is an instructive illustration of this divine dynamic. Instead of presenting a list of questions to the Lord Jesus when he was overwhelmed by His presence on the Damascus road, Saul of Tarsus simply cried out, “What shall I do, Lord?” (*Acts 22:10*). With his spiritual blindness removed by God – “straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God” (*Acts 9:20*).

He “was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision” (*Acts 26:19*) even though it must have required years for him to rethink everything that he had previously learned about the Scriptures in the light of this transforming new revelation. The book of *Acts* contains numerous examples of such proclamations of God’s revealed message, resulting in conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit and genuine conversion (*Acts 2:36-38; 8:34-36; 10:42-48; 16:31-34*).

Another important New Testament example of this approach to Christian apologetics may be found in Paul’s admonition to the Corinthian church to turn from worldly wisdom and from an unwarranted glorying in certain sign-gifts in order that they might give themselves to the clear proclamation of God’s Word. He said: “But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth” (*1 Corinthians 14:24-25*).<sup>2</sup> It is perfectly obvious from this remarkable passage that neither human wisdom nor empirical signs were an adequate substitute for the clear proclamation of God’s Word.

---

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Ramm is obviously quite wrong to say – “If a man has a prejudice against the Gospel it is the function of apologetics and evidences to remove that prejudice... Apologetics and Christian evidences cut down these objections to enable the Gospel once again to directly confront the consciousness of a man” “*Protestant Christian Evidences*” (Chicago: Moody Press, 1953), 15-16.

However, if the Christian communicator constantly appeals to God's Word in order to establish its truth in the mind of the unbeliever, is he not guilty of reasoning in a circle? If the unbeliever refuses to accept the Scriptures as divinely inspired, should not the communicator temporarily abandon the Bible until he has demonstrated its truth independently by appealing to the vast array of archaeological, historical, scientific, and other facts that tend to confirm its claims?

The answer to this question is – no. If Christianity is merely *one* circle of truth to be conditioned and defined by *other* circles of truth, then it is not true at all, because the Scriptures boldly and consistently claim to be God's eternal, all-inclusive, unique, final, and absolutely authoritative Word. This is the crucial foundation of true Christian apologetics.

When the Christian appeals to God's Word he is appealing to the *only* ultimate circle of truth concerning God and spiritual realities. This circle is so vast and profound that it includes everything that exists, both within and beyond the universe, both visible and invisible – including the unbeliever himself and the very 'god of this world' who blinds him!

To turn off the light of God's Word, in order to establish first a 'common ground' with the unbeliever is thus to abandon truth in order to grope together with an unregenerate mind in the darkness that characterizes this world-system apart from God.

Revealed truth is self-authenticating and self-vindicating, like light. Peter stated – “Ye do well that ye take heed [*to the Word of God*], as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn” (2 Peter 1:19).

Imagine a man lost within the deep recesses of a dark underground cavern in utter despair of ever finding his way out. If a friend had a general idea of his location, how could he best come to his rescue? Should he rush into the cave, careless of his pathway, and sit with him in darkness, sharing with him the common ground of being lost?

Would it not be much wiser to take along a powerful flashlight, marking his path as he enters the cavern so that he could retrace his steps to the safety of the world above? However, suppose that the lost man, in his utter despair, refused to believe that his friend had a flashlight and that there was a way out? Should the would-be rescuer sit there in darkness and argue with him concerning the size, make, power, and previous performance of his flashlight?

Since the lost man still has the capacity to recognize light when he sees it, should not his friend immediately end the debate by *inviting him to look at the light* as he switches on the flashlight?

Man's amazing capacity to hear and to see in the physical realm did not come about by chance. “The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them” (Proverbs 20:12). Neither is man's capacity to recognize God's truth a product of chance. Every human being has this capacity and will be judged by the Creator on the basis of his use of it. John tells us that Christ is “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9). Thus, man has an innate knowledge of his Creator. “That which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has shewed it unto them” (Romans 1:19).

When a man is therefore confronted with Christ, the Light of the world, it is no help to him to accommodate him when he demands another light first. When a Christian apologist turns off the light of his Lord and begins groping to find light from the general consensus of scientific opinion, he has entered into a spiritual cavern from which there is no escape.

What he must do is to keep the heart and mind of his unbelieving friend exposed to God's Word in one way or another, all the time praying that the Spirit of God might bring conviction of sin and a willingness to trust the Savior. If he does not respond to God's infallible Word, which

is His *special* revelation, what assurance do we gain from the Bible that He will respond to the witness of *general* revelation, such as the various theistic proofs for God's personal existence and historical evidences for the truth of Christianity?

The Christian who adopts such a Bible-centered method must, however, prepare himself for intense criticism, even from fellow Christians. To subordinate rationalistic argumentation to the supremacy of Scripture is to cut across the grain of all our natural inclinations and invite the accusation of obscurantism. "After all," we are being told on every side, "with so many false religions, cults, and philosophies in the world today, is it not the right and responsibility of an intelligent person to investigate carefully the validity of Christianity in comparison with other possible alternatives before making a final decision?"

Again, the answer is – "no". Christianity is not simply one of the several available religious truth systems. Nor is our Lord Jesus Christ just one of several saviors we may investigate at our leisure and on our own terms.

Furthermore, our intelligent investigator is far from being neutral and unbiased in spiritual matters. He cannot sit in judgment with complete objectivity as one religion after another passes in view, waiting to find one that is logically coherent, historically and scientifically factual, and personally satisfying before adopting it as his own.

Quite to the contrary, men are active enemies of the one true God of revelation and redemption, in whose image and likeness we have all been created, and in whom "we live and move, and have our being" (*Acts 17:28*). While it is true that the divine image has been marred through the Fall, it is nevertheless very much intact (*Genesis 9:6; 1 Corinthians 11:7; James 3:9*).

It is precisely because man does bear God's image that he inwardly *knows Who* this God is. That is why he runs away from God and His Word and hides his face from Him (*cf. Genesis 3:10; Isaiah 53:3*). That is why he also hinders or suppresses the truth in unrighteousness (*Romans 1:18*) and "hateth the light, neither cometh to the light" (*John 3:20*).

Sinful men cannot innocently claim that God is an unknown entity to them "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (*Romans 1:21*). These are the reasons why sinful men actually have no right to demand 'proper credentials' when the Creator says to them: "Repent! Believe My Word! Obey Me – NOW!" When the Holy Spirit says to the human heart, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," it is potential suicide to procrastinate, investigate or debate. "Behold, now is the day of salvation" (*2 Corinthians 6:2*). "God...now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (*Acts 17:30*). God may graciously prolong the appeal, but sinful man cannot presume upon this!

Let us look at the matter from a different perspective. If an unregenerate man actually did have the right to demand full intellectual satisfaction concerning the claims of God's Word before accepting them, he would be the greatest of fools for settling for anything less than a complete demonstration.

But in order to have such a demonstration he would have to examine carefully *all* the pertinent facts and *every* possible alternative before receiving Christ as his Lord. Of course, he would die long before he could arrive at the place where he could make a decision on this basis. Such an approach to Christian apologetics is not only unbiblical but it leads to logical absurdities!

To give an unbeliever the impression that he has a right to demand answers to all the rational problems relating to the Bible and Christianity before he repents of his sin and turns to Christ for

forgiveness, is to set him up on a pedestal of intellectual and spiritual pride from which he will *never* descend. What can such endless debates actually accomplish in preparing such a person for “the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel” (*Romans 2:16*)?

What can be said for such rationalistic apologetics when God has commissioned us to present “all the counsel of God” (*cf. Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 20:27; 2 Timothy 2:2; 4:2*)? And how do we respond to Paul’s admonition to Timothy – “be gentle unto all men, apt to teach [i.e.: *to teach revealed truth*], patient, in meekness instructing [i.e.: *with Scripture*] those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil” (*2 Timothy 2:24-26*)?

If the New Testament is our infallible guide in such matters, we must conclude that the Christian who will be most effectively used by God in winning people to Christ is not the one who knows the most about secular philosophy, psychology, history, archaeology, or natural science (important though these disciplines may be in their proper place in developing a comprehensive Christian world-and-life view). It will be the Christian who knows most about God’s Word, and who humbly seeks God’s daily strength and wisdom in obeying it.

The best Christian apologist is the best student of Scripture, who, to use the Bible’s own terms to describe him, is “a workman that needeth not to be ashamed,” because he is “rightly dividing the word of truth” (*2 Timothy 2:15*).

He will be a man like Apollos – “mighty in the scriptures...instructed in the way of the Lord... [who] spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord,” and thus by God’s Word “he mightily convinced” unbelievers (*Acts 18:24-28*).

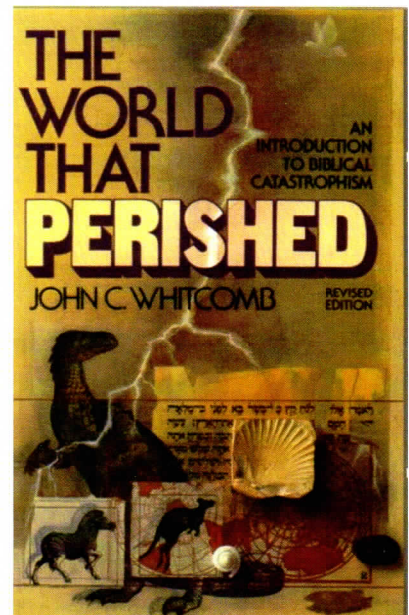
The writer finds himself in complete agreement with those who insist that Christianity is supremely rational. This is not because the Christian understands everything that God has revealed, for even the apostle Paul refused to make such a claim (*Romans 11:33; 1 Corinthians 13:9; see also 2 Peter 3:16*).

The reason why one must insist on the essential rationality of Christianity is because of the nature of God Himself. His thoughts have been communicated to us effectively and in truth. The Bible is perspicuous (*1 John 2:20, 27*). However, man’s finiteness will prevent him from knowing God exhaustively.

The Gospel may be foolish “to them that perish” (*1 Corinthians 1:18*), but it is *not* intrinsically foolish; it is perfect and infinite wisdom (*1 Corinthians 1:20-29*). Thus, the Christian message is *ultimately rational*. But this is very far from saying that the Christian message can be communicated *rationalistically* to lost men.

The apostle Peter, by the Spirit of God, commanded each believer to “be ready always to give an answer [Gk: *apologian*] to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (*1 Peter 3:15*). Does this mean that the Christian must go outside the sphere of revelational truth to provide intellectual and academic justification for his faith in God’s Word to the unbeliever? Could Peter himself have fulfilled such a command in view of his very limited background?

Would the apostle Paul, who was widely known for his great learning (*Acts 26:24; cf. 22:3*), have indulged in such pursuits for the philosophically-minded Corinthians in view of his avowed determination “not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified...that your



faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (*1 Corinthians 2:2 and 5*)? Hardly so.

One therefore suspects from the very outset that the very popular semi-rationalistic interpretation of *1 Peter 3:15* is misguided.<sup>3</sup>

This suspicion is confirmed by an examination of the immediate context of the passage. Peter was writing to persecuted Christians who were being terrorized by their pagan neighbors. They were commanded, however, not to sink into despair, but to recognize their truly “blessed” situation (*cf. Matthew 5:10; James 5:11*).

Furthermore, they were neither to fear nor to be troubled (*1 Peter 3:14; cf. Isaiah 8:12*). But why should they adopt such an attitude? Was it because they knew they could out-manuever their enemies in intellectual debate? Definitely not! Early Christians did not include “many wise men according to the flesh” among their number (*1 Corinthians 1:26*).

Their confidence was really based upon their spiritual resources in Christ the Lord, whom they were to *sanctify* in their hearts.

Furthermore, the words that follow Peter’s command to “be ready always to give an answer” are highly significant. This defense is to be made with “meekness and fear” (*cf. Colossians 4:6*) and with “a good conscience; that ... they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.”

Note carefully that these conditions have nothing to do with rationalistic debate, for a basic assumption underlying such debate is that a correct answer is effective regardless of the presence or absence of meekness, reverence or godliness in the one giving the answer. But in a spiritual witness to the truth of God, these factors are absolutely vital.

It is clear from this passage, then, that no spiritually effective answers can be given to unregenerate people by Christians concerning the hope that is in them until they have learned to *sanctify the Lord God* in their own hearts. But what does that really mean?

The term *sanctify* in this context presupposes that Christians are themselves sanctified or holy – set apart for God.

In the immediate context, then, Peter is saying that the believer must confess his inability to convert men by mere human reasonings, and recognize God’s unique and sovereign ability to do the converting. He must learn to pray that the God Who knows the hearts of all men and Who knows how to penetrate those hearts with His own Word will present His Word, by His Spirit, to the hearers, and be glorified by the results.

During the 1944 Ardennes campaign in Belgium, better known as the Battle of the Bulge, the writer served as a “fire direction computer” in a US field artillery battalion. It was his job to sit with two other men in a basement behind the front lines and to telephone directions to the artillerymen who handled the twelve 105mm guns.

The really dangerous job was entrusted to the forward observer, usually a lieutenant. He had to position himself in a high place near enough to the front lines to see enemy tanks approaching.

When the tanks came into view, a potential crisis emerged. He could either panic or he could follow strict instructions. If he panicked and fled to the rear, the tanks would proceed unchallenged, and the battle might be lost, including the forward observer. Or, he might rush

---

<sup>3</sup> Whereas pure rationalism in apologetics would claim that unbelievers can be argued directly into the kingdom, semi-rationalism claims that – “The purpose of apologetics is always merely to clear away the intellectual obstructions so that the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit may do their work” Edward John Carnell, “*How Every Christian Can Defend His Faith*,” in *Moody Monthly*, February, 1950.





**The Battle of the Bulge, 1944-45:  
a shattered German tank, its  
turret blown off by anti-tank fire.**

**Dr. Whitcomb bases an  
illustration on this battle.**

**Imperial War Museum: EA 48892**

toward the tanks and start firing on them himself. That would also prove disastrous to him, and to his military unit.

There was, however, a third alternative. That would be to “sanctify” the field artillery in his heart! In other words, he could follow instructions and phone the “fire direction center,” giving them the number, size, location and apparent speed and direction of movement of the enemy tanks, confessing thereby his inability to handle them in his own strength, and the ability of the field artillery to do the job which he could not do.

It hardly seems necessary to explain that once the artillery had located these tanks, they were in desperate danger. As dozens of armor-piercing shells whistled over the head of the forward observer and penetrated the tanks one by one, exploding inside, *he was giving his greatest apologetic to the challenge that confronted him.*

As God’s “forward observers” in Satan’s world of demons and fallen men, Christians must learn to call upon their Lord. No other system has ever really worked nor ever shall.

What, then, is the “answer” that each of us must be prepared to give to everyone who asks us to give an account for the hope that is in us? The answer must be basically God’s Word, not our own word. God’s thoughts are vastly higher than our thoughts (*Isaiah 55:9*), and His words penetrate far deeper into men’s hearts than our words.

In every sincere soul-winning effort, the believer soon discovers that his own words are dead, inactive and dull.

But – “the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (*Hebrews 4:12*).

It was Christ the Lord Who set the apologetic example for all believers when He thrice defeated Satan with accurate, appropriate quotations from the Word of God, and with the formula – “It is written” (*Matthew 4:1-11*). In His great confrontation with unbelieving Pharisees in *John 8:12-59*, our Lord appealed constantly to *basic spiritual realities*, such as the witness of His Father (*John 8:14, 26, 28, 29, 38, 42, 49, 54*), rather than to sign-miracles. It is noteworthy that “as he spake these words, many believed on him” (vs. 30).

Do modern Christians sometimes feel that they have, because of archaeological, historical, scientific, and other discoveries that shed light on the Scriptures, *a superior apologetic*, to that of our Lord and His apostles, and of the early church?

If so, they have not really sanctified the Lord God in their hearts and their answers to lost men can bring neither conviction nor conversion in the biblical sense of those terms. God's work must be done in God's way if it is to receive God's approval (*cf. 1 Corinthians 3:10-15*).

Dr John C. Whitcomb  
10203 Coral Reef Way  
Indianapolis, IN 46256  
317-250-5469

Email: [whitcombministry@gmail.com](mailto:whitcombministry@gmail.com)

To purchase books, DVDs, CDs or Bible Charts, visit our website: [www.whitcombministries.org](http://www.whitcombministries.org)

Listen to Dr. Whitcomb's sermons: [www.sermonaudio.com/sermonsspeaker.asp](http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermonsspeaker.asp)