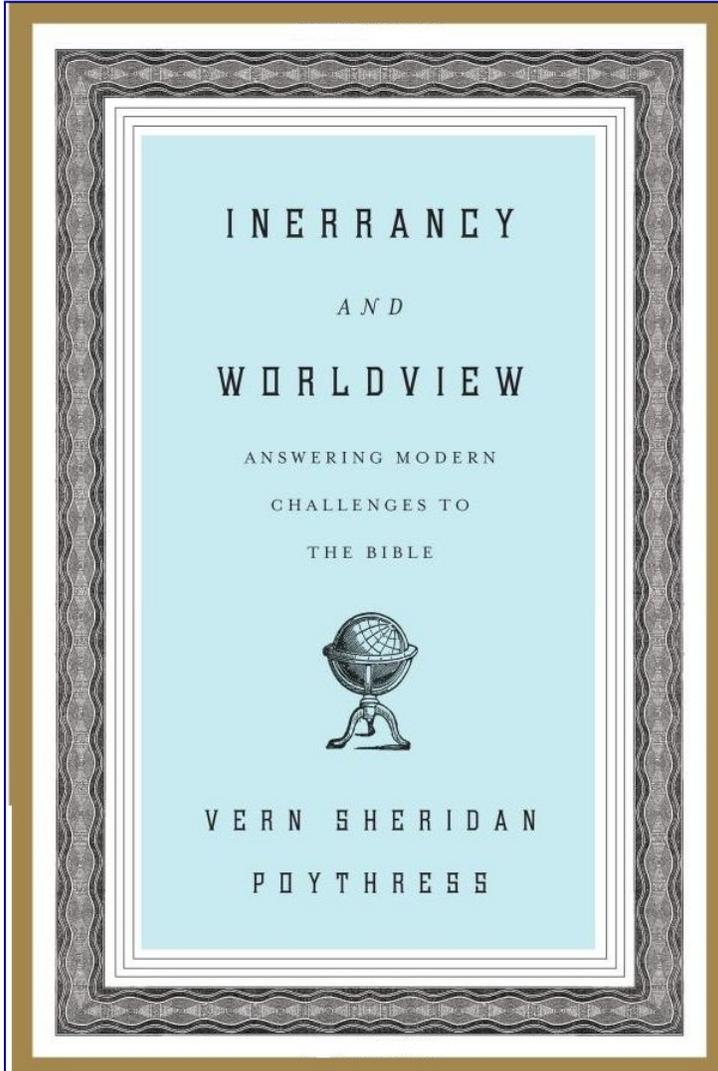


[Interview by Matthew Claridge for *Credo Magazine*, www.credomag.com, posted on July 13, 2012, at <<http://www.credomag.com/2012/07/13/a-conversation-with-vern-poythress/>>. Used by permission.]

A Conversation with Vern Poythress

On 07.13.12 | In [Interviews](#), [Matthew Claridge](#) | by [editor](#)



Interview by Matthew Claridge—

Challenges to the evangelical doctrine of inerrancy just won't stay down. It often seems that no amount of theological, historical, or exegetical fortifications can abate the waves of skepticism that continue to rage over this doctrine. So why the impasse? In his most recent volume, Vern Poythress suggests that the problem may be a more basic one than source theories and postmodern hermeneutics. It's a matter of worldview commitments. Commitments, we might add, that no one bothers to state up front. Dr. Poythress graciously answered for Credo some questions about his unique approach to defending

this classic doctrine in [*Inerrancy and Worldview: Answering Modern Challenges to the Bible*](#).

For most people, defending inerrancy is all about solving historical discrepancies or authorial contradictions in the Bible. Although those concerns are not entirely neglected, your focus is quite different. Give us an idea of how you've gone about defending inerrancy in this book.

My book *Inerrancy and Worldview* focuses on the way in which assumptions due to a modern worldview affect people's understanding of the Bible. A large number of modern criticisms of the Bible and modern claims to find "errors" arise from injecting erroneous assumptions belonging to modern worldviews. People see errors because they misconstrue the Bible's claims or find them implausible when measured against their standard assumptions. They do not humbly endeavor to understand the Bible on its own terms.

Behind the dizzying array of historical critical proposals you suggest there is fundamental commitment to a worldview alien to the Bible. Particularly, you routinely distinguish the "personalist" worldview of the Bible from the "impersonalist" worldview of the Modern era. Could you explain for us this distinction and how it impacts the reasonableness of inerrancy in our day?

We live in pluralistic times, and so in a sense there are *many* modern worldviews. But people are deeply influenced by materialism, which says that matter and motion constitute the ultimate structure of the world. That assumption is part of the foundation for a worldview that I call *impersonalism*. Impersonalism thinks that the structures of the world, whether scientific laws or historical patterns or social or linguistic structures, are just "there." The world runs by semimechanical means, and God—if he exists at all—is absent. By contrast, the Bible offers a *personalist* worldview, with God at the center. God rules the world personally. He is intimately involved not only with each individual, but with everything around us. His power, wisdom, faithfulness, and presence are expressed in his governance of science, politics, language, and society.

Impersonalism, by contrast, assumes that God is essentially absent. So its treatment of history excludes miracles. Its treatment of language and society sees these structures as impersonal, and therefore when it sees their marks cropping up in the Bible, they become signs of deficiency. The claim that the Bible is actually the voice of God becomes implausible, because if a person has an impersonalist worldview the Bible is made to fit into that view.

Another key point you press is the tendency of the Modern worldview to "decontextualize" meaning. What do you have in mind by this?

People can find contradictions in the Bible if they treat individual verses in isolation from one another. They ignore the way in which the meaning of each verse is colored by its

context. So, for example, they may argue that Psalm 86:8, “there is none like you among the gods,” implies the actual existence of many gods. They thereby suppress the connection with the neighboring verse, Psalm 86:10, which says, “You alone are God.” Psalm 86:8 also sits in the larger context of the entire canon, which contains clear teaching about God.

Historical criticism is notorious for finding alleged contradictions. What is too seldom noticed is that (1) historical criticism comes to the biblical text with a method that ignores God’s purpose to have each verse unfold its meaning in the light of guidance from the rest of the canon; (2) it thinks of positive efforts to understand disparate verses in the light of one another as “artificial” or “dogmatic”; (3) it looks for earlier sources as an explanation for alleged “contradictions,” and in the very process isolates verses from their present location in a whole book.

In many cases, you do not reject entirely the methods of historical and literary criticism. Could you give us an idea of how you are able to affirm many of these modern methods and still maintain a distinctly inerrant view of Scripture?

Every modern method contains insights, due to God’s common grace, or it would not be attractive to anyone. Therefore, it does no credit to a Christian merely to reject a method wholesale. At the same time, every modern method gets contaminated and distorted by the infiltration of impersonalist assumptions, which come from the culture situation as well as individual sinful biases. Impersonalism biases historical research in the direction of antisupernaturalism—either the outright denial of the possibility of miracles, or a pattern of ignoring miracles in practice because “historical explanation” is virtually defined as an explanation that ignores God. Thus, according to a modern approach, it becomes unacceptable as a historical explanation to say that the Gospels are historically reliable because God inspired them. And it is unacceptable to say that the Ten Commandments originated by the voice of God at Mount Sinai, or that Amos’s prophetic message originated because God empowered him and revealed it to him. Within an impersonalist worldview, such explanations are viewed not only as illegitimate “history” but laughable. According to modern assumptions, “explanation” essentially *means* explanation according to immanent, secondary causes. Of course, according to a biblical worldview, God has ordained secondary causes. But in modern historical method there is no room in practice to acknowledge that God is present and at work in the midst of these causes, and that God is free to work in an exceptional way whenever he wishes.

Once we stand back from the seduction of modern assumptions, it is easy to see that they are radically at odds with the Bible itself. So it is no wonder that modern assumptions create tensions when applied to the Bible. Nevertheless, it is easy for people to be seduced, because many of the assumptions are part of the modern atmosphere. They are not debated but assumed. They seem “natural,” because they fit in with our culture.

We can also consider modern literary approaches, in distinction from approaches that focus on the history behind the Bible. Evangelicals have warmed up more to literary approaches, because these typically concentrate on the finished text of the Bible, rather than speculating about sources. By common grace, literary approaches can give us

insight, because the books of the Bible are produced by God in a way that takes account of and utilizes the literary and narrational resources that God himself has already ordained within the languages that he uses.

Yet dangers still lurk here. Secular literary methods assume that language and literature are closed to the presence of God. Therefore, plot and character development and literary artistry are artificial human additions to a basic substructure of factuality. When they occur in the Bible, they are seen as merely human, rather than an aspect of the voice of God. The literary approach can go even further at times, by pretending that in every narrative only the “story” as story—the literary artifice—matters, and whether the events happened is irrelevant. Literary approaches can be reductionistic in other ways, by training their practitioners to notice only the kind of verbal texture that is integral to a particular approach, and by seeing that texture only in one particular way. The ordinary reader who asks himself unself-consciously, “What is God saying?” does far better at noticing multiple dimensions to a text. In a personalist worldview, study of literary aspects of the Bible can supply positive insights, but these insights remain subordinate to the fundamental personal experience of listening to God speak. By contrast, within a modern impersonalist worldview, “method” and technical, professional skill derived from scholarly training may become primary. They then dictate the terms for engaging with texts.

Many people are unsettled by the amount of parallels between the Bible and other historical documents (e.g., the Genesis account and Gilgamesh, the Mosaic Law and Hammurabi’s code). In your view, this is actually an argument in favor of the Bible’s uniqueness. How so?

Modern impersonalism assumes that language, law, and culture are merely human and that God is absent. According to this assumption, any similarities between the Bible and surrounding culture become evidence that can be used to argue for a purely human origin for the Bible. Even if God were to speak, impersonalism would expect his speech to be radically different and unconnected with the impersonalist environment.

But the issue looks completely different if we follow the Bible’s own personalist worldview. God is thoroughly in charge of language, law, and culture. In addition, according to his own nature as trinitarian God, and according to his wisdom, it is natural for him to speak in a way that takes full account of and interacts with the context that he himself has ordained. That is to say, because of the very character of God and his presence in every culture, his speech fits in with the environment into which he speaks. He can, of course, criticize mistaken ideas and unjust laws. But because of God’s presence in general revelation in every culture, all cultures also contain true ideas and some sense of justice and morality and wisdom. So God’s speech naturally makes contact with cultural products that surround his speech.

Consider Hammurabi’s code in particular. It does not embody perfect justice, but it is a product that is influenced by the presence of God, who reveals himself and his righteousness in general revelation. It is natural that it should show similarities to the law of Moses. In addition, God in speaking through Moses takes into account the cultural situation of the Israelites, a situation that he himself has ordained and controlled. So in

the law he speaks about typical issues that crop up in the Israelite situation—regulations for betrothal, or lost animals, or animals that get loose and graze in someone else’s field, and so on. Hammurabi’s code is designed for a similar kind of culture, and so the similarities between it and the law of Moses are natural. The details in the law of Moses are a demonstration of God’s wisdom rather than a demonstration of merely human origin.

In responding to the oft maligned idea that inerrancy necessarily involves a mindless dictation theory, you propose a robustly Trinitarian framework for explaining the interaction between the divine and human author. Could you tease that out for us?

Orthodox theology has understood for centuries that God uses the full personal capabilities of the human authors, capabilities that he himself has imparted and shaped (Ps. 139). There is even a label for this kind of involvement of human authors in producing the Bible: “organic inspiration.” Orthodox theology has also noted the Bible’s teaching that the Holy Spirit is involved in inspiration: “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along *by the Holy Spirit*” (2 Pet. 1:21; see also Acts 1:16). The Holy Spirit works through the authors, as they actively use their full human capabilities.

The work of the Holy Spirit in inspiring the Bible is unique. But we can still see an analogy with the way in which the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of Christ, comes to indwell each Christian believer, for sanctification, for empowerment, for wisdom, and for witness. We are to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). Our goal is to be remade into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). And this goal includes being filled with the Holy Spirit in a manner analogous to Christ’s being filled by the Holy Spirit at the commencement of his ministry (Luke 3:22; 4:18). These patterns have their ultimate origin in the Trinity, where each person of the Trinity indwells the others in the pattern of coinherence.

Given this background, we can see by analogy how human beings are filled with the Holy Spirit in the work of inspiration (note Heb. 1:1-3). We may contrast the Bible’s view with impersonalism. Impersonalism sees the mind of each human being as a kind of closed box, from which God is absent. Such a view makes inspiration virtually impossible except by a disruption or violation or elimination of the human mind. But this view is deeply wrong. True humanity is humanity in fellowship with God, in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Our every thought is not supposed to be autonomous and isolated, but full of the wisdom of God, which he imparts through his presence. The personalism of the Bible dissolves the difficulty that impersonalism perceives in the idea of plenary verbal inspiration.

Many modern critics of inerrancy tie together two ideas: 1) error is simply a given of human communication and 2) God, in communicating with humans, must accommodate himself to human error. What is your response to this argument?

Human beings have the possibility of erring. But they do not always err—unless one redefines error to mean anything short of infinite precision. Such a redefinition can as usual be avoided by adopting a robust biblical view of truth, error, and communication. Given a biblically informed view of truth, we can then observe that even uninspired human beings sometimes speak the truth. So it is also possible that they would speak for a long time and be speaking nothing but the truth. It is not a disruption of humanity to have no error. It is simply that mere humanity does not *guarantee* the absence of error. Human nature as such provides many possible and actual instances of truth telling. The guarantee comes from divine speech. Human speech is true at times; divine speech is always true. There is no contradiction, once we have a robust, biblically informed view of God's sovereignty, including his sovereignty over human actions.

Could you illustrate how your focus on worldview helps us deal with a particularly difficult problem in the Bible?

One classic difficulty occurs in Proverbs 26:4-5:

Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.

Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

My book devotes one chapter to discussing this difficulty, so that its various dimensions can be adequately understood. I can only mention a few points here.

Some critics have been quick to claim that the two parallel lines in Proverbs 26:4-5 contradict one another. We work best if we take time to think and pray about a difficulty, and work through it carefully using a biblical worldview. In particular, language as given to us by God is complex, and the Book of Proverbs is complex.

(1) We take into account who God is. (2) We take into account the Book of Proverbs, which has wisdom and folly as major themes. (3) We take into account the literary character of individual proverbs, according to God's design for them and for their place in language. A proverb is typically suggestive, and invites readers to take time to reflect on its meaning and implications. (4) We take account of the fact that the author places the two verses side by side, thereby inviting reflection. (5) We take account of the qualifying clauses introduced by "lest." These have the effect of coloring the meaning of answering. The first line focuses on the danger to "you," while the second line focuses on the danger to the fool. A wise answer takes into account both dangers. (6) The key phrase "according to his folly" could involve falling into the folly oneself (verse 4), or could involve addressing the fool's folly according to its shape and crafting an answer that challenges him (verse 5).

Reflecting on these and other dimensions in the pair of proverbs results in deeper understanding. For the humble person, the apparent surface tension between the two lines actually aids understanding, because it challenges him to further reflection.

A second, companion book, entitled *Inerrancy and the Gospels: A God-Centered Approach to the Challenges of Harmonization* (Crossway), due out in October, 2012, takes up many more individual cases of difficulties. Though the book focuses on the Gospels, its principles can be applied to other issues in the Bible.

Some critics might respond that your robustly presuppositional argument for biblical inerrancy is virtually unfalsifiable. They might ask, “what would it take to falsify your inerrant view of the Bible?” What would be your rejoinder?

There is much to be said in answer to this question. I have learned a good deal from presuppositional apologetics, and works on that subject explain why I approach things as I do. Obviously I cannot go into detail here, but let me try to make a beginning.

If I were talking to a particular critic, I would want first to ask more questions about what is troubling him. Part of the point of my book is to ask just such questions, and to try to understand ways in which assumptions and presuppositions belonging to a modern worldview have affected people. If we find out what a person’s assumptions are, we are in a better position to help him. Frequently the assumptions contain both grains of truth and some distortions of truth. Sorting out these two takes time. And to some extent each person’s difficulties are different.

Since I am dealing here with a general question rather than a specific critic, I have to guess about what the difficulties might be in the critic’s mind.

I would guess that the question about falsifiability rests partly on a misapprehension of what I am trying to do in the book. I acknowledge all the way through the book that our modern world is pluralistic in worldviews, and that many people do not believe what I believe. I am not trying to persuade people to believe in Christ, and then in the Bible as Christ’s book, merely on the basis of arguments presented in my book. If a person is considering who Christ is, and what his claims are, he should first of all read the Bible, and particularly the Gospels. (Of course many other books that are about the Bible and the Christian faith may help; but eventually all these lead back to the Bible.)

God the Father, Christ himself, as he presents himself in the Gospels, and the Holy Spirit whom he sends, are the primary agents in persuasion. That fact ought to go without saying. But I say it because once again differences in worldviews may be intruding. An unbeliever with an impersonalist worldview may expect to be persuaded by the logic of arguments, a logic which he conceives as impersonal. He may expect to be presented with evidence, which he thinks of as impersonal—it is so many facts.

If so, he is already missing part of the point of the Bible’s message. An unbeliever has to deal with God, against whom he has rebelled. And he has to deal with a thoroughly personal interaction with Christ and with the Holy Spirit. As he reads the Bible and considers its claims, he is not in charge of the arrangements for debating or presenting evidence. Rather, he is confronted with God, who makes claims on him. To be sure, there is plenty of evidence, especially in the Gospels themselves. A person does not first have to accept the authority of the Gospels in order to read for himself. My book is saying that he should become aware of the fact that he will misread the Bible if he imports his own

assumptions.

I also hope to help people who are followers of Christ. We all need to see more clearly how to understand the Bible in terms of its own worldview.

Now let us come to the actual question of the critic, concerning unfalsifiability. I want to ask, “For whom does the critic think that the Bible’s inerrancy is unfalsifiable? For himself, for some other inquirer, or for me?” I ask that question because for each person, his worldview is going to influence what he expects. My preceding discussion shows, I hope, that I think that the Gospels themselves, as well as other parts of the Bible, need to be read and thought about. The Bible talks about what God did in history, and shows how the resurrection of Christ is central to history. Did it happen? If it did *not*, that would “falsify” the Christian faith, as the Apostle Paul himself indicates (1 Cor. 15:14-18). Paul also appeals to evidence (1 Cor. 15:3-8). But if someone undertakes to evaluate the claim that Christ was raised, he will find that the evaluation is related to the issue of whether a person’s worldview allows that there might be miracles, and how a person ought to evaluate historical claims. So in practice the evaluation involves worldviews, and that leads back to the discussion in my book.

The actual question of the critic is not whether the Christian faith is falsifiable, but whether inerrancy is falsifiable. But I suggest that inerrancy needs to be understood as a conclusion that a person comes to because he has already met Christ. Fellowship with Christ, through the Spirit, makes him sensitive to all kinds of biblical testimony, including the testimony of Christ himself in the Gospels, to the authority of Scripture. Other advocates of inerrancy have made the same point. So I find myself once again wondering what is really troubling the critic.

Let me make another guess. Perhaps the critic is worried about me and my commitments, not about his own views of the Bible. My book, by contrast, is worried about how people—including me—may misread the Bible by reading it against the background of their own worldview, which may be at odds with the Bible. It is a different question.

Maybe the critic is worried, not so much about me, but about how I deal with apparent difficulties in the Bible. I attempt to deal with them using the worldview that the Bible itself presents. When I do so, I can often show that the difficulties dissolve. I suppose that this might look “circular,” but it is actually quite sane to hear someone out on his own terms. A reader will never do justice to what the Bible actually claims unless he is willing to permit such a study of the Bible. The alternative is to bring along a modern worldview, and presuppositions that accord with that worldview. And then the result is predictable: one finds difficulties in the Bible that are generated by one’s own alien assumptions.

Many critics, I would guess, have a lot of confidence that, at least in its basic features, their modern impersonalism is correct. They bring along that commitment, and so they notice very quickly that I do not share it. Rather, I am calling for a reassessment of their confidence. I think it is ill-grounded. In fact, near the end of the book I suggest that it is a product of religious gullibility. That is rather a strong claim. But atheism and impersonalism, when adopted, function as ultimate commitments that in many ways are like a personal substitute for traditional religious commitments. With the adoption of substitute religion comes gullibility about that religion. Critics do not question their own assumptions.

Some critics, I would guess, want a way of testing the Bible that does not already involve a worldview. They want a way to test if the Bible is true by searching for contradictions in it, or searching for tensions between it and ancient extrabiblical sources. As I say, there is plenty of evidence. The Gospels are one source, but there is also evidence from the fulfillment of prophecy, from the remarkable claims of Jesus, and much else. I have already mentioned the testimony to the resurrection of Christ in 1 Cor. 15:3-8. The difficulty is that such evidence is often weighed using modern assumptions.

So what is a critic to do? The hope for having a neutral test is naive. No one can undertake a search for contradictions or historical evidence without already having an idea of truth, an idea of what makes a contradiction, an idea of what is history, an idea of how language works, and so on. In all these areas impersonalism comes right on in, uninvited, because it is the atmosphere in which modern life works.

Shall I illustrate one way in which impersonalism can come in? Let us ask about the word “falsify.” This word has a history. Why is that word being used, and why does “falsifying” seem important? If the gospel comes to an animist culture in central Africa, can you imagine the animist asking the preacher about whether his message can be falsified? The animist wants to know how to be free from the power of evil spirits. The gospel includes the announcement that in his life on earth Christ triumphed over the demonic realm and rescued those who were demon possessed. And the same is true today. The animist is not afraid of whether the gospel is falsifiable. He is afraid that it may not be true. If it is not true, and he nevertheless commits himself to Christ, he will have no effective protection from evil spirits, and harm or even death will come to him quickly.

Why is the typical secular European not reasoning in the same way? You see, we are carrying along a lot of cultural baggage without knowing it. The inhabitant of modernity thinks that modern cultural baggage is “wisdom.” The inhabitant will appeal to the triumphs of modern science, and the outmoded character of evil spirits. (He will do so in spite of having absorbed a postmodernist view of tolerance that says that all cultures are equal.) But the Bible’s worldview involves rethinking everything—even the nature of science, the nature of evil spirits, and the myth of “progress,” which says that we ourselves are at the peak of wisdom.

If I am not mistaken, the cultural background of the word “falsify” lies mainly in reflections on the nature of science and what makes empirical knowledge stable. The word tends to carry along with it presuppositions about the superiority of the objectivity in scientific investigation, and the obligation of all areas of knowledge to try to measure up to a scientific ideal. This position is a form of scientism, where science becomes a god and substitutes for traditional religion. It is also, needless to say, a form of impersonalism. And it is naive, because it does not realize that it secretly depends on a worldview. In addition, it does not realize that its worldview commitments infect its rather one-dimensional picture of what science is and how it operates. It also innately rebels against God, because it is not willing to contemplate the possibility that in a meeting with God, through Christ, the critic is not in charge of the arrangements for falsifiability. God is not positioned on the lab table, waiting to be inspected and “tested.”

By common grace, falsifiability does have some truth in it. Truth is in God, and what is false is eventually shown to be false when it comes up against truth (John 12:46). I may

even venture to answer a fool according to his folly. My view of inerrancy would surely be shown to be false if, after dying, I were never to rise from the dead, or if in the new heaven and the new earth, God were to tell me that I was wrong. What I suppose is scandalous about what I am doing within this life is that I make no pretense about the fact that I am intent on following Christ in every area of intellectual life. That includes how I think about evidence and inerrancy and history and falsifiability and so on. I believe this way of life is wise, as indicated in Proverbs 1:7 and John 14:6. I devote some time to explaining it in Part 8 of my book.

Following Christ leads to an increase in wisdom, whereas the alternatives do not. It is the way that the Bible recommends. We human beings are not good at running our own lives, despite our pretensions. Our own autonomous way of life is being continually “falsified.” We continue to follow it nonetheless. It is better to get over it, confess our sins, and commit ourselves to One who is trustworthy—to Christ our Savior. But then this remedy is personalistic, and our modern times find it uncomfortable even to hear, and folly to follow. I have no other way to offer to modern times. He is the way (John 14:6).

How would you advise a Christian to begin a dialogue with naysayers of the doctrine of inerrancy?

I would suggest to begin by listening. Ask the naysayer for his story. “Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger” (James 1:19). That is an expression of a personalist worldview, isn’t it? Conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit, not the fruit of the cleverness of our arguments. At a subordinate level, I believe that all the knowledge we have—even “ordinary” knowledge—comes from God, expressed in his Word, through the Holy Spirit.

We can present arguments, yes. We can present evidence, particularly evidence for the resurrection of Christ, which is central to the Christian faith. To those who accept the claim concerning Christ’s resurrection, we go on to other issues: who Christ is, and what is his teaching about the authority of the Old Testament. We do so with an awareness of the personal character of God, the inescapable presence of God, and the deceitfulness of sin, including sin still remaining in ourselves. We pay attention to differences in worldview between ourselves and the naysayers. Arguments and evidence have a role, but they are only one aspect within a personalist context. We pray for those to whom we speak.

If a critic indicates that he has a difficulty with some particular verse of the Bible, we can try to address that difficulty. Commentaries on the Bible written by inerrantist authors frequently do this. Naturally, the commentators differ in their wisdom, and they are not in themselves infallible, but they are a valuable resource. I hope that my book may contribute as well, by providing additional resources for thinking about how we clear up difficulties, and giving examples of how it is done.

As part of the process, I think that dialogue can fruitfully include discussion of the influence of worldviews and assumptions. What baggage does the naysayer bring to his reading of the Bible? By common grace, there are going to be many good things. But we may also—sometimes painfully—explore the ways in which the baggage reinforces resistance to the Bible’s message and misunderstanding of it. We distinguish our own

worldview from that of the world around. We take care not to compromise our own convictions in the course of trying to explain them to someone with vastly different convictions.

We are all human beings and all sinners. We have that in common. But, as presuppositional apologetics claims, we do not share “common ground” with unbelievers, if that means some neutral rules or methods or facts where our convictions make no difference. Christ is Lord of all. He is Lord of all rules and methods and facts. Thus, he remains central in discussions of the Christian faith, and central also to what assumptions we bring in when we read the Bible.

“What we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 3:5). Christ’s power alone can rescue our friends from the prisons—including mental prisons—in which they are trapped. “For the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 3:6). A person comes because he is captivated, not by “evidence” or “argument” in the abstract, but by the glory of God displayed in the love of Christ.

The Apostle Paul saw a literal vision. Each of us needs the spiritual analog—a spiritual “vision” or reception of Christ. We come to place our faith in Christ for our salvation. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ’s glory subdues us, and then we begin to see the Bible rightly. We have confidence in it, not because we ourselves, by some allegedly neutral standards, can solve all its difficulties, but because God has shown himself to be faithful in Christ’s crucifixion and his resurrection.

Given that basic confidence, we find ourselves understanding the Bible more and more, and clearing up apparent difficulties, because we are receiving blessing from God by walking in his way (Prov. 4:18), and because we are reading the Bible on its own terms. We then invite the naysayers to change their ways and proceed along with us. We try to persuade them through a dual discussion, where we present the Bible’s teaching and its worldview, as best we can, and where we attempt to make evident the ungrounded assumptions and commitments that belong to modernity. We also pay attention to the existential aspect—the naysayer’s personal needs and failings and longings—and yes, his sin and guilt and alienation. The naysayer, like us, is a full human being, not a debating machine. There are many topics on which discussion may proceed, and we may try to choose topics in a way that adjusts to the personal needs of each naysayer. We pray.

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