

Tuesday, September 16, 2008

## Another Response to David, Part 6: Signs of the Legends

In this post, I continue my long-awaited response to [David's comments](#) in response to my 29 July post [In Response to David on I Corinthians 15:3-8](#).

I wrote:

Yes, you adhere to supernaturalism on the one hand (which defies explanation), and yet demand more and more and more explanation when it comes to hypotheses involving embellishment, fabrication, misunderstandings that beget further misunderstandings, manipulation of sources (such as OT "prophecies" of Jesus), etc., all couched in a worldview which condemns human beings as depraved liars. Got it.

David responded:

Not even close Dawson, and I'm surprised you would hurl such insults if you are really laboring in love as you claim. It only makes the discussion less productive.

Why consider my statement above insulting? You do adhere to supernaturalism, do you not? The bible is full of supernaturalism, so because of your confession as a Christian, I assume you do adhere to supernaturalism. And so far I've not seen how supernaturalism can be explained (to explain it would be to defuse it) or how supernaturalism can be accepted as a rational explanation to anything. Suppose someone tried to explain the growth of green plants because some supernatural being makes them do so. How is that a reasonable explanation? I've written amply on the issue of supernaturalism (see for instance [here](#)), and have concluded that proponents of supernaturalism consistently fail to explain how someone like myself can distinguish between what they call "the supernatural" and what they may merely be imagining.

Also, it is the Christian worldview, not mine, which views man as contaminated with some malady or force called "sin," something we are said to be born with or into, something that is part of our nature whether we like it or not. There's no use denying this aspect of our existence, Christians say, for it is traced back to the fall of Adam, the first man, according to the Genesis myth which got the whole thing started. It's never been clear how one "inherits" sin from Adam, or how one man's guilt can be hereditary. But then again, supernaturalism defies explanation, and we're just supposed to believe that this curse is passed on from generation to generation, without exception. In Rom. 3:12 Paul declares "there is none that doeth good, no, not one." To be true, this statement would have to include Paul himself. This statement was preceded by the declaration, in 3:4, "Let God be true, but every man a liar," which I've always thought a very puzzling statement, for it seems to put this decision, that "God [is] true" and "every man a liar" in the hands of the believer. That makes sense on my analysis of Christianity as ultimately being rooted in imagination. But Christians want to believe all this is true. But if it's true, that men are inherently depraved and involuntarily prone to lying, why should I trust what any Christian says? It's completely self-undercutting, even coming from the bible, because it was written by men, and, as men, they are involuntarily prone to lying according to their own worldview.

And here I am, I have offered a non-supernaturalistic explanation of the data which we find in the New Testament, and it's rejected because a few inconsequential things here and there are left "unexplained." But if being able to explain everything comprehensively were the guiding criterion for qualifying an account as reasonable, then surely we ought not accept the Christian account of the New Testament.

David had written:

3. Your interpretation provides little explanatory power, since if 'brother of the Lord' simply means James was a Christian, this is nothing unique and honorific at all.

I responded:

Did you read what I had written? Paul clearly thought that James was a "pillar" of the church at the time (I referred you to Gal. 2:9). He was not just another convert in Paul's view.

Now David writes:

This doesn't at all lend credence to your argument about the meaning of the phrase in Galatians 1.

Why isn't Paul's reference to James as one of the pillars of the church allowed to inform the context of his reference to James as "the brother of the Lord"? The word 'Lord', as I have shown, is a title, not a name. The impression I get from Paul is that James was an elder in the church with some elite claim to authority. If Paul had meant that James was a sibling of Jesus, why didn't he say "a brother of Jesus" instead of "a brother of the Lord"? All the data points to a title being used of James rather than a biological relationship which most likely wouldn't have mattered to Paul anyway, given his abhorrence for the flesh.

David continued:

Paul could say James was purple in chapter 2, but why assume that has any bearing on the meaning of a phrase in chapter 1?

I don't think Paul calling James purple in chapter 2 would be at all comparable to what we actually have. In chapter 1, Paul mentions, in passing and without further explanation, what appears to be a title for James, since he uses the word 'adelphos' (which Robert has shown can have a wide variety of meanings) in relation to "the Lord," which for Paul is the post-resurrection Jesus. As [Robert pointed out in a comment](#), if Paul meant to specify a biological relationship between James and Jesus, he would have been better off using *kasignêtoio* instead of *adelphos*. Also, it is unlikely that he would have meant to denote this kind of relationship in reference to "the Lord," for reasons stated. Furthermore, that Paul clearly refers to James as a central figure in the Jerusalem church, so the implication here is sufficiently strong that Paul could only mean some positional status by virtue of his place as one of the "pillars." Meanwhile, I've seen no good reason why this reference would suggest a biological relationship. The only rationale I've seen for this involves an appeal to the gospels, but I've already addressed why this is at best shaky, and persistence in taking this course in the matter requires one to ignore the enormous context weighing against the authenticity of the gospels.

I wrote:

Specifically what evidence "points to the historicity of the Gospels"? What exactly do you mean by this? What evidence is there that a deity incarnated itself, was born as a human being to a virgin mother, performed miracles and cured congenital blindness, rebuked demons and devils, raised dead people back to life, and was himself raised back to life after being crucified? We have stories, and stories can be made up. Tell me what evidence supports these stories?

David responded:

It seems like you have only supernatural events in mind for the historicity of the Gospels. There are voluminous works out there on the historical Jesus from all spectrums of the issue which give evidence for this. Need I summarize them all here?

No, you needn't summarize these works, because they aren't what I'm asking for. Volume after volume of text is not what I'm asking for. I've seen enough "argument" for these things. When I ask for evidence which "points to the historicity of the Gospels," I'm asking for something more substantial and more solid than just some apologetics book. There are books out there which argue for the reality of near-death experiences, astrological influences, ESP, sorcery, Mormonism, Scientology, etc. Defenseless readers are taken in by this stuff all the time, because the authors make it seem like these things are all true. Authors of these kinds of texts play on the reader's imagination and rely on specious reasoning, and that's how they hook them in. Josh McDowell, Bill Craig, NT Wright and yes, even Geisler and Turek, are all good examples of this. It gets even more perverse with the presuppositionalists.

All Christians have for validating the gospel narratives are the storybooks themselves, and sources which variously date later but are taken as confirmation of these storybooks. But in the end, stories are all they have, stories which become "real" in the believer's imagination, because he envisages the characters and events which they depict. They are, in essence, the precursors to today's [cartoons](#).

I wrote:

As for the legend theory, I've already pointed to things which Paul says that conflicts with the later record, such as his view of rulers.

David responded:

I already asked how Paul's general description of rulers is relevant to a specific description in the Gospels.

I gave as an example the view which Paul gives in Rom. 13:3 that

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same.

This is something Paul is saying within the lifetime of those who have supposedly been taught that Jesus was put to the cross under Pilate at the urgency of the Jewish leadership of Jerusalem. As such, Pilate would strike Paul's readers - had they known the passion stories of the gospels - as an obvious and blatant counterexample to the general assessment that Paul gives here. But Pilate is no isolated case in the gospels and book of Acts. Recall in Matthew, we have Herod the Great, alleged to be responsible for the slaughter of innocents upon hearing of the birth of a new king (see Mt. ch. 2). There is also the story of Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, who as ruler of Galilee had John the Baptist beheaded at the request of his daughter, according to the NT that is (see Mt. ch. 14). Then of course there was Pontius Pilate, who sanctioned Jesus' execution by the cross. Then later, according to Acts, James the son of Zebedee was killed by Herod Agrippa (see Acts. 12:1-2). With all these murderous exploits taking place by rulers and governors, why would Paul issue a generality like the one he gives in Rom. 13:3, when the gospels and Acts portrays some very vicious rulers and governors?

Now, if Paul had no knowledge of these things, and in fact had known differently about rulers and governors, thinking they were fair, then Paul's proclamation about rulers and governors might make sense. But why wouldn't he know about these things? Is it possible that Paul was just uninformed? But how could that be the case, given his travels and humanitarian ventures? It seems difficult to believe that Paul would have been so ignorant of the behavior of rulers and governors which not only impacted the lives of believers, but also helped to propel the very events of the narratives which we find in the gospels and book of Acts. Besides, Paul was supposedly "divinely inspired," having his knowledge by result of it being revealed to him from a supernatural source. This would seem to make ignorance of these evil rulers all the more unlikely. And if Paul were so divinely inspired, wouldn't he have at least some inkling of the state-sanctioned persecution to come? Surely Christians would not suppose that Paul's generality could apply to Nero, Severus, Maximinus, Decius, Diocletian, etc. Clearly many rulers and governors of Paul's time (even of the Roman state itself) were not fair, as he describes them, nor were many to come. At best, Paul's statement seems wildly naïve. We can reasonably ask: What rulers and governors did Paul have in mind here? Paul himself does not tell us, which is not surprising.

But Paul's statement that rulers and governors is only one of numerous points of discrepancy between what we read in his letters as opposed to what we read in the gospels and the book of Acts.

In I Cor. 5:9-11, Paul writes:

I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.

Did Paul know of the gospel Jesus, who kept company with adulterers, harlots, publicans, and other vicious types?

For Paul, spiritual maturity clearly involves doing away with "childish things." Famously, he tells us (I Cor. 13:11):

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things

In I Cor. 14:20, Paul writes further:

Brethren [believers might mistakenly think he's speaking to Jesus' biological siblings here], be not children in understanding... in understanding be men.

But according to the gospels, Jesus taught oppositely, requiring that one become as a little child in order to receive the kingdom of heaven. In Mt. 18:3, for instance, Jesus is made to say

Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

And in Mark 10:15, Jesus is made to say:

Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

Other quotes suggesting a similar sentiment can be found in the gospels. But the question is: if Paul were divinely inspired in his writings by the same Jesus as the gospels depict, would he say things that directly conflict with what the gospels record Jesus as saying?

For Jesus, salvation (the kind that grants entry into heaven anyway) is available if one should “keep the commandments” (cf. Mt. 19:16-19). But Paul would have none of this, as this is a soteriology of works. For Paul, salvation is through faith:

If thou confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness: and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

The two do not seem to agree even on a matter so important to the believer as the formula for salvation! Jesus is clear in affirming the view that salvation comes as a result of obedience, while Paul is clear in affirming that it comes as a result of confession and belief that Jesus rose from the dead, a component which is not at all present in Jesus’ salvific recipe. But if Paul knew that Jesus had taught that obedience to the Torah was necessary for salvation, would Paul ignore this and give his own formula? Or do we have two different traditions being represented here, combined into the same Testament and jointly affirmed by the institution known as the church? One thing, however, that both formulas share is the element of personal voluntary determination: one can choose to obey commandments just as he can choose to confess Jesus is Lord (though I would not argue that beliefs are comparably governable by choices; for instance, I cannot choose to believe that werewolves exist). This is a major difficulty for Calvinism and similar subcults which focus on the involuntary recipes for salvation, such as the need to be rebirthed (cf. John 3:5-8 et al.). Steven B. Matthies, in his [Christian Salvation?](#) supplies a telling survey of the different views of salvation found in the New Testament.

When it comes to the resurrection appearances, the view which gospels give us differs significantly from what we find in Paul, and even amongst themselves the gospels have some major points of discrepancy. Wells summarizes these problems as follows:

As, then, appearances of the resurrected Lord were of importance in the early church in establishing apostolic authenticity, it is at first surprising that those recorded in the gospels correlate poorly with those posited by Paul. The canonical gospels know nothing of an appearance to James, or to five hundred. And although Cephas as, according to Paul, the first to see the risen one, Peter plays but a very minor part in the gospel resurrection stories... In *Matthew* and *John*, appearances to women (unmentioned by Paul) are given pride of place. This suggests that the gospels were written at a time when establishing one’s apostolic authority by reference to appearances had ceased to be important. Mark, whose Christology led him to represent Jesus as dying deserted by his disciples, introduced women instead of them as witnesses of the crucifixion and burial, and naturally represented these women as going to the tomb on Easter morning, where they receive the resurrection news from an angel in the empty sepulcher [also unmentioned by Paul]. Matthew initiated a tradition of actual appearances of the risen one to these women by supplementing Mark’s story... It is also noteworthy that, while Paul has nothing to say of the locality where the appearances occurred, later Christian documents which are explicit on this matter contradict each other. Matthew locates the appearances to the disciples exclusively in Galilee, whereas Luke confines them to Jerusalem, seventy miles away. Such major discrepancies concerning a matter of the greatest importance to early Christianity suggests that stories of the appearances are legends. Initially Christians would simply have believed that Christ was risen; later, various stories about his appearances entered the tradition as attempts to substantiate this claim... That Christ rose from the dead does not of itself give him any share in God’s sovereignty. To achieve this he must be exalted to heaven, to sit at God’s right hand. Resurrection, then, and exaltation or heavenly session are not identical, although it was natural for the earliest Christians to assume that the latter the former immediately. Paul does not suggest any discontinuity when he writes of “Christ Jesus... who was raised from the dead and is at the right hand of God” (Rom. 8:34). And in Phil. 2:8-9 the sequence of events is said to be: Jesus dies and God exalts him to heaven. In Paul’s view, the post-resurrection appearances were made from heaven... The evangelists, however, writing a generation later, were anxious to establish the reality of the resurrection by making the risen one return - even if only for a few hours - to the company of disciples who had known him before his death. It was natural to represent him as doing this before his exaltation, and so the possibility was given of terminating his resurrection appearances with a distinct act of ascension. This possibility was not taken up by Mark and Matthew, but fully exploited by Luke. (In the appendix to *Mark* the ascension is stated in phrases clearly drawn from *Luke*.) In *Luke* and *Acts* the physical reality of Jesus’ post-resurrection body is brought out by making him eat and drink with his disciples (Acts 10:41) as he had done before his death. Paul would surely have rejected as blasphemous any claim to have eaten and drunk with the exalted one, and his claim that this person had appeared to him is intelligible, as we have seen, as religious experience. Luke’s story of the risen Jesus consuming broiled fish (Lk.

24:41-3) represents later apologetic, relevant to a situation where Christians were replying to Jewish and Gentile incredulity with a narrative which established the physical reality of his resurrection. (*The Historical Evidence For Jesus*, pp. 44-45)

So as the story was retold, the legend grew. For Paul, Jesus was crucified and resurrected and immediately joined God in “heavenly session.” For the later writers concocting narratives intended concretize the growing story, they began to insert a second earthly sojourn between resurrection and exaltation, something Paul knows nothing about. And since this was not enough to combat non-Christian incredulity, Luke has his Jesus actually eating food. It’s quite a fish story, but we’re not done yet.

The profound discrepancy between Paul’s epistles and later canonical tradition is carried into Acts, which is written by the same hand that wrote the gospel of Luke, and which is supposed to document the travels of Paul on his missionary journeys to places like Ephesus and Corinth. Before going to Corinth, Paul went to Athens, and according to Acts he gave his famous public square speech (speeches are a big thing in Acts, and make for interesting study). A comparison of the speech that Acts puts into Paul’s mouth with what Paul writes in his letters is quite revealing. Wells summarizes:

That Paul preached effectively in Athens and won followers (as Acts alleges) before leaving for Corinth (17:34-18:1) - there is no suggestion that he was driven out - is incompatible with Paul’s own statement (1 Cor. 2:3) that he reached Corinth in “fear and trembling,” obviously after a very rough time in Athens. If he ever did speak as Acts represents him, then he indeed went a long way to accommodate his Christian views to pagans - so far as to eliminate the redemptive significance of the cross, which he stresses at every turn in his letters.

Luke knows nothing of Paul’s idea of the efficacy of the crucifixion. For him, this event was a miscarriage of justice, a sin of the Jews, in that they perpetrated it when they should have known from their scriptures that Jesus was their Messiah.

Apologists have tried to argue that at Athens Paul modified his real views, in accordance with his declared principle (1 Cor. 9:10) of becoming like a Jew to win Jews and like a Gentile to win Gentiles. But the context shows that what he had in mind when he wrote this was observation of the Jewish religious law (which in his view is in any case unnecessary to salvation). In Jewish company he is prepared to be bound, for instance, by Jewish food laws, but in pagan company he feels free to abandon them. What he does not mean is that he is a hypocrite who will change his theology so as to win converts. In Galatians he insists that, as far as the theological substance of his preaching is concerned he will make no compromise: “Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8; cf. the whole of Gal. 2).

Apologists who reconcile Romans with Acts by making Paul modulate his theology thus pay a heavy price for the consistency thus achieved. But if, in fact, the author of Acts knew nothing of Paul’s epistles and little of their theology, then the address to the Athenians becomes quite intelligible. Luke lived in a world where the Christian mission had turned from Jews to Gentiles, and so he naturally wished to show that Christianity is acceptable from Gentile premises. To this end he makes Paul say that pagan religious ideas need by slight recasting to become Christian, that Greek lore allows of Christian interpretation. (*The Historical Evidence For Jesus*, p. 162)

A major issue which Acts tries desperately to smooth over is the relationship between Paul and the Jerusalem council. This involved not only whether or not Paul subordinated himself to the Jerusalem leadership, but also the issue of whether or not Gentile Christians were supposed to adhere to aspects of the Mosaic law, specifically circumcision. According to Paul, he did not subordinate himself to the Jerusalem church. In fact, he seems quite defiant of them (cf. Gal. 2:6). Paul saw himself as the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13), but he did not view this as an assignment from the Jerusalem; on the contrary, according to his own report the Jerusalem church accepted this as Paul’s role (Gal. 2:7-9), but were not responsible for commissioning it to him.

The picture in Acts is significantly different. Acts has Paul subordinating himself to the Jerusalem church at every turn. Acts 15:23-29 recounts a letter written by the Jerusalem church to Paul and Barnabas who were in Antioch. This letter included instructions on what Paul and Barnabas should be including in the content of their missionary teaching and preaching. Among those instructions are the following injunctions (Acts 15:29):

that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.

These are requirements that Paul and Barnabas are instructed to impose on Gentile converts. And Acts portrays Paul and Barnabas happily going along with these instructions:

Acts 16:4

And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.

Paul himself, however, gives us a completely different account of this episode in Gal. 2:10, where he says of the Jerusalem council's requirements:

They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.

This contradicts what we read of this same situation in Acts, for Paul makes no mention of the injunctions which, according to Acts, the Jerusalem council issued in their instruction letter, and says that the "only" thing they wanted was that he and Barnabas "remember the poor." It appears that the author of Acts has drawn from a tradition about Paul of which Paul knows nothing, a tradition which would subordinate Paul to the Jerusalem council. For indeed, it would be hard to suppose that Paul would go along with the injunction against food sacrificed to idols, for in 1 Cor. 8:4-6 he speaks directly to this:

Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.

It seems that one could easily use a similar line of argument that Paul gives here in response to the prohibition of consuming blood and "things strangled." Since both blood and "things strangled" are "of whom are all things and we for Him," they should be just as acceptable as "things offered to idols." What's more, Revelations 2:20 has Jesus condemning the consumption of "things sacrificed unto idols," and puts this on a par with fornication.

The claim that the injunctions in Acts. 15:29 are best understood as an injunction against participating in pagan festivities, as some apologists have argued in order to overcome the problem, is unpersuasive. For if this is all that the Jerusalem council intended, why didn't they say this? Indeed, it is quite a different matter, for things sacrificed to idols were often sold to the public for personal consumption. Thus one need not participate in the festivities which produced things offered to idols, and still consume them. As if anticipating such a spin on things, Paul confirms the point in I Cor. 10:25-26, where he writes:

Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness."

Of course, it seems that one could justify just about any chosen action by appealing to the slogan that "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness," especially when the god so designated is said to have "a morally sufficient reason for the evil which exists" (Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, p. 172).

At any rate, we still have a problem when Acts tells us that the Jerusalem council issued a decree instructing Paul and Barnabas to have converts abstain from things offered to idols, blood and strangled things (Acts 15:29), while Paul tells us that all they wanted of them was that they remember the poor (Gal. 2:10).

To make matters worse, in Acts. 16:1-3, when Paul meets up with Timothy in Lystra, the apostle compels Timothy to be circumcised - my reading of Acts suggests that Paul performed this operation himself (eww!). Surely the god of foreskins and calves' blood would have been pleased, but Acts has Paul do this to appease the local Jews. And yet according to Paul's own letter (Galatians), he rebuked Peter in Antioch for appeasing a Jewish faction which had been sent there by James (Gal. 2:11-12). This on top of Paul's vehement denial of any requirement that Christians be circumcised (cf. Gal. 5:6).

According to Paul's letters, there were some scandalous disagreements between them, much of it revolving around the place of the law in the new Christ-centered religion as it involved Gentile converts. This is evident in Galatians where Paul gives his side of the dispute and recounts his rebuke of Peter, something the book of Acts completely ignores.

I wrote:

You believe the literalist Christian propaganda because you've invested yourself so deeply into its program, and admitting that your leg has been pulled is just too much to bear, especially when the messenger is someone so "loathsome" as a confessed atheist. I realize this, David, I was in your shoes at one point in my life. Only I woke up.

David responded:

It's rather unfortunate that my beliefs be relegated to mere "devotion to a system."

Not that I did, but why would this be so unfortunate? Isn't it the case that you're devoted to the Christian faith? If it is more than "mere 'devotion to a system'," what is it?

David continued:

It's not as if you have any particular insistence on the negation of my beliefs, or hold stock in the legend theory for any reasons relevant to your own Christianity experience.

I've learned things that I cannot sit down on. I have learned from many readers that my work has benefited them in some way. Several have come to me and thanked me for helping them find their way out of the darkness. I am not sponsored, as are many professional apologists, by some ministry or 501(c)(3) organization hiding behind charitable programs.

David wrote:

No not at all! I am completely biased and blind because of my worldview and you are the wise old atheist waking me up with the somber light of disbelief.

I don't know if I have the ability to wake anyone up, but if I can help people discover and learn about a rational worldview, even one person at a time, I am pleased to try.

David wrote:

I find that rather silly, but amusing nonetheless. :) I'm 24 years old and grew up in a Christian home in the deep Southern Bible belt. I wildly abandoned my parents' faith in college and eagerly followed the natural sciences as the sole means of attaining truth. I did things I never dreamed of (and will have nightmares about later in life), having been freed from the morality of my youth. Then, through events in my life, God took hold of me. I picked up the Bible and actually read its claims about God, mankind, and the world as well as the relationship between them. It makes perfect sense to me, and everything in the Bible meshes with what I've experienced personally in my "walk", or whatever the popular Christian word is these days. In addition, I find the 4 facts about the resurrection very compelling.

You are still very young, David. When I was your age, I too was smitten with Christianity and other forms of supernaturalism. I have taken Paul's advise, only in its own most consistent terms, and have put away such childish things.

David wrote:

So you see, from my perspective I too woke up, and I was also in your shoes.

I don't think you've been in my shoes. Were you an Objectivist before becoming a Christian? I highly doubt it.

David wrote:

Actually I know a limited amount about your shoes, but I think you have a great deal of confidence in your dismissal of Christianity.

It's important to note that, contrary to what many believers have charged, my rejection of Christianity is not an irreducible primary. I do not begin by denying the Christian god. No one begins by denying. We begin by recognizing, then integrating, then affirming, then assessing, etc. How the mind does any of this is a mystery to most individuals; their minds are the most alien objects in their entire existence and experience. And they are not encouraged to understand it in an objective manner. Instead, they are immediately taught, from before the time they can even speak in many cases, to fear an invisible magic being with whom they can have no actual dialogue, and to obey instructions they're not supposed to understand on pain of supernatural threat. They are

indoctrinated into such a mindset long before they have had the chance to develop the cognitive tools needed to defend themselves philosophically. There is no doubt that religion preys upon the philosophically defenseless.

My confidence in my critique of Christianity is subordinate to my confidence in my critique of mysticism as such, because I understand why it is false, why it is dangerous, and what the proper alternative suitable to man is. It would be very difficult for me to just sit on this knowledge and do nothing about it. Hence I broadcast it, free of charge, with open admission to all who would like to come.

David wrote:

I'm sure you've thought this, but I'm always one to say doubt everything even your skepticism.

Doubting is not a prime directive in my worldview. It has its place, but it is surely not a starting point. It can't be; to suggest that it is, is to commit [the fallacy of the stolen concept](#). We begin our intellection with positive recognition of perceptually self-evident facts, facts that are available to us firsthand, in the "here and now," for this is where our awareness begins - with that which is immediately perceivable. The suggestion that we should "doubt everything, even your own skepticism," is intellectually counterproductive. For one, there is no good reason why I should "doubt everything" (the claim that there is a good reason to doubt everything would itself need to be subject to doubt), and, also, skepticism is neither my standard nor my method.

David wrote:

indeed all other sources examined use the phrase specifically to identify Jesus' siblings.

I responded:

And I've addressed this several times now: had later Christians not known that 'brother of the Lord' was a church title not at all denoting a sibling relationship, it could easily have been mistaken by them as meaning a sibling relationship, or opportunistically seized on in order to contrive such a view. Using 'brother' to denote others as believers was common parlance; it still is today. When I was a Christian, everyone in my church was so eager to call me his brother. Also, it is doubtful that Paul would have put stock in a relationship of the flesh. Nowhere does Paul say that Jesus had any siblings.

David then wrote:

Are you basing your assertions about later Christians on what is probable or what is possible?

My inferences are based on what is reasonable given both the overall context of Paul's teaching as well as the specifics of the case at hand. Is it really that unreasonable to suppose that Paul, who refers to James as one of the "pillars" of the church (Gal. 2:9), was making use of a title here?

In Gal. 1:19, Paul indicates that whoever "James the Lord's brother" may be, he was one of the apostles. He writes there:

But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.

If we compare this to the list of apostles given in the gospels, an interesting picture emerges. Here is Mark 3:16-19, where the 12 apostles are listed:

And Simon he surnamed Peter; And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder: And Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Canaanite, And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him: and they went into an house.

This list is repeated in Matthew 10:2-4:

Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

The two lists agree on the names, which are as follows:



1. Simon Peter
2. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother
3. James the son of Zebedee
4. John the son of Zebedee
5. Philip
6. Bartholomew
7. Thomas
8. Matthew
9. James the son of Alphaeus
10. Thaddaeus (surnamed Lebbaeus)
11. Simon the Canaanite
12. Judas Iscariot

There are two individuals named James in the lists which Mark and Matthew provide. They are James the son of Zebedee and James the son of Alphaeus. What's curious here is that there is no "James the son of Joseph," as we would expect if "James the Lord's brother" were supposed to be the biological sibling of the earthly Jesus. Apparently "James the Lord's brother" was not understood to number among "the twelve." Or was he? Again, confusion reigns here. But in the end, this is not my problem.

David wrote:

If all your probability assessments rely on the legend theory, I think you're in big trouble.

Threats of being "in big trouble" will not move me.

I had written:

I've spoken to this already. The phrase "brother of the Lord" as used by Paul most likely indicates that James had some very high position in the Jerusalem church; for Paul, James is one of the "pillars" of the church (Gal. 2:9).

David responded:

You've given no evidence that "brother of the Lord" indicates this, and neither have the quotes you provided. Speculating about unnamed "extant texts" doesn't do much for me.

Here you simply display the persistence of your own confessionally motivated denial. You want "brother of the Lord" to validate the sibling relationship which the gospels make explicit between Jesus, not because anything in Paul's letters warrant this, but because you want to preserve the literalist view that the gospels portray authentic history. Indeed, you have provided no evidence to support the view that Paul really did have a biological relationship in view with his reference to James as "the brother of the Lord." I've given several reasons why this interpretation is highly unlikely, and your response to these reasons is to dismiss them with the wave of your hand, to deny them outright if for no other reason than that you simply prefer otherwise.

I wrote:

Especially because it references "the Lord" as opposed to "Jesus," the phrase strikes me very much to be a title rather than a reference to a biological sibling. I don't think a reference to a sibling here would at all make sense.

David responded:

Actually when the alleged ossuary of James was found, one of the reasons some critical scholars rejected it as authentic was precisely because it named him "brother of Jesus."

Well, there you go, then. A later Christian could have easily come along and used his inscription on the ossuary to correct what he considered a problem in the written record.

I wrote:

I see that you resist answering my question. At any rate, I will answer yours:

David responded:

On the contrary, I clearly stated that I didn't think James' sibling status had much to do with it.

Yes, you're right, you did. Had I time to edit my response I probably would have caught this. My apologies.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Christian Legends](#)

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [6:00 AM](#)

### 34 Comments:

[david](#) said...

Part 1 of my two part response:

1. I hope you will clarify two statements which you made that I have categorized as heavy and unsupported.

#### 1) Geisler and Turek are telling lies.

*The statements made here are so misleading that it's amazing that any publishing house would have accepted this book's manuscript. But lies do sell in this day and age, just as they did 2,000 years ago and before.*

#### 2) Geisler and Turek beg the question.

*As if that weren't bad enough, notice the overtly question-begging nature of the following statement: There's no possible way that such testimony could describe a legend, because it goes right back to the time and place of the event itself.*

So far you haven't supported either of these claims, and as a philosopher you should know that a formal reconstruction is the only way to demonstrate claim #2. I have already given a valid reconstruction of the G/T argument to the best of my ability. My contention is that in an effort to smear two Christian apologists, you have created a straw man. You certainly don't care much for the principle of charity - a theme which I find common among atheist and Christian apologists alike. You reconstructed the weakest possible argument and then didn't even internally critique it correctly (you imported your own evidence). Do you need more evidence that you did this? See my points below. In contrast to your approach, an objective critic would seek clarification to properly evaluate an opponent's argument. I have consistently attempted to do this while interacting with you, but you consider this demanding "more and more explanation." Indeed! If you wish to offer a sound argument, be prepared to justify any questionable premises. Do you want examples of some unjustified premises? Here you go! (italics are quotes; other text is my paraphrase or commentary):

1) *There are plenty of reasons why we would expect Paul to give at least some details pertaining to the circumstances of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, since these are central premises to his religious pronouncements...*

2) Jesus wouldn't have said similar things during his earthly ministry and his post-resurrection appearances to Paul.

*if Paul is attributing his teachings to Jesus, he's attributing them to the \*risen\*, heavenly Jesus who speaks to Paul through revelatory means (however that supposedly works), while the gospels have those teachings coming out of Jesus' mouth during his earthly ministry, about which Paul seems to know nothing. That's quite a nugget to swallow, David.*

3) When we encounter more detail in the gospels than we find in Paul,

*This is the sort of situation we'd expect to see if the gospel narratives were the product of embellishment on earlier portrait models*

4) Josephus' reference to James is interpolation.

*Second, in regard to Josephus using this same expression, several scholars (e.g., Rajak, Wells, et al.) have classed this passage (along with the Testimonium) as a Christian interpolation. I tend to find arguments for this quite convincing, enough so that I don't think there's much open to apologist to recover it as genuine.*

5) *The term "brother" is commonly used, even by Paul (often in the plural; see I Cor. 15:6 for instance!), to indicate membership in some elite fraternity or high ranking zealots.*

6) Concerning the crucifixion (hehe) and resurrection, Paul

*treats it as if it were something that had happened years, perhaps even decades or longer, before his own encounter with the \*risen\* Jesus*

7) *It is because Paul is apparently so disinterested in the earthly life of Jesus (in spite of his determination to know only "Christ crucified" - cf. I Cor. 2:2), that he never refers to it in a manner which suggests a time or place.*

8) Jesus and Paul were both Jewish but would probably not have taught similar things out of the Old Testament. Old Testament aside, there can be no overlap between Paul and Jesus' sayings, one must borrow from the other.

*Paul's teachings - which he gave as his own or cited the OT for authority - are thrust into an earthly Jesus' mouth, whereas in Paul there's no hint that an earthly Jesus had issued them.*

9) Geisler and Turek are trying to discredit a particular kind of legend theory which precludes use of any gospel material whatsoever.

*I've been very clear on this: using the gospels to back-date the resurrection appearances found in I Cor. 15:3-8 in order to discredit the legend theory simply begs the question.*

10) *Paul's rendition of the supper passage is just another example of a motif found in the early epistolary strata that was later woven into a narrative about Jesus' earthly life.*

11) Paul's use of a word outside of the context of a phrase can be construed as evidence for the meaning of a phrase. So hypothetically if I wrote a bunch of letters and referenced a "son" 33 times, then the one time I write about some guy who's a "son of a bitch," technically you should assume that the bitch is his mother and that guy is my kid! :P

12) Mark's author probably created Jesus' brothers to combat docetism

*Opposition to the heresy of docetism would provide sufficient motivation for giving Jesus blood relatives.*

13) The early church may have misread the text concerning James being Jesus' brother.

*"If Christians of Paul's time and later did not understand that 'brother of the Lord' was a title indicating membership in some core fraternity of leaders or zealots, it could easily have been interpreted as suggesting a sibling relationship."*

At least this one is consistent with your other position that Paul uses nonsense like "the twelve" to confuse his audience. If I thought that Paul was delusional, then I'd bet on this one.

14) Since Paul says James is a swell guy in another context, he is probably using brother to call him a swell guy in Gal.

*For Paul, James was clearly someone important in the early hierarchy of the church in his day (in Gal. 2:9 he refers to James as one of the "pillars" of the church). He does not explain the credentials belonging to such a position, but given Paul's abhorrence for things of the flesh, it is quite doubtful that a relationship according to the flesh is what gives James the privilege of the honorific title he gives him.*

*Did you read what I had written? Paul clearly thought that James was a "pillar" of the church at the time (I referred you to Gal. 2:9). He was not just another convert in Paul's view.*

15) "Brother of the Lord" was a special designation for James given his leadership role in the Jerusalem church.

16) Hegesippus is regurgitating legends that didn't make it into the gospels accounts.

*Clearly by Hegsippus' time (some 100+ years after Paul), the legend of who James was had grown significantly.*

*So the more we look at this, the more compelling it becomes that Paul used the word 'brother' in his letters, pretty much without exception, to indicate a relation within the election, not a biological relation.*

17) Its ok to assert your position as evidence against objections to it.

*At no point does Paul explicitly indicate that Jesus had any siblings, and a survey of his use of "brother" demonstrates that this was a religious title, not a sibling relationship. I don't need any evidence beyond this.*

18) Its ok to take different positions depending on the context:

*Also, as I explain in a follow-up comment to an article by Robert Price regarding the question of whether or not I Cor. 15:3-11 is an interpolation, I specifically stated that I am allowing that the passage in question was written by Paul.*

And then:

*if I Cor. 15:3-8 is a post-Pauline interpolation, as Price has argued, then pointing to this passage as an early creed would be moot.*

19) Specifically speaking at the time Nero was Emperor Paul, Paul says rulers are not a terror to good conduct. This is a universal statement that creates a contradiction because Jesus' showed good conduct but a ruler terrorized him.

*Indeed, if Paul had conferred with Peter and learned from him that Jesus was put to death as a result of a trial before Pilate, do you think Paul would tell us that "rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil" (Rom. 13:3)? How could Paul have this view of rulers, a view which is echoed in I Peter 2:14, if he believed Jesus had been crucified under Pilate?*

*As for the legend theory, I've already pointed to things which Paul says that conflicts with the later record, such as his view of rulers.*

I could go on, but my point is that your statement here is demonstrably fallacious:

*And here I am, I have offered a non-supernaturalistic explanation of the data which we find in the New Testament, and it's rejected because a few inconsequential things here and there are left "unexplained."*

If you honestly re-read our exchange and evaluate the evidence provided (assertions from Wells and Price don't count as evidence), do you really think I should accept your explanation? I don't think you've come to terms with some of the implied premises in your argument. There is a lot to hash out, but essentially you're going to end up having to reject the fact that Paul was Jewish if you're not careful. For instance, any Jewish historian can point references to bodily resurrection that predate Christ...does that mean Paul probably knew about them? Yes, and this is exactly what Price denies, claiming that Paul is basically a fake Jewish convert but truly a Greek. I don't think Wells would agree, would you? Bottom line this whole "spiritual resurrection" bit is completely out of line with Judaism, so unless you think Paul wasn't Jewish you might as well hang it up. You are welcome to try to demonstrate that Paul ignored his Jewish resurrection beliefs in favor of Hellenistic resurrection beliefs. Otherwise, there is no reason why mention of resurrection doesn't imply bodily death and thus an earthly ministry. So while you can point to what Paul doesn't tell us explicitly, you may have missed some important contextual information. *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Wright) is a great resource for putting a historical context around the resurrection belief of Paul and the gospel writers.

2. Another example of you importing your worldview:

Dawson: *Throughout his several letters, Paul relies heavily on Old Testament citations to buttress his points.*

*As for Paul, I would expect in his letters at least some details about Jesus' life on earth if Paul knew anything about it, because he was determined to "preach Christ crucified" (I Cor. 1:23) and "not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). When was "Christ crucified"? Where was "Christ crucified"? Under what circumstances was "Christ crucified"? Paul's treatment of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection is so open-ended and unspecific that for all we know he could be referring to an event that took place five centuries earlier or in some astral plane.*

You continue to point out all the things Paul doesn't tell his readers about Jesus.

Therefore....Paul didn't know? Paul made it all up?

Some contextual questions are in order:

-Is Paul an unbeliever?

-Does his primary audience consist of unbelievers?

-Is his purpose to convince them that Jesus existed?

-Is his purpose to convince you that Jesus existed?

Your critique of Paul is the equivalent of me walking into church and accusing a pastor of not believing in God because he didn't argue for it. Does Paul have to argue for it? Does his audience require an argument? To extract any conclusions from this lack of evidence is an exercise in special pleading. Paul's treatment of the resurrection is quite specific to a specific background - Judaism. Just like with the mystery cults, I would simply ask why we must run off the Hellenism when Paul is sitting there spouting off Jewish Scriptures about everything including Jesus. Then when he says resurrection or sacred meal we go off in lala land and start looking at every possible mystery influence under the sun.

3. Wells said: *Paul gives it as his own view (Rom. 13:8-10) that the law can be summed up in the one Old Testament injunction "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." According to Lk. 10:25-8, Jesus himself taught that love of neighbor (together with love of God) ensures salvation; but one could never gather from Paul that Jesus had expressed himself on the matter.*

Umm they were both sort of referring to the same OT source - Lev 19:18

And then after giving some vague parallels Wells concludes:

*Surely in such instances he might reasonably be expected to have invoked the authority of Jesus, had he known that Jesus had taught the very same doctrines*

I disagree with the following assumptions made by Wells:

1) Paul didn't know he was writing under the authoritative inspiration of the God the Holy Spirit

2) Paul didn't consider Jesus to be the second member of the Trinity, the Son of God

3) Paul needed to claim more authority than he had already, namely the ability to proclaim scriptures "God breathed."

4. An example of you mischaracterizing your opponent:

*I've read through David's response to my recent post on I Cor. 15:3-8, but am not quite sure what exactly he was trying to argue against my overall point.*

What did I say my purpose was in that first response?

*I would like to quickly outline what Habermas commonly presents in his debates and also address some of Dawson's comments.*

In your next response you placed my statements under the umbrella of the latter purpose, which of course works nicely for saying things like "well this argument does nothing against my claim." Of course it doesn't, because it wasn't intended to silly!

5. Dawson: *And so far I've not seen how supernaturalism can be explained (to explain it would be to defuse it) or*

*how supernaturalism can be accepted as a rational explanation to anything.*

I have not attempted to explain this; however, I think you are seeking explanation in the wrong places. Where did invariant universal tendencies come from in the first place (objectivism assumes they exist does it not)? Pointing out natural explanations does not preclude supernatural origins; in fact, I assert that the very presence of such deductive/inductive ability demands in itself an explanation. But you know that such an explanation must utilize its conclusion to explain it.

I can't justify deduction without using deduction, nor can I infer the ability to make an inductive leap by doing likewise. Can you? My position is that an absolute, self-referent being created the universe and is responsible for the laws which govern that universe. All scientists, logicians, historians, cosmologists, etc. operate on the principle that there are invariant laws. How do you account for it in your worldview?

6. Dawson: *But if it's true, that men are inherently depraved and involuntarily prone to lying, why should I trust what any Christian says?*

This is a fair question. My position is that all true belief is arrived at through God's providence regardless of being Christian or not. Justifying that belief is a different story since ultimately one's worldview foundations will supply the justification for all other worldview propositions correct? Just to be fair: why should I trust what the naturalist says given his worldview? If beliefs are the result of evolutionary change, then how does the statement "beliefs are the result of evolutionary change" acquire self-exemption?

7. How many ways can you assert your legend theory against G/T's argument?

*If the event in question is in fact legendary, and Paul's own account of that event provide no indication of time or place or setting, then the accounts we find in the gospels, the earliest of which being written a decade or more after Paul's letters campaign, would simply be embellishments of the legend itself...here Geisler and Turek insist that the testimony we find in 1 Cor 15 could not contain any legend.*

*And if the later writings - namely the gospels - are themselves legends, then using them to date an event which is itself legendary, simply immerses apologists deeper and deeper into the fake environment of their imagination. Having to rely on one legendary work to validate another legendary work can only mean that the alleged historicity of Christ will evaporate under examination.*

*But if the Jesus story were a legend in the first place - the very premise which our authors are trying to defeat, then appealing to what might have happened or could have happened to Jesus' body simply begs the question, for it assumes precisely what they are called to prove: namely that the story we have of Jesus in the New Testament is not legend. If the story about Jesus is merely a legend, then there was no body to crucify and seal in a tomb or parade through the streets of Jerusalem.*

*Consequently, to claim that 1 Cor. 15:3-8 is "too early" to be legend, requires one to assume the truth of the basic portrait of Jesus found in the gospels, which simply begs the question at issue.*

*David points out that Habermas dates Jesus' crucifixion to "30 AD." But on what basis, if not the stories found in the NT gospels, can Habermas do this? If he bases this dating on what we read in the gospels, then claiming that 1 Cor. 15:3-8 is too early to be legend simply begs the question against the legend theory (which is what Geisler and Turek were seeking to dismiss in the section of their book that I quoted in my blog).*

Only your straw man is begging questions Dawson. Will you deny that you used your position as means to place circularity in the G/T argument? I will be absolutely blown away if you finally admit you were wrong about something. :P

8. Dawson: *It's completely self-undercutting, even coming from the bible, because it was written by men, and, as men, they are involuntarily prone to lying according to their own worldview.*

During your time as a Christian, were you introduced to the doctrine of inspiration? For what reason would inspiration be necessary if not the very one you provide above?

9. Dawson said: *...for even the gospel depictions of Jesus' passion put no witnesses with Jesus when and where he was supposed to be resurrected - that is, in his very tomb!*

I think you have made a great observation. Remember that your legend theory gives considerable freedom with narration (no real events to worry about), yet now you wish to point out that there are no witnesses put at the resurrection site in the narratives! But wait, that doesn't lend much credulity to a story. Ok, well who saw the empty tomb? Uh, the testimony is quite incredulous in the ancient Roman world - perhaps that of women! This is exactly what I'm talking about when I say that your theory simply fails to explain the data. Here are two examples of absolutely rotten legend material, and I haven't even gotten warmed up on the embarrassment criteria or the dissimilarity criteria (I'll get to them in due time).

10. Dawson said: *Also, I find it puzzling that Geisler and Turek would reference the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Galatians and not notice what he says just a few verses prior to the one they do cite. Paul makes it explicitly clear that the answer which our authors give us is not the right answer to the question the pose....So according to what Paul tells us, he "received" the gospel that he preaches to everyone else directly from Jesus as a revelation. (One wonders why that same Jesus doesn't reveal himself directly to everyone else as well rather than revealing himself to one person who then goes around telling everyone he meets about it.) Paul himself is telling us that what Geisler and Turek propose is precisely what did not take place.*

Incidentally, I found a radio [debate](#) between Gary Habermas and Robert Price in which this very topic comes up (the oral tradition gospel vs. the received gospel). See the "Infidel Radio Dialog."

You seem puzzled that they did "not notice" this. I'm not puzzled; unless you can distinguish between two Greek words then you'll assume they're the same one.

11. Dawson: *Why isn't Paul's reference to James as one of the pillars of the church allowed to inform the context of his reference to James as "the brother of the Lord"? The word 'Lord', as I have shown, is a title, not a name. The impression I get from Paul is that James was an elder in the church with some elite claim to authority. If Paul had meant that James was a sibling of Jesus, why didn't he say "a brother of Jesus" instead of "a brother of the Lord"? All the data points to a title being used of James rather than a biological relationship which most likely wouldn't have mattered to Paul anyway, given his abhorrence for the flesh.*

You're the one trying to do it, so I'll simply ask you why you think Paul's reference to James as one of the pillars informs the context of "brother of the Lord"?

I don't think you've shown that "Lord" is a title Dawson. You pasted a quote.

Kurios is the Greek translation for the ineffable name of God - YHWH. You simply didn't prove that it's a title, do you intend to?

At any rate, saying "I'm the brother of the Caesar" or "brother of the ceasar" doesn't change the relationship between "brother" and "Caesar." Not sure why this distinction is worth quarrelling about. Why should Paul use phrases (brother of Jesus) which you find more likely to be literal if he's content calling Jesus kurios all over the place in his letters? Would his audience have cared?

You haven't one single piece of data that points to James getting an honorary brotherly title, but if zero counts I guess you could say all data points to your conclusion. :P

You simply dismissed all the external evidence for James on the basis of your legend theory being correct.

[September 16, 2008 9:33 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David wrote: "So far you haven't supported either of these claims,"

I have, amply, and on several occasions now. You simply do not like the support I've given them apparently. I've dedicated entire posts to your meltdown, and in response I get things like this:

David: "Then when he says resurrection or sacred meal we go off in lala land and start looking at every possible mystery influence under the sun."

David: "Paul's use of a word outside of the context of a phrase can be construed as evidence for the meaning of a phrase. So hypothetically if I wrote a bunch of letters and referenced a "son" 33 times, then the one time I write about some guy who's a "son of a bitch," technically you should assume that the bitch is his mother and that guy is my kid!"

David: "I don't think you've come to terms with some of the implied premises in your argument."

David: "You continue to point out all the things Paul doesn't tell his readers about Jesus."

David: "I don't think you've shown that "Lord" is a title Dawson. You pasted a quote."

Etc.

Like a peacock who spreads his plumage, you attempt to make yourself appear bigger than you are. More and more your responses are droning on into irrelevant pettiness as if you simply haven't grasped the points that have been presented, and are desperately looking for something - anything - to discredit my position. Meanwhile, I've pointed to numerous sources and have demonstrated in my responses that those sources do in fact answer any of the actually substantial objections you've attempted to raise in your comments.

David: "and as a philosopher you should know that a formal reconstruction is the only way to demonstrate claim #2. I have already given a valid reconstruction of the G/T argument to the best of my ability."

David, begging the question (aka *petitio principii* or circular reasoning, etc.) is an *informal fallacy*. It does not follow from the fact or supposition that an argument has been validly constructed, that it does not contain informal fallacies. This is basic Logic 101 stuff. At any rate, I have a response to your "valid reconstruction of the G/T argument" and show numerous problems with it, including its question-begging nature. I hope to have it up in a few days.

David: "My contention is that in an effort to smear two Christian apologists, you have created a straw man."

Yes, that's been your contention, and yet I have quoted them in their own words and shown how their own assertions and inferences are faulty. I deny the charge that I have mischaracterized them, and have dedicated an entire post to dealing with this charge. In your meltdown, you've simply become more and more stubborn on the point. I cannot help you there as this is your own problem.

David: "You certainly don't care much for the principle of charity"

Careful, David. I've been more than charitable to you. I've allowed you post numerous and lengthy comments, and I've spent a substantial amount of time attempting to educate you on these matters. It won't due for you to become ungrateful now. I've also been sufficiently charitable to folks like Geisler and Turek, who are clearly out to tarnish atheism with their silly garbage. Their "reasoning" suffers dramatically, and an examination of a one-page quote is sufficient to show this. Do you need more evidence for this? If so, start reading their book, and it won't be very long before you see how cheap their reasoning is. That is, of course, unless you've spent a little too long at the Kool-Aid bar yourself.

Now I am going to post my final Part 7, and in this portion of my response to your earlier comment, I explore your precious few statements about the nature of revelation, a topic I had asked you to comment on. I notice that you did not address my questions, some of which you had requoted yourself (so I know you're aware of them), but instead pointed me to another source which, for all that I can tell, probably does not address them either. This is a big issue, since Paul appeals to revelation (as opposed to familiarity with a historical Jesus) for the content of his gospel. I personally find this quite puzzling, that the earliest writer in the NT needs to appeal to revelation in order to inform his understanding of the gospel, while later writers somehow have access to stories about Jesus' life on earth, something about which Paul seems to know nothing.

Many of your other points are so off-topic that they are not relevant to the case I have presented so far. For instance:

David:

"-Is Paul an unbeliever?"

"-Does his primary audience consist of unbelievers?"



"-Is his purpose to convince them that Jesus existed?"

"-Is his purpose to convince you that Jesus existed?"

No matter how we answer these questions, the data remains as it is. He claims to be concerned with "Christ crucified," and in all the passages where he speaks of Christ and his crucifixion, his suffering, etc., he never once gives any indication of place, time or circumstances, and treats it as if it happened in the distant past.

David: "Your critique of Paul is the equivalent of me walking into church and accusing a pastor of not believing in God because he didn't argue for it."

I don't think so. I have not called for Paul to argue for the existence of God (he just appeals to revelation, which is no argument at all). I'm simply asking what his knowledge of the earthly Jesus is. I will have more posts on this in the near future. But exploring this question is not at all analogous to "accusing a pastor of not believing in God because he didn't argue for it." Indeed, there are better reasons to suppose a man does not really believe in invisible magic beings.

David: "I have not attempted to explain this; however, I think you are seeking explanation in the wrong places."

I've sought explanation from Christians. They espouse belief in supernaturalism. So inquiring with them is the wrong place to look for an explanation? Perhaps you're right. This certainly does not challenge my conclusions about supernaturalism.

David: "Where did invariant universal tendencies come from in the first place?"

This is the kind of retort I've come to expect from Christian apologists. It's the usual [Duh, I donno, must be God did it!](#) kind of treatment of the issue which is characteristic of a most embarrassing kind of ignorance on the matter it poses as being interested in.

David: "(objectivism assumes they exist does it not)?"

This all depends on what you mean by "invariant universal tendencies," which is not clear to me. Invariance occasions certain fundamental facts - e.g., the fact that existence exists - which are identified by Objectivism's founding axioms. To ask where such facts "come from" can only invite the fallacy of the stolen concept. Universality is a property of concepts; it is a consequence of their inherent open-endedness. There's no mysteriousness here which needs to be "explained" by appealing to supernaturalism (which again, explains nothing). I've pointed out in earlier writings that Christianity lacks a theory of concepts, and no Christian has been able to prove me wrong on this. If you think Christianity has its own theory of concepts, I'd surely like to see it. But lacking a good understanding of concepts, I'd expect to see the kind of carelessness that you're venturing into here.

David: "Pointing out natural explanations does not preclude supernatural origins;"

No doubt, we can have all the "natural explanations" the world has to offer, and more, but we'll always be able to retreat into the imaginary as if it had some substance to offer in supplement to those explanations. The problem for the supernaturalist, however, is that he cannot give an account for how one can reliably distinguish between what he calls "supernatural" and what may merely be imaginary.

David: "in fact, I assert that the very presence of such deductive/inductive ability demands in itself an explanation."

And that explanation is available with a good understanding of how the mind forms concepts, for these are conceptual operations that you speak of here. Pointing to supernatural agencies will only cloud one's understanding of these matters. I've pointed this out numerous times on my blog. You're behind the times, David. I encourage you to get down and start doing your homework. ;)

David: "But you know that such an explanation must utilize its conclusion to explain it."

There's nothing illicit in using concepts in order to identify and articulate how the mind forms concepts. So I'm on safe ground here.

I could go on, but as you see, it will just be more of the same.

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 17, 2008 6:07 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson: *Like a peacock who spreads his plumage, you attempt to make yourself appear bigger than you are.*

I'm sorry you feel that way. I think my attitude has consistently been that of one seeking more knowledge on the subject, but with the way you toss around assertions about how awesome your position is I have tempered my comments with a little wit and sarcasm. I hardly find this reason to say I didn't grasp what you said.

This is exactly the kind of thing I'm talking about:

*Meanwhile, I've pointed to numerous sources and have demonstrated in my responses that those sources do in fact answer any of the actually substantial objections you've attempted to raise in your comments.*

If you list out your sources and remove those that contain mere assertions from Price, Doherty, and Wells it is quite short and lacking substantive argument.

Dawson: *David, begging the question (aka petitio principii or circular reasoning, etc.) is an informal fallacy. It does not follow from the fact or supposition that an argument has been validly constructed, that it does not contain informal fallacies. This is basic Logic 101 stuff. At any rate, I have a response to your "valid reconstruction of the G/T argument" and show numerous problems with it, including its question-begging nature. I hope to have it up in a few days.*

I realize it is an informal fallacy, but how can you demonstrate that the conclusion is in the premises without formal reconstruction?

Dawson: *I've dedicated entire posts to your meltdown, and in response I get things like this:*

I'm sorry it appears to frustrate you, but I am perfectly fine with it. You can call it a meltdown if you wish to characterize me that way; however, I have re-read all of our interaction several times and the evidence just isn't there, yet you continue to parade around statements implying ample evidence and strong arguments. I try to avoid such claims in my argumentation as they are essentially rhetorical in nature.

Dawson: *This all depends on what you mean by "invariant universal tendencies," which is not clear to me. Invariance occasions certain fundamental facts - e.g., the fact that existence exists - which are identified by Objectivism's founding axioms. To ask where such facts "come from" can only invite the fallacy of the stolen concept. Universality is a property of concepts; it is a consequence of their inherent open-endedness. There's no mysteriousness here which needs to be "explained" by appealing to supernaturalism (which again, explains nothing). I've pointed out in earlier writings that Christianity lacks a theory of concepts, and no Christian has been able to prove me wrong on this. If you think Christianity has its own theory of concepts, I'd surely like to see it. But lacking a good understanding of concepts, I'd expect to see the kind of carelessness that you're venturing into here.*

So basically "it just is."

David: *"But you know that such an explanation must utilize its conclusion to explain it."*

Dawson: *There's nothing illicit in using concepts in order to identify and articulate how the mind forms concepts. So I'm on safe ground here*

Does your worldview contain a foundational proposition that is not self-affirming?

Yes I'm behind the times in that I haven't read all of your blog articles.

[September 17, 2008 8:34 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I wrote: *Why isn't Paul's reference to James as one of the pillars of the church allowed to inform the context of his reference to James as "the brother of the Lord"? The word 'Lord', as I have shown, is a title, not a name. The impression I get from Paul is that James was an elder in the church with some elite claim to authority. If Paul had meant that James was a sibling of Jesus, why didn't he say "a brother of Jesus" instead of "a brother of the Lord"? All the data points to a title being used of James rather than a biological relationship which most likely wouldn't have mattered to Paul anyway, given his abhorrence for the flesh.*

David responded: "You're the one trying to do it, so I'll simply ask you why you think Paul's reference to James as one of the pillars informs the context of "brother of the Lord"?"

See what I mean? I've already addressed this, and here David keeps coming back asking for what's already been spelled out to him.

In this very blog, I had written:

*Furthermore, that Paul clearly refers to James as a central figure in the Jerusalem church, so the implication here is sufficiently strong that Paul could only mean some positional status by virtue of his place as one of the "pillars."*

[Elsewhere](#) I had stated:

*James, it was seen, was referred to as one of the "pillars" of the church by Paul. It is most probable then that Paul is referring to James with a fraternity title, similar to the one he uses for an unspecified number of persons in 1 Cor. 9:5, where he states: "Have we no right to lead about a wife that is a believer, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?" Here Paul is obviously referencing the upper echelon of the Christianity of his day. It would be hard to suppose that Paul is referring to a group of biological siblings of Jesus here. Instead, he's speaking of an inner circle group, who were obviously held in high regard. The assumption that Paul is referring to a biological relationship is generated by reading the gospel details into Paul's letters, when in fact Paul's letters in no way confirm this reading.*

I had also [quoted Wells on the matter](#):

*One must constantly remind oneself that, as the gospels did not exist when Paul wrote, one has no right to assume, prior to investigation, that the traditions which came to be embodied in them were known to him, even when appearances suggest this, as in a few cases they do. The most striking example is Paul's reference to "the brethren of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 9:5) and to "James the brother of the Lord" (Galatians 1:19), whom he here designates as one of the leaders of the Jerusalem church. We immediately think of those persons designated brothers of Jesus in the gospels, without pausing to ask whether Paul had in mind members of a fraternity, of a small group of Messianists not related to Jesus, but zealous in the service of the risen one. (The Jesus Legend, pp. 26-27)*

Meanwhile, David *still* has given no evidence whatsoever to suppose that Paul meant to indicate a biological relationship. None. Zilch. Nada. Zippo.

David: "I don't think you've shown that "Lord" is a title Dawson. You pasted a quote. Kurios is the Greek translation for the ineffable name of God - YHWH. You simply didn't prove that it's a title, do you intend to?"

Here's an excerpt the American Bible Study's article [Lord \(Title for Jesus\)](#) which does this for me:

*The Greek word for "Lord" is kyrios, which may mean "master" or "sir." "Lord" should not be confused with "LORD", the word that is printed in all capital letters and used to represent God's special name "Yahweh." (See the mini-article called "Lord (YHWH),") In the Roman Empire, "Lord" was used for Caesar and indicated his absolute power as monarch, but did not mean that he was a god. "Lord" appears as a title for Jesus in the New Testament and declares his royal authority as the one who has been raised from the dead to sit at God's right hand... Practically speaking, "Lord" functions in the same way as "Christ," another royal title.*

David: "At any rate, saying 'I'm the brother of the Caesar' or 'brother of the ceasar' doesn't change the relationship between 'brother' and 'Caesar'."

I'm not sure the relevance here. Does the title "Caesar" refer to a resurrected savior-deity sitting at the right hand of God? Do followers of this Caesar commonly refer to each other as "brother"? Did this Caesar purportedly teach that "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mt. 12:50)?

David: "Not sure why this distinction is worth quarrelling about."

Then why do you insist on quarrelling about it, especially when you've provided no basis to suppose that Paul meant a biological relationship here?

David: "Why should Paul use phrases (brother of Jesus)"

Please tell me where in any of his letters Paul uses the phrase "brother of Jesus". I've not seen it. I've only seen "brother of the Lord," which is not the same thing.

David: "You simply dismissed all the external evidence for James on the basis of your legend theory being correct."

I've asked, and will ask again, what suggests that \*Paul\* meant a biological relationship when he refers to James as "brother of the Lord"? I've not seen anything from you on this. You rely exclusively on external sources, namely the gospels, to inform the meaning of this reference. I've already explained why this is at best highly questionable.

What's curious, David, is that our debate on this one point - the meaning of Paul's reference "brother of the Lord" - is part of a broader question, namely: What in Paul's letters suggests that he knew of the earthly life of Jesus as the gospels portray it? Notice how important this one reference is in answering this question. If this is all there is in all of Paul's letters, that explains why it is so damn important for you to defend it as a reference informed by what the gospels say. Were there other, more substantial and informative references to Jesus' pre-resurrection life on earth in Paul's letters, my suspicion is that this wouldn't be so important to you. It's your last gasp, your only piece on the board, and that's why you fight so hard to keep it in play. Without it, you're sunk. But even then, you can provide no conclusive reason why we should accept Paul's use of this phrase as a reference to an actual biological relationship between Jesus and James. How unfortunate.

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 17, 2008 9:16 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson: In this very blog, I had written:

*Furthermore, that Paul clearly refers to James as a central figure in the Jerusalem church, so the implication here is sufficiently strong that Paul could only mean some positional status by virtue of his place as one of the "pillars."*

Yes I see where you've asserted that a connection can be made, but I don't see where you've argued for it. You also made a similar assertions about the verse in I Cor 9:5 about what you thought was probable. Oh and Wells asserts it too, nice. It as if you think that assertions give strength to you case; I grew up in a hellfire and brimstone Southern Baptist church so rhetoric and powerful statements don't persuade me very much.

Dawson: *Meanwhile, David still has given no evidence whatsoever to suppose that Paul meant to indicate a biological relationship. None. Zilch. Nada. Zippo.*

This game is getting old. I gave you extra-Biblical references and you dismissed them as mere retelling of the legend. What are you looking for as evidence?

And from the same [site](#) you quote:

*When the Old Testament was translated into Greek in the second or third centuries B.C., the translators did not translate this holy name. Instead, they used the Greek word for Adonai, which is kyrios, and means "Lord." Many modern Bible translations, including the CEV, show the Hebrew word YHWH (Yahweh) as LORD, written with small capital letters. See also the mini-article called "I Am."*

Dawson: *Please tell me where in any of his letters Paul uses the phrase "brother of Jesus". I've not seen it. I've only seen "brother of the Lord," which is not the same thing.*

I think you misunderstood. I am asking how you justify you claim that Paul SHOULD use that phrase rather than the one he does use. How do you know its not the same thing?

OK Dawson, given your theory that all later stories are legends I don't have a problem with your dismissal of the external sources and gospels, but I have a problem with you saying I've given no evidence. It would be a little more accurate to say I've given no persuasive evidence. Don't you agree?

Dawson: *What's curious, David, is that our debate on this one point - the meaning of Paul's reference "brother of the Lord" - is part of a broader question, namely: What in Paul's letters suggests that he knew of the earthly life of Jesus as the gospels portray it? Notice how important this one reference is in answering this question. If this is all there is in all of Paul's letters, that explains why it is so damn important for you to defend it as a reference informed by what the gospels say. Were there other, more substantial and informative references to Jesus' pre-resurrection life on earth in Paul's letters, my suspicion is that this wouldn't be so important to you. It's your last gasp, your only piece on the board, and that's why you fight so hard to keep it in play. Without it, you're sunk. But even then, you can provide no conclusive reason why we should accept Paul's use of this phrase as a reference to an actual biological relationship between Jesus and James. How unfortunate.*

I've pointed to a slew of verses and you dismissed that as stuff Paul made up which the writers of the narrative embellished. Again you assume that if you have dismissed evidence then I haven't provided any evidence.

Hmm my last piece on the board? I thought we were playing cards, stop looking at my hand you! :P Let me get something straight: If you don't find my arguments convincing that is fine. If you still think your arguments are convincing that is fine.

I see no need to win any games here Dawson, honestly.

[September 17, 2008 9:40 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "I think my attitude has consistently been that of one seeking more knowledge on the subject,"

If your ambition here were to "seek more knowledge on the subject," I'd expect to see more indications of a "why do you suppose that?" attitude. But that's not what I've seen from you, David. Rather, I've seen from you, more and more, a hardline approach that resembles a juvenile who stops up his ears, shuts his eyes and yells "I'm right, you're wrong! I'm right, you're wrong!" over and over. It's not quite there, but it's moving rapidly in this direction, and it becomes quite tiresome. If it continues to escalate, I will have to ask you either to change your habits or to find some other forum to play in. Your behavior in regard to "James the brother of the Lord" is a case in point. Rather than pointing to evidence in Paul's letters which suggests or confirms that he really did have a biological relationship in mind with this phrase, you've simply insisted that this is the case and have baldly dismissed the various pieces of evidence that I have put on the table. That's not an attitude of "I want to learn" but rather "I want to lambaste you!"

David: "but with the way you toss around assertions about how awesome your position is"

Where did I "toss around assertions" proclaiming that my position is "awesome"? I don't recall doing this.

David: "I have tempered my comments with a little whit and sarcasm."

I don't mind your attempts at whit and sarcasm, David.

I wrote: *Meanwhile, I've pointed to numerous sources and have demonstrated in my responses that those sources do in fact answer any of the actually substantial objections you've attempted to raise in your comments.*

David: "If you list out your sources and remove those that contain mere assertions from Price, Doherty, and Wells it is quite short and lacking substantive argument."

Plenty of argument has been provided, David. Apparently you are simply denying this fact because the

consequences of facing it are simply too difficult for you to bear. By referring to Price, Doherty and Wells, I have demonstrated that the objections you raise have already been anticipated and dealt with. Because of your confessional commitment to literalist Christianity, you fear the implications of the legend theory (for as a Christian, fear is your starting point). But please proceed with your objections, as it helps me sharpen my critique of the literalist view of Christian beginnings.

I wrote: *David, begging the question (aka petitio principii or circular reasoning, etc.) is an informal fallacy. It does not follow from the fact or supposition that an argument has been validly constructed, that it does not contain informal fallacies. This is basic Logic 101 stuff. At any rate, I have a response to your "valid reconstruction of the G/T argument" and show numerous problems with it, including its question-begging nature. I hope to have it up in a few days.*

David: "I realize it is an informal fallacy, but how can you demonstrate that the conclusion is in the premises without formal reconstruction?"

One does not need to present a formal reconstruction of an argument to recognize that it commits an informal fallacy. But as I indicated in my statement above, I have a response to your reconstruction of the G/T argument, and I will be posting it in the near future. Hopefully you will find it satisfactory, since I'll be using your very own reconstruction of their argument. Were I to use mine, you'd probably again accuse me of misrepresenting the apologists. By using yours, I immunize my critique of such opportunity.

I wrote: *This all depends on what you mean by "invariant universal tendencies," which is not clear to me. Invariance occasions certain fundamental facts - e.g., the fact that existence exists - which are identified by Objectivism's founding axioms. To ask where such facts "come from" can only invite the fallacy of the stolen concept. Universality is a property of concepts; it is a consequence of their inherent open-endedness. There's no mysteriousness here which needs to be "explained" by appealing to supernaturalism (which again, explains nothing). I've pointed out in earlier writings that Christianity lacks a theory of concepts, and no Christian has been able to prove me wrong on this. If you think Christianity has its own theory of concepts, I'd surely like to see it. But lacking a good understanding of concepts, I'd expect to see the kind of carelessness that you're venturing into here.*

David: "So basically 'it just is'."

Huh? Which part of my above statement suggests that my position is "it just is"? The fact that existence exists is the only thing that would seem to qualify here. But if you think there's some prior causality to the fact that existence exists, I'd sure like to see your reasoning on this. My first question would be: does this prior cause exist? Even Christians themselves cannot avoid backing their position out to a final terminus which is accepted as is because "it just is." But the other points I made in my above statement are not reasonably characterized as "it just is." If you want to pursue this area further (since "seeking more knowledge on the subject," right?), I'd be really happy to pursue it with you. It's actually much more interesting to me than quivels over whether "brother of the Lord" is a biological reference or fraternity title.

David asked: "Does your worldview contain a foundational proposition that is not self-affirming?"

I'm not sure what you're asking here. Are you asking if my worldview's initial axiom contains more than one concept? If so, it could not qualify as an initial axiom. The task of a foundational axiom is not to argue or infer a truth, but to identify a basic truth which is perceptually self-evident, conceptually irreducible, inescapable and attendant to all other truths.

David: "Yes I'm behind the times in that I haven't read all of your blog articles."

You're depriving yourself, David! ;)

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 17, 2008 9:52 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson: *Rather than pointing to evidence in Paul's letters which suggests or confirms that he really did have a*

*biological relationship in mind with this*

Now Dawson you can hardly blame me that you reject all written history about James. You contrived an argument about adelphos and I simply pointed out all the reasons why it doesn't work.

Dawson: *Where did I "toss around assertions" proclaiming that my position is "awesome"? I don't recall doing this.*

This is a general observation about the number of times you proclaimed sufficient or strong evidence to support your claims. I would denote it but it seems like you aren't a big fan of my little lists :P Hey maybe we're both plugging our ears ;)

Dawson: *Plenty of argument has been provided, David. Apparently you are simply denying this fact because the consequences of facing it are simply too difficult for you to bear.*

Not the ol 'worldview made me do it' motive. I would be perfectly happy to abandon Christianity if the truth claims were false, really I would.

Dawson: *One does not need to present a formal reconstruction of an argument to recognize that it commits an informal fallacy. But as I indicated in my statement above, I have a response to your reconstruction of the G/T argument, and I will be posting it in the near future. Hopefully you will find it satisfactory, since I'll be using your very own reconstruction of their argument. Were I to use mine, you'd probably again accuse me of misrepresenting the apologists. By using yours, I immunize my critique of such opportunity.*

Ok thats cool, but you're the philosopher so I would have expected more. Not a big deal I guess.

Dawson: *Huh? Which part of my above statement suggests that my position is "it just is"? The fact that existence exists is the only thing that would seem to qualify here. But if you think there's some prior causality to the fact that existence exists*

I guess what I mean is how do you account for the laws of the universe given your starting point that "existence exists"?

Dawson: *I'm not sure what you're asking here. Are you asking if my worldview's initial axiom contains more than one concept? If so, it could not qualify as an initial axiom. The task of a foundational axiom is not to argue or infer a truth, but to identify a basic truth which is perceptually self-evident, conceptually irreducible, inescapable and attendant to all other truths.*

I agree completely. Instead of "existence exists" I found my worldview on "The Bible is the Word of God." Are we good so far?

[September 17, 2008 10:18 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "I gave you extra-Biblical references and you dismissed them as mere retelling of the legend. What are you looking for as evidence?"

I've given ample reasons to support the view that the gospels are the result of later legend-building. I've seen no good reasons to suppose they are authentic histories. The kind of evidence I'd be interested in reviewing is anything in Paul's letters which support the claim that he intended a biological relationship between Jesus and James. This I have not seen.

David: "I am asking how you justify you claim that Paul SHOULD use that phrase rather than the one he does use. How do you know its not the same thing?"

I spoke on this earlier as well. For Paul, "Lord" means the risen Jesus, the exalted heavenly savior who sits at the right hand of God in power.

David: "OK Dawson, given your theory that all later stories are legends I don't have a problem with your dismissal of the external sources and gospels, but I have a problem with you saying I've given no evidence. It would be a little more accurate to say I've given no persuasive evidence. Don't you agree?"

How about this: Unless you've pointed to evidence in Paul's own or other early letters (even the epistle of James does not claim a sibling relationship to Jesus for its author), and have informed your interpretation of the phrase "brother of the Lord" by reading the gospel accounts into these earlier documents, then you've given no evidence that is not contaminated with later legendary constructions. How's that?

David: "Hmm my last piece on the board? I thought we were playing cards, stop looking at my hand you!"

Maybe it's time you call?

David: "Let me get something straight: If you don't find my arguments convincing that is fine. If you still think your arguments are convincing that is fine."

Okay, deal! ;)

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 17, 2008 10:23 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I wrote: *Plenty of argument has been provided, David. Apparently you are simply denying this fact because the consequences of facing it are simply too difficult for you to bear.*

David: "Not the ol 'worldview made me do it' motive."

No, it's 'the confessional investment made you do it' motive. ;) You operate on a mixed worldview whether you realize it or not.

David: "I would be perfectly happy to abandon Christianity if the truth claims were false, really I would."

Well, if you want happiness, do what I did: make the choice to be honest. Once I did that, the mirage of Christianity began to crumble rather quickly.

I wrote: *Huh? Which part of my above statement suggests that my position is "it just is"? The fact that existence exists is the only thing that would seem to qualify here. But if you think there's some prior causality to the fact that existence exists*

David: "I guess what I mean is how do you account for the laws of the universe given your starting point that 'existence exists'?"

First we need to understand mutually what is meant by "laws" in this case. Are these properties? Are these conceptual identifications? Are they stipulations of some kind? I certainly do not hold that what I understand "laws of the universe" to be, to have been put in place by some act of consciousness, as if they were commanded into place. Again, I reject the primacy of consciousness entirely, and recognize that the primacy of existence can be the only true account of the nature of reality and the relationship between a subject and its objects.

David: "Instead of 'existence exists' I found my worldview on 'The Bible is the Word of God'. Are we good so far?"

Well, for one thing, your founding affirmation assumes the truth of mine; mine would have to be true before you could chance to propose yours. See for instance my blog [Theism and Its Piggyback Starting Point](#). Also, in tandem with my previous point, the affirmation you propose as your founding truth is not conceptually irreducible, which means that it assumes prior truths which would need to be identified and explored for any prior assumptions they make. Also, the statement "the Bible is the Word of God" does not identify a perceptually self-evident fact. Even if we accept it as true, it would have to be the conclusion of prior inference, which itself would ultimately need to be rooted in the perceptually self-evident. We could spend days and weeks exploring why one might accept it as



truth, where as 'existence exists' identifies a fact which is perceptually self-evident, undeniable, inescapable. Another concern is that it is not undeniable: I can deny the assertion that "the Bible is the Word of God" and I am in no way undercutting truths which I do affirm or contradicting facts which I accept as facts. Another problem (and I'll stop with this), is: what exactly is it referring to? It certainly does not have the scope of reference that 'existence exists' has (since 'existence' is the widest of all concepts, it includes everything which exists), and seems to be irrelevant to pretty much everything. Its applicability is wholly artificial, forced as it is as an interpretative filter on a reality which has no need for such notions. To justify the claim that it has relevance in our world, the one affirming this claim would probably resort to the claim that the universe and everything within it were created by said "God." But this again is not perceptually self-evident; that the universe was created by an act of consciousness (e.g., "God spoke the universe into existence") is a claim for which I have certainly seen no good evidence whatsoever.

Again, a good understanding of concepts is vital to all this, David. If the bible is your guide to truth, where are you going to find your theory of concepts?

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 17, 2008 11:01 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Fair enough, I'll forgo my second response and do a final closing statement on Part 7.

In summary I would have just pointed out:

1. kasignêtoio isn't a New Testament word, and I only found usage in the Homeric epics. Homeric Greek, a derivative or Ionic Greek, predate koine Greek so Not much more to say about that other than it seems quite ad-hoc.

2. Paul's point about rulers is that Christians who fear God needn't be afraid of persecution. Of course he knew about persecution since he probably wrote during Nero's time. (cf. Isa 8:13) At any rate, he is hardly making a universal affirmative.

3. You asked: *Did Paul know of the gospel Jesus, who kept company with adulterers, harlots, publicans, and other vicious types?*

Not sure, but his instructions concerning the church don't seem comparable to details of Jesus' earthly ministry.

4. You asked: *I don't think you've been in my shoes. Were you an Objectivist before becoming a Christian? I highly doubt it.*

Only in the sense that I thought the laws of logic and induction were axiomatically true somehow.

5. You asked: *Is it really that unreasonable to suppose that Paul, who refers to James as one of the "pillars" of the church (Gal. 2:9)*

Its a very interesting point, but from an exegetical perspective I can't see justification for such a move. Believe it or not, sound exegetical methods serve to eliminate theological bias when handling the text. Both sides benefit from this.

Let me know if you want clarification or think I should address a point in detail.

Cheers,  
David

[September 17, 2008 11:41 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I'll make some brief comments:

David: "Paul's point about rulers is that Christians who fear God needn't be afraid of persecution. Of course he knew about persecution since he probably wrote during Nero's time. (cf. Isa 8:13) At any rate, he is hardly making a universal affirmative."

Again, the quote in question is Romans 13:3, which states:

*For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same.*

This does not appear to be merely saying that "Christians who fear God needn't be afraid of persecution." This interpretation would obviously allow that rulers can be a terror to good works, and Paul is directly saying this is not the case. As for whether it is a universal statement or not, there does not seem to be any qualifier restricting its scope of reference. So without that, I would say one could easily be forgiven for supposing it is meant to be taken universally. But again, I still wonder (since you now add Nero to the list I had provided in my blog), which rulers did Paul have in mind? Certainly you don't think he was saying that Nero was not a terror to good works, do you?

I asked: *Did Paul know of the gospel Jesus, who kept company with adulterers, harlots, publicans, and other vicious types?*

David responded: "Not sure, but his instructions concerning the church don't seem comparable to details of Jesus' earthly ministry."

That's quite an understatement. Indeed, I've been saying something close to this all along. Paul's teachings and Jesus' teachings at many points seem to be going in different directions.

I asked: *I don't think you've been in my shoes. Were you an Objectivist before becoming a Christian? I highly doubt it.*

David responded: "Only in the sense that I thought the laws of logic and induction were axiomatically true somehow."

Objectivism does not hold that logic and induction are "axiomatically true somehow." It nowhere teaches that inductive inferences are automatically true, nor does it teach that inductive inference is an axiomatic operation. Both logic and induction, according to Objectivism, are conceptual in nature (incidentally, this is the key to addressing many of the questions which Drew raised in his response to Robert). As I pointed out in an earlier comment, universality is a property of concepts, due to their open-ended nature of reference. The concept 'man' for instance, includes every man who exists, who has existed and who will exist, until of course qualification (e.g., "this man," "the man who lives across the street," etc.) narrows its scope of reference. Indeed, it is because the concept 'man' is so open-ended that we need to qualify it when making use of it. This is the same for any concept. Since logic is conceptual in nature, its principles are open-ended, but they are not necessarily axiomatic. Objectivism does recognize that the founding principle of logic is axiomatic (the axiom of identity), but it does not follow from this that it holds that *all* principles of logic are likewise axiomatic. Similarly, induction is not axiomatic either. Concept-formation provides the mind with a working model for inductive inference. It is, in fact, the application of the law of causality to entity classes, which allows the mind to extrapolate in an objective manner from a sample of inputs to truths which apply generally, whether to "future instances" involving that sample of units or to all units of a class. Without the ability to form concepts, this capacity would be beyond man's ability, precisely because it is a conceptual process.

At any rate, it's clear that you were not an Objectivist prior to converting to Christianity, so I don't think you were in my shoes prior to accepting Christianity's teachings.

David: "Let me know if you want clarification or think I should address a point in detail."

I was really hoping we could explore my questions pertaining to revelation.

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 17, 2008 12:42 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

If you feel you've arrived at valid exegesis then by all means please stick with your interpretation of Romans 13.

Might I point out that the betrayal mentioned in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor) would seemingly imply Paul's knowledge of Jesus being arrested by the Roman authorities. I'm sure you have some explanation, but that's not the point. If you can look at the overall context of Romans, Paul's argument in chapter 13, and also the text itself and still conclude Paul is making a universal affirmative...go right ahead Dawson.

My reading of his argument is as such:

Statement: "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities" (Rom 13:1)

Why?

Because all authority exists ultimately by God's design, including the authority of the state (Rom 13:1). Therefore, to resist authorities is to resist God's intent (Rom 13:2).

But What is God's intent?

It is God's intent that through his "servants" (governing authorities) evil acts are punished (Rom 13:4); bad works are restrained through fear of punishment (Rom 13:3; and the good is promoted and encouraged (Rom 13:3). (*Hard Sayings of the Bible*, pg. 575)

There is no reason to assume Paul is making a universal affirmative, and there are plenty of reasons to think he isn't; namely, that he would be invalidating his own ministry during which he experienced persecution and was imprisoned by the Roman government.

[September 17, 2008 10:36 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Oh and your definition of concepts makes no sense to me. Guess that's to be expected since I embrace a mystical worldview. ;) Hey I even tried to get one of my philosopher buddies to read your explanation and he couldn't make heads or tails of it either.

Is there a good introductory book on it somewhere? I am interested in seeing how one gets to concepts starting from existence only.

[September 17, 2008 10:46 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "If you feel you've arrived at valid exegesis then by all means please stick with your interpretation of Romans 13."

It's interesting. Last evening, while out doing some errands, I was listening to Pastor Ed Young's radio broadcast in the car (it's what happened to be playing on the Satellite Christian Network at the time). Young was making a point to his congregation that, when you read "the Scriptures," go by its plain meaning. He urged his people not to put some "fancy" (his word) interpretation to the text, and to go by the plain reading unless it obviously violates some church doctrine or other passage in the bible. I began laughing because, even though Christians tell each other this quite a bit (I remember my "brothers in Christ" advising similarly back when I was a churchgoer), apologists typically won't allow this approach in their critics.

As for my understanding of Romans 13, I'm still wondering why you would consider my interpretation of Rom. 13:3 invalid.

David: "Might I point out that the betrayal mentioned in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor) would seemingly imply Paul's knowledge of Jesus being arrested by the Roman authorities. I'm sure you have some explanation, but that's not the point. If you can look at the overall context of Romans, Paul's argument in chapter 13, and also the text itself and

still conclude Paul is making a universal affirmative...go right ahead Dawson.”

Doherty refers to I Cor. 11:23-26 as “the only passage in all the epistles written in the first century which bears any resemblance to a Gospel episode.” (*Challenging the Verdict*, p. 29) He’s speaking of course about the Lord’s Supper. Paul’s own words suggest that he learned of this through revelation as opposed to traditions about a historical Jesus; in fact, Paul gives no indication of time or place for this communal meal event. We get our impression that he’s talking about a supper with 12 apostles gathered round him from the gospels, for this is not at all what Paul himself describes. As for the word ‘betrayed’ here, Doherty points out the following in response to Edwin Yamauchi:

*You say that Paul declares Jesus was “betrayed.” This, of course, is supposedly found in 1 Corinthians 11:23, when Paul talks of Jesus’ words at the “Lords Supper.” But the word “betrayed” - sometimes it’s given as “arrested” - is a common translation of a word in Greek which doesn’t necessarily go that far. The verb is “paradidomi” which simply means “to deliver up,” and it can be used in any context of justice or martyrdom. “Betrayed” implies the story of Judas in the Gospels, but it is significant that Paul never mentions the figure of Judas anywhere; nor does any other epistles or non-canonical writing in the entire first hundred years of Christianity. Paul uses this verb a few other times in his epistles, where it cannot possibly mean “betrayed” or “arrested.” IN Romans 8:32 he says, “He [God] did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all.” And in Ephesians 5:2 and 25 it is Christ who “gave himself up on your behalf.” (*Challenging the Verdict*, pp. 61-62)*

The translation of ‘paradidomi’ here as “betrayed” seems to be influenced by knowledge of the gospels, when in fact Paul uses the same word elsewhere which is not translated as “betrayed,” and wouldn’t make sense as “betrayed.”

David: “My reading of his argument is as such: Statement: ‘Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities’ (Rom 13:1) Why? Because all authority exists ultimately by God’s design, including the authority of the state (Rom 13:1). Therefore, to resist authorities is to resist God’s intent (Rom 13:2). But What is God’s intent? It is God’s intent that through his ‘servants’ (governing authorities) evil acts are punished (Rom 13:4); bad works are restrained through fear of punishment (Rom 13:3; and the good is promoted and encouraged (Rom 13:3). (*Hard Sayings of the Bible*, pg. 575)”

Here’s what Romans 13:1-4 really says (per the KJV):

*Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.*

Even when I was a believer, this passage struck me as at best puzzling, on plain reading just wrong, even downright propagandistic. Of course, when I was a believer, I had to restrain myself from admitting my evaluation here and try to coax my mind into just going along with it. By introducing verse 3 with “for” here, Paul suggests that what follows is the reason for the preceding teaching. What’s amazing, as I’ve pointed out before, is that the New Testament itself gives numerous counter-examples to what Paul says here, and not just peripherally, but directly involved with the story we find in the later narratives. Again another sign that the later stories were unknown to the earliest Christians.

Many a loyalist has no doubt pointed to this passage as justification for the divine right of kings. Indeed, if the early colonialists followed the teaching here, they probably would never have revolted from Great Britain. Obey the king, for by virtue of the fact that he has authority must mean that his authority is sanctioned by God and that he has been “appointed by God.” The colonialists who resisted King George I back in the mid 1700’s were, according to this verse, resisting “the ordinance of God,” and that’s bad (so goes the thinking anyway).

David: “There is no reason to assume Paul is making a universal affirmative,”

Actually, there’s a very good reason to suppose he’s making a universal statement here, and that is because he does not qualify it in any way. Recall my earlier point about the concept ‘man’. I had written: “it is because the concept ‘man’ is so open-ended that we need to qualify it when making use of it.” If I said “TV sets are brown,” you might come back saying something like “actually I have two TV sets and they’re both black.” If I said in response to this, “Well, I didn’t mean *all* TV sets are brown,” you might rightly be thinking that this is what I was originally

saying, since I had not qualified my statement in some way (e.g., “*some* TV sets are brown”). An unqualified plural lends itself to universal generalization. That’s why languages have modifiers - our cognition requires them much of the time.

David: “and there are plenty of reasons to think he isn’t; namely, that he would be invalidating his own ministry during which he experienced persecution and was imprisoned by the Roman government.”

Well, I don’t think this would be the first time Paul invalidated his own position on things. It may be that, when he wrote this, he was trying to calm his own anxieties about his impending doom.

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 18, 2008 11:07 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: “Oh and your definition of concepts makes no sense to me.”

Actually I did not provide a definition of the concept ‘concept’ if that’s what you were thinking. I simply gave some brief general points about the role of concepts in logic and induction. Indeed, very brief. There’s a lot, lot more to it. Can you isolate what puzzled you most?

One of the points I had emphasized about concepts is their \*open-endedness\*. Did you at least understand this part? Let me give another illustration. Say Johnny has 50 marbles, and he calls them ‘marbles’, and his concept ‘marble’ includes all fifty of the units he has in his possession. Now suppose his friend Billy comes along with fifty more marbles, and suggests that he combine his marbles with Johnny’s so that they would have 100. Then Johnny says back to Billy, “Oh no, we can’t do that. My concept of ‘marble’ stops at fifty units; what you have cannot marbles, they must be something else. The concept ‘marble’ reached capacity with my fifty here. Go find another concept for what you have.” Now you would be right to consider this a very misguided view of the nature of concepts, precisely because the utility of concepts lies in their open-endedness - i.e., their unlimited capacity to include units of a similar kind. What would it be like if we built into our concepts arbitrary limitations like Johnny’s view of the concept ‘marble’? We’d have to spend much of our time inventing new concepts for objects which could already have been included in an earlier iteration.

Now the question probably enters your mind, how can concepts be open-ended? What process makes this possible? The answer to this question is the process of abstraction. Objectivism has an explanation for this (see below).

David: “Guess thats to be expected since I embrace a mystical worldview. ;)”

That’s part of the problem. It goes hand in hand, however. Since you embrace a worldview void of a good understanding of concepts, it’s expected that, as a consequence, you won’t develop a good understanding of concepts, since the worldview to which you ascribe is unable to provide it. At the same time, since you lack a good understanding of how the conceptual operations of the mind function as well as an explicit understanding of metaphysical primacy, you are vulnerable to being seduced by mystical ideas. The apostle Paul suffered from the same problem.

David: “Hey I even tried to get one of my philosopher buddies to read your explanation and he couldn’t make heads or tails of it either.”

That doesn’t surprise me at all. In my experience, most people who are churned out of university philosophy departments, ironically seem to have a pretty poor grasp of these things. I’ve examined numerous other philosophy systems, and how the mind forms concepts is typically given short-shrift. This is especially the case in the Christian literature I’ve read. For instance, Van Til’s *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, which, by its title, I’d expect to find at least some discussion of concepts (since concepts are the form in which we retain and integrate our knowledge), says nothing on the matter. Without understanding how they formed their concepts, a thinker is liable to be found adrift at sea without a compass.

David: “Is there a good introductory book on it somewhere?”

See Ayn Rand’s *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, preferably the Second Revised Edition (which includes

numerous excerpts from her workshops on epistemology in the 70's). This is Rand's theory of concepts. But I would not suggest that you begin there per se. I would suggest first getting acquainted with Objectivism more generally. Peikoff's *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* is a good intro primer for this.

David: "I am interested in seeing how one gets to concepts starting from existence only."

That's a good question, but it's prone to overlooking something important, namely perception, since it does not mention it. Concepts do not magically populate themselves in our minds; we have to form them through an active process which we automatize at a relatively early age, and consequently never really understand how it works. We begin our cognition by perceiving objects, and this is an automatic, non-volitional process. Without perception of objects, we'd have no awareness of them and thus nothing to integrate into concepts. Since our first concepts are formed on the basis of things which we directly perceive, it would obviously need to be the case that those objects would have to exist in order for us to perceive them. If they didn't exist, we wouldn't be able to perceive them. And if they existed but were not accessible to our ability to perceive, we would not be able to form initial concepts for them. Very roughly speaking, the basic process is: perception of objects -> isolation of commensurable attributes -> measurement-omission -> integration of units into concepts -> definition. Concepts thus formed avail the mind to retain information and provide a context for the discovery of new information. I'd be happy to discuss more of this with you. And if Christianity has a native theory of concepts that I don't know about, I'd love to hear about it.

Now again, I was really hoping we could explore my questions about revelation. You had earlier thought that Geivett's article on "The Epistemology of Resurrection Belief" addressed my questions. Given what he says of his own article, I'm not confident that it does, but again I have not read it. But if you have and you still think it does address them, I'd like you to share this with me. But again, even if Geivett does get into the issues I raise, I'm curious how well they might reflect Paul's mindset back in the day. Paul himself does not explain his claim to having received knowledge by revelation.

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 18, 2008 11:10 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

I am equally saddened by Christians who abuse the Bible for their own purposes, as I am by non-Christians who do this. There is simply no excuse for making statements about a passage when you haven't done at least some background work on the author, intended audience, historical context, thematic contexts (the overall point of the passage, chapter, argument, theme, and book in relation to one another), and lexical-syntactic analysis. Neglecting this is simply mishandling the text, regardless of inspiration or inerrancy or anything like that; one would certainly not approach Homer or other ancient documents from a "take it for what it looks like it says in my English edition" approach. There are so many nuances in translations that affect the reading of the passage that most people don't even recognize (for instance the use of semicolons and commas actually must denote some theological meaning in English when Greek provides this within the language itself and English cannot convey such in the words).

You will find no argument from me as to the anti-intellectual nature of most Christian establishments with regard to the Bible. However, I would suggest that you call yourself to a higher standard than those "brothers in Christ" if you want to effectively use the Bible to critique Christianity.

I don't think your interpretation of Romans is necessarily invalid, but I don't think it's been well justified. Not meaning to sound insulting here, but your use of Greek during our exchanges has been reckless. Doherty tries to argue that paradidomi might mean the same thing Paul meant elsewhere. So what? That isn't a strong argument, it's just speculation. We all know words can have many meanings and one author may use them differently even within the same sentence, or can use several different words to get at the same meaning (actually a common rhetorical technique in Greek, similar to me saying "I like it, I love it, I want some more of it").

That being said, I would merely point out again that the later folks who assembled the narratives keep looking more dishonest or more incompetent as the legend theory explains away parallels. Did they not understand the correct usage of paradidomi? Why should we assume that we are better at gauging the meaning than the original language speakers in the original context? I think ignorance won't fly, I think they would need to do it purposely. But what motive would give rise to Judas betraying Jesus and throwing off the number of "the twelve"? This gets into the whole criteria of embarrassment thing, which I think the legend theory simply can't explain.

Ughh, I can't stand the KJV; the underlying Greek texts are simply vastly inferior. Heck some of the passages Erasmus just made up Greek for because he didn't have any manuscripts so he used to Latin Vulgate. I would suggest a translation based on an eclectic text, which take into account data - the 5735+ Greek manuscripts (new ones uncovered in Albania last month), and almost 20,000 patristic quotations and early Coptic, Gothic, and Syriac translations - that has been assembled into a single critical apparatus for translation and textual criticism. I think Erasmus might have used about 11 manuscripts but I can't remember off the top of my head. If your church was "KJV Only" I am very sorry you had to live through that nightmare.

*The colonialists who resisted King George I back in the mid 1700's were, according to this verse, resisting "the ordinance of God," and that's bad (so goes the thinking anyway).*

Well I'm betting Pastor Young's point was that people like these folks shouldn't put such a weighty idea on a single verse and should pay attention to all the other verses that qualify and clarify the overall Biblical teaching. A essential doctrine of the faith should never stand or fall on a single verse.

*Actually, there's a very good reason to suppose he's making a universal statement here, and that is because he does not qualify it in any way.*

So if I say "men are strong swimmers" then you see no reason to think that my statement is not a universal affirmative? There is no reason to interpret it as "some men are strong swimmer" or maybe "most men are strong swimmers"? Again this goes back the the [principal of charity](#).

But what is the reason for inserting "some" or "most" instead of "all"? Because its obvious that "all men are swimmers" is false. Yet with Paul, you take an opposite approach. You say that since "all rulers" is false then you can just assume your approach is correct and now Paul is contradicting himself I and likely the the later writers didn't know, care or just misunderstood him? No offense but whoever came up with this is grasping at straws.

*An unqualified plural lends itself to universal generalization. That's why languages have modifiers - our cognition requires them much of the time.*

I think it depends on the implication. Again "all men are strong swimmers" is certainly false, and only someone who was out to show me to be an idiot would say "hey come on buddy we all know that's false, look at that one he can't even tread water!?" Again no offense, but essentially you are doing the same thing with Paul.

*It may be that, when he wrote this, he was trying to calm his own anxieties about his impending doom.*

This coming from the same Paul who said to die is gain?

[September 18, 2008 12:54 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Again I am not a philosophy buff, but your definition of concepts reminds me of the Platonic world of forms a bit. There is an actual chair I'm sitting in, but there is an abstract "chairness" that contains chairs (both actual and possible I would guess).

So if G.A. Wells, Robert Price, Earl Doherty, etc. don't share your theory of concepts are they vulnerable to being seduced by mystical ideas?

My main question is would concepts exist if brains didn't?

I'll add those objectivists to my reading list. Give me a few days on the Geivett thing maybe I can review it this weekend.

[September 18, 2008 1:04 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David,

I found your soliloquy both interesting and also a little saddening for you. You seem quite alone in your crusade. You wrote:

*There is simply no excuse for making statements about a passage when you haven't done at least some background work on the author, intended audience, historical context, thematic contexts (the overall point of the*

*passage, chapter, argument, theme, and book in relation to one another), and lexical-syntactic analysis.*

How many self-identifying Christians do you suppose are out there in the world, full of spirit and gung ho for Jesus, who have never done any of the kind of research you describe here? I have a friend at work who is a Christian, and just this morning she mentioned to me how last night was the first time she has opened her bible in probably two years (I believe that's the amount of time she mentioned). On your view, is she still a Christian in spite of this? If she made a statement about a passage in the bible (such as "it's true!"), and yet she has not done the kind of research you describe here, would there be any excuse for her statement?

I wrote: *The colonialists who resisted King George I back in the mid 1700's were, according to this verse, resisting "the ordinance of God," and that's bad (so goes the thinking anyway).*

David responded: "Well I'm betting Pastor Young's point was that people like these folks shouldn't put such a weighty idea on a single verse and should pay attention to all the other verses that qualify and clarify the overall Biblical teaching. A essential doctrine of the faith should never stand or fall on a single verse."

It seems like you're saying, albeit in roundabout fashion, that even though Paul says that "whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God," believers can find some other verse in the bible to justify resisting authority. Is that right?

I wrote: *Actually, there's a very good reason to suppose he's making a universal statement here, and that is because he does not qualify it in any way.*

David responded: "So if I say 'men are strong swimmers' then you see no reason to think that my statement is not a universal affirmative?"

Under normal circumstances - i.e., in the reality which my universe describes? Sure, I could expect that such a statement is not intended to be taken as universally applicable, that exceptions would certainly be acknowledged. However, if you stated this and along with it also stated that a supernatural being ordained that men are strong swimmers, why wouldn't I take that as a universal statement if not qualified in some way? It's even worse with Paul's statement, since rulers are obviously a very small subclass of human individuals, and the relevant issue involved with their station as rulers is authority, and Paul is very conscious of authorial hierarchies. Paul is very clear that rulers derive their authority from God, that God appointed them and ordains their authority. Not quite the same thing as men being strong swimmers.

David: "There is no reason to interpret it as 'some men are strong swimmer' or maybe 'most men are strong swimmers?'"

It depends. If involved in the immediate context is the accompanying premise that men were created by a supernatural being and this supernatural being appointed men to be strong swimmers, why interpret it as "some" or "most" instead of "all," especially if such qualifiers are absent. Then again, who were these just rulers that Paul had in mind? Was it Herod the Great who, according to Christian tradition, ordered the slaughter of countless babies and toddlers? Was it Pilate who, according to Christian tradition, sanctioned the execution of Jesus? Was it Nero who according to Tacitus blamed the Christians for the burning of Rome? So like Paul, he does not give any specifics, he simply plays it safe by keeping it general.

David: "But what is the reason for inserting 'some' or 'most' instead of 'all? Because its obvious that 'all men are swimmers' is false."

Well, for one thing, to have Rom. 13:3 to say "some rulers" instead of just "rulers," we'd have to, as you put it, insert a word. That is, we'd have to add a qualifier which is not in the text. Why not let Paul speak for himself? I suppose if we want to say that he really meant "some rulers," he was a bit sloppy here by failing to qualify his statement in this way.

Now I agree that it's obviously not the case that all "rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil," but that does not grant us permission to revise what Paul actually wrote by inserting qualifiers which he himself failed to include. Again, I'm trying to think of just one example from Paul's day that did fit the statement with your proposed revision of it. What rulers in Paul's day could be counted on to be a terror to evil works and not good works? Surely he had Roman rulers in mind, doncha think? I can name a bunch who don't fit the tab, but I've yet to see any which do fit the tab.



I wrote: *An unqualified plural lends itself to universal generalization. That's why languages have modifiers - our cognition requires them much of the time.*

David: "I think it depends on the implication. Again 'all men are strong swimmers' is certainly false, and only someone who was out to show me to be an idiot would say 'hey come on buddy we all know that's false, look at that one he can't even tread water!?' Again no offense, but essentially you are doing the same thing with Paul."

I think what's happening here is that a vital element in the context of Paul's statement is being overlooked. And that is the element of divine ordination, which Paul is explicit about here as being a guiding factor to all this. A ruler vested with magisterial authority is, according to Paul in this very passage, to be thought of as "God's minister to you for good." Frankly, to me, the whole passage reads like a propaganda piece urging unquestioning subordination to whoever happens to be a ruler. (I wonder if Christians under Sadam Hussein's regime considered him to be a ruler after Paul's heart.) But on Paul's view, rulers in authority are "appointed by God." To bring your analogy more in line with the context we have in Paul's letter, we'd have to accompany the claim "men are strong swimmers" with a premise suggesting something to the effect that, for instance, their swimming proficiency is divinely appointed. So even if it takes Ugly Herman seven minutes to cross the pool while all his teammates do it in under 40 seconds, he's still a strong swimmer nonetheless. After all, who says that "strong swimmer" means a quick swimmer? Herman's strength as a swimmer is manifested in the slam of his splashing, just as Pilate's goodness as a ruler is manifested in his fulfillment of God's plan.

I wrote: *It may be that, when he wrote this, he was trying to calm his own anxieties about his impending doom.*

David: "This coming from the same Paul who said to die is gain?"

Such a statement shows us what kind of values Paul stood for. But even this passage could have been written by a beaten down Paul who was desperate to keep his spirits up.

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 18, 2008 9:05 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "Again I am not a philosophy buff, but your definition of concepts reminds me of the Platonic world of forms a bit."

In what way? What do you think the definition of 'concept' that I gave was? (Hint: I haven't given a definition of 'concept' in this discussion yet.) Unlike Objectivism's concepts, Plato's Forms reside in some otherworldly realm, existing independent the subject-object relationship of human cognition, and are accessed by anamnesis. Plato reasoned that the Forms must exist in some other realm because they are unchanging, while the concretes in the realm in which we exist do change. He clearly did not grasp the role of measurement-omission in the abstraction process (in fact, there's no room for such a process in his theory to begin with), and that one parameter of measurement typically omitted in the formation of most concepts (especially those integrating entities and their attributes) is that of time. Also, on Plato's theory, the chair that we see, touch and feel, is just a concrete representation of the Form 'chair'. On Plato's view, the Form comes first, while the particular chairs which exist in the world are simply manifestations of that Form. This is why, for Plato, the implications of the primacy of consciousness are ultimately unavoidable, a most serious deficiency to his theory. Moreover, because it fails to address the need to understand the process of abstraction, Plato's theory deprives us of any understanding of how our minds in fact know what they know.

David: "There is an actual chair I'm sitting in, but there is an abstract 'chairness' that contains chairs (both actual and possible I would guess)."

How did you get this from what I said? That's not what the objective theory of concepts teaches. There is the actual chair - a particular, concrete object, but there is also the method in which we identify, integrate and retain in our awareness that and every other chair we've encountered. That is the unit-economy which concepts provide to man's consciousness: "the ability to reduce a vast amount of information to a minimal number of units" (ITOE, p. 83) This ability is an ability which man's consciousness possesses and performs.

David: "So if G.A. Wells, Robert Price, Earl Doherty, etc. don't share your theory of concepts are they vulnerable to being seduced by mystical ideas?"

Of course. Indeed, there are things I've read in Wells and other writers whose work I enjoy which indicate that they do not have a consistently good grasp of concepts. In the case of Wells, however, I would say that he strikes me as solidly on the primacy of existence, at least from what I've read by him. But there is an important point to make in this regard as well, a point which I've made elsewhere in my writings, is that thinkers who accept fundamentally false or arbitrary premises, especially in the west, tend to develop the psychological habit of segregating those premises from the this-worldly contexts which govern a majority of their choices and actions. As I pointed out in [one blog](#), fortunately most believers "compartmentalize their beliefs, living a double mental life, with one foot in their religion, and the other foot in the real world." (I say "fortunately" here because if they didn't, they'd be more dangerous to other human beings than they already may be.) Now I'm not suggesting that Wells or Doherty do this; they might, but I don't know enough about them personally to make this determination. I'm not even sure if either are atheists, but even an atheist can ascribe to the primacy of consciousness. Look at Marxists for instance. Presuppositionalists like to say that non-Christians borrow from the Christian worldview. Marxists are a great example of this.

David: "My main question is would concepts exist if brains didn't?"

I'm not sure why this would be your main question, but it should be obvious. Since concepts are the method in which human minds integrate and retain knowledge, and since there would be no human minds without human brains, there would be no concepts. Concepts are not entities existing independent of the subject-object relationship.

Let me ask you a question, David: On your view, is logic a conceptual system, or is it something else? If you think it's something other than a conceptual system, what do you think it is?

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 18, 2008 9:07 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson: *If she made a statement about a passage in the bible (such as "it's true!"), and yet she has not done the kind of research you describe here, would there be any excuse for her statement?*

What defines a Christian is true belief, but to justify a belief (about a text's meaning) is another matter altogether. Of course you don't have to be an exegete to be a Christian, but I think to attack or defend Biblical teaching you should understand something about the original languages and how to properly handle the text.

Dawson: *It seems like you're saying, albeit in roundabout fashion, that even though Paul says that "whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God," believers can find some other verse in the bible to justify resisting authority. Is that right?*

No, I'm talking about an interpretative principle called the [analogy of Scripture](#).

Dawson: *Then again, who were these just rulers that Paul had in mind?*

I don't think he was necessarily trying to be specific to an emperor as you seem to think. The word simply means "civil magistrates" which could include anyone in any position in the entire Roman government. The Christians he wrote to would have probably had more interaction with local judiciary and internal police. Regardless, check out the context that precedes chapter 13. Paul is talking about how God's intent is that people live in a community with harmony, peace and order (Rom 12:10, 18). But life in a community becomes chaotic without regulatory laws enforced by authorities. In the historical Jewish context that Paul came out of, we can see that "broad streams of early Judaism understood that rulers were appointed by God (cf., e.g., Wid 6:1-11; b.Ber.58a, see further Str-B 3:303-5). Early Jewish thought also understood that these rulers also are held accountable by God (Wis. 6:5-8)." (*Commentary on the NT use of the OT*, pg 682, Carson). But look at how the OT describes these rulers. Almost all of them were screwed up in some way and ended up doing something wrong or getting Israel into trouble. The whole role of the prophet in relation to the king speaks volumes to this fact (Jeremiah, etc.) Surely, Paul isn't so naïve to think that the secular rulers of Rome were to fair better than the great men from his own tribe?

Dawson: *I suppose if we want to say that he really meant "some rulers," he was a bit sloppy here by failing to qualify his statement in this way.*

Remember Paul's audience isn't full of modern skeptics or folks who are looking to misconstrue everything he says or trip him up. Seriously, you got ill about all those "irrelevant" questions I posed earlier but they are just basic exegetical questions. By the way you say skepticism isn't your approach, but G.A. Wells is the ultimate skeptic with regards to Biblical criticism. I didn't intend to imply epistemic skepticism.

Dawson: *Such a statement shows us what kind of values Paul stood for. But even this passage could have been written by a beaten down Paul who was desperate to keep his spirits up.*

Even though this isn't the way it happened, I chuckled thinking about a situation with Paul sitting in prison writing a letter to the church and urging them to submit to the authorities...ironic given what got him imprisoned all the time! What a eccentric charlatan you make him out to be ;)

[September 18, 2008 10:36 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson: *In what way? What do you think the definition of 'concept' that I gave was? (Hint: I haven't given a definition of 'concept' in this discussion yet.)*

I was referring to your marbles analogy and the open-endedness thing. Sorry if that was unclear.

Dawson: *Let me ask you a question, David: On your view, is logic a conceptual system, or is it something else? If you think it's something other than a conceptual system, what do you think it is?*

Haha now you've really got me away from my subject area. I think there is a normative and descriptive sense that could be delved into here. If someone asked me "what does it mean to be logical?" I would respond, "thinking God's thoughts after him." Now within the presuppositional camp there is some disagreement between the Van Tillian and Clarkian schools of thought as to how that exactly works. From the little I have read, Gordon Clark argued that knowledge was qualitatively the same as God's while Cornelius Van Til thought it was analogous. Vincent Cheung and John Robbins continue from Clark, while John Frame and Greg Bahnsen carry on Van Til's approach. My guess is you would find Vincent Cheung to be the most interesting read. As a descriptive process, I think logical operations boil down to the law of non-contradiction. The main thing is our brains perform this way with fallible and finite faculty, but ultimately logic is grounded in God's nature.

[September 18, 2008 10:59 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I asked: *If she made a statement about a passage in the bible (such as "it's true!"), and yet she has not done the kind of research you describe here, would there be any excuse for her statement?*

David responded: "What defines a Christian is true belief, but to justify a belief (about a text's meaning) is another matter altogether. Of course you don't have to be an exegete to be a Christian, but I think to attack or defend Biblical teaching you should understand something about the original languages and how to properly handle the text."

Well, recall David, you had said that "there is simply no excuse for making statements about a passage when you haven't done at least....[snip litany of requirements]." Now I'm pretty sure my co-worker and friend has not done any of this for probably anything in the bible; in my discussions with her on the topic, she seems like your average Christian churchgoer - completely clueless about what's under the hood in "scripture." And yet she has made statements about passages in the bible, clearly without having performed any of the tasks you seem to require of a person in order to qualify her for making such statements. She'll even go so far as saying that every passage in the bible is true, even though she admits that she has not read every passage in the bible. Now certainly your requirements are not only for non-believers and critics like myself, but for everyone, is that right? Or do believers get a free pass, by virtue of their confession?

I wrote: *It seems like you're saying, albeit in roundabout fashion, that even though Paul says that "whoever*

*resists the authority resists the ordinance of God,” believers can find some other verse in the bible to justify resisting authority. Is that right?*

David: “No, I’m talking about an interpretative principle called the analogy of Scripture.”

So, is there a passage elsewhere in the bible which says it’s okay to resist the ordinance of God, as the colonialists did in the mid 1700’s?

I asked: *Then again, who were these just rulers that Paul had in mind?*

David: “I don’t think he was necessarily trying to be specific to an emperor as you seem to think.”

Oh, it doesn’t have to be an emperor, but Paul does say “rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil.” I’m just wondering if we can find one example from Paul’s day of a ruler who fits this norm. He does not seem to be talking about “regulatory laws” but of human individuals who hold positions of authority, an authority which he says is divinely appointed. But who from Paul’s day could fit the tab? And why would he say this with examples like Herod the Great, Pontius Pilate, Herod Antipas, etc., fresh in the memories of Christians? I’m still wondering what ruler from Paul’s day his statement could refer to. I’ve asked several times now, and you’ve not been able to point to any, so I’m prepared to rest on this one.

David: “By the way you say skepticism isn’t your approach, but G.A. Wells is the ultimate skeptic with regards to Biblical criticism. I didn’t intend to imply epistemic skepticism.”

There are two general ways that one can use the notion ‘skepticism’; you seem to be aware of this. One can be skeptical of certain claims or a body of claims, without being a philosophical skeptic.

David: “Even though this isn’t the way it happened, I chuckled thinking about a situation with Paul sitting in prison writing a letter to the church and urging them to submit to the authorities...ironic given what got him imprisoned all the time! What a eccentric charlatan you make him out to be ;)”

Oh, it’s not me making him into a charlatan. We’re going by Paul’s own statements here. He was a campaigner, and campaigners make the best of their opportunities, so to speak.

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 19, 2008 6:08 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: “I was referring to your marbles analogy and the open-endedness thing. Sorry if that was unclear.”

My marble illustration was intended to draw attention to the fact that concepts are open-ended with respect to the units they subsume. A concept does not reach some arbitrary point of capacity and then cease to allow one to subsume additional units. I hope that was clear. Was there anything specific about my illustration called the Platonic world of forms to your mind?

I wrote: *Let me ask you a question, David: On your view, is logic a conceptual system, or is it something else? If you think it's something other than a conceptual system, what do you think it is?*

David: “I think there is a normative and descriptive sense that could be delved into here. If someone asked me ‘what does it mean to be logical?’ I would respond, ‘thinking God’s thoughts after him’.”

That is not the question I’m asking you here. Essentially I’m trying to find out from you whether or not on your view logic is conceptual. If it’s conceptual, how do you account for it without a theory of concepts? If it is not conceptual, is it something else? Is it material? Is it physical? Is it mineral? What? This is a general question which I think needs to be settled before getting into more specific areas about logic.

David: “Now within the presuppositional camp there is some disagreement between the Van Tillian and Clarkian schools of thought as to how that exactly works.”

How can there be disagreement among people who are all thinking the thoughts of the same divine being? That's most puzzling, David. Could it be that they really aren't thinking some divine being's thoughts after all? Or is this a non-negotiable premise and the disagreements you mention here (which from what I've read have escalated into take-no-prisoners vehemence) can be explained away somehow?

David: "From the little I have read, Gordon Clark argued that knowledge was qualitatively the same as God's while Cornelius Van Til thought it was analogous. Vincent Cheung and John Robbins continue from Clark, while John Frame and Greg Bahnsen carry on Van Til's approach."

I'm familiar, to varying extents, with all the writers you've mentioned here. If you've read much of my blog, it will be obvious which ones I'm more familiar with.

David: "My guess is you would find Vincent Cheung to be the most interesting read."

Of the ones you've listed, I've read probably the least of this guy, but that's because, from what I've read of him, he seems to stream vitriol rather than information. He's like John Robbins on steroids (not that John Robbin isn't frothing himself). Incidentally, the founding premise you had floated earlier and I shot down ("the Bible is the Word of God") comes from the Clarkian-Robbins camp. I have never seen the Vantillian camp ever affirm this as a starting axiom.

David: "As a descriptive process, I think logical operations boil down to the law of non-contradiction."

Recall my earlier statement: "Objectivism does recognize that the founding principle of logic is axiomatic (the axiom of identity)." Here you affirm that logic boils down to the law of non-contradiction. But the law of non-contradiction assumes the axiom of identity. It seems we come to a common terminus here. As I had mentioned earlier, your founding axiom ("the Bible is the Word of God") assumes the truth of mine. You seem to be borrowing left and right from my worldview, David!

Now here's a question for you: Is the law of non-contradiction conceptual, or is it something else?

David: "The main thing is our brains perform this way with fallible and finite faculty, but ultimately logic is grounded in God's nature."

That's what I'm trying to figure out, and to see if your position is really very consistent on the matter. To know for sure, we need to know whether or not logic has a conceptual nature. If it does not have a conceptual nature, what alternative to this is there for logic?

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 19, 2008 6:10 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson: *Now certainly your requirements are not only for non-believers and critics like myself, but for everyone, is that right? Or do believers get a free pass, by virtue of their confession?*

How many times need I refer you to my first sentence, "I am equally saddened by Christians who abuse the Bible for their own purposes, as I am by non-Christians who do this?"

Your question doesn't follow from what I said. The context of my statement was the "brothers in Christ" who told you to go by the plain reading of Scripture to **determine** what it says. You responded with "How many self-identifying Christians do you suppose are out there in the world, full of spirit and gung ho for Jesus, who have never done any of the kind of research you describe here?... would there be any excuse for her statement?"

I am talking about how one determines what Scripture teaches, not if they believe it is true. Your friend can believe it is all true all she wants, but she has no excuse for teaching people that a passage teaches x,y, or z or that it doesn't teach x,y, or z without doing that background work. Again, remember you had just given the example about the pastor on the radio show.

Dawson: *So, is there a passage elsewhere in the bible which says it's okay to resist the ordinance of God, as the*

*colonialists did in the mid 1700's?*

Yes.

Dawson: *And why would he say this with examples like Herod the Great, Pontius Pilate, Herod Antipas, etc., fresh in the memories of Christians?*

Because they needn't be afraid (terrorized) of such persecution (a point he drives home all over the place in his letters). I think you're focusing on the rulers' treatment when the word "terror" probably implies the reaction of the person receiving treatment. A ruler can mistreat two people equally, and one he is not "a terror" to because they know that they are being martyred for Christ, etc.

Dawson: *Oh, it's not me making him into a charlatan. We're going by Paul's own statements here. He was a campaigner, and campaigners make the best of their opportunities, so to speak.*

No I think we're going by your interpretation of Paul's statements, which consistently renders him incoherent. We have seen this over and over again. That is fine for you, but the hermeneutic that I employ actually seeks to resolve conflicts and assume the best case (principle of charity, etc.).

Elsewhere on the blog, have you written up a concise statement of why you think the Christian worldview lacks a good understanding of concepts?

[September 19, 2008 9:53 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "I am talking about how one determines what Scripture teaches, not if they believe it is true. Your friend can believe it is all true all she wants, but she has no excuse for teaching people that a passage teaches x,y, or z or that it doesn't teach x,y, or z without doing that background work."

I see. So she can say what the bible teaches is true, but she can't determine what it teaches without going through all the rigmarole that you described?

David: "Again, remember you had just given the example about the pastor on the radio show."

Yes, I remember. Dr. Young. I think his point was that "the Scriptures" speak directly to the believer's heart, and that "fancy" (his word) interpretations should be discouraged or at any rate unnecessary. This was on Wednesday's broadcast. I'm sure it's available on his website. I don't know the name of the sermon message though. But hey, he's the pastor of a megachurch. He was called by God to deliver His message. Certainly he's being guided by the Holy Spirit, is he not? Are we to believe a 24-year-old college student who's recently learned to flex in four- and five-syllable words, or a seasoned man of the cloth whose preaching has touched thousands for some 40 years?

I asked: *So, is there a passage elsewhere in the bible which says it's okay to resist the ordinance of God, as the colonialists did in the mid 1700's?*

David answered: "Yes."

Okay, now we're getting somewhere. So in one place the bible says it's not okay to resist the ordinance of God, and in another place it says it is okay to resist the ordinance of God. That's quite an admission, David.

I wrote: *Oh, it's not me making him into a charlatan. We're going by Paul's own statements here. He was a campaigner, and campaigners make the best of their opportunities, so to speak.*

David: "No I think we're going by your interpretation of Paul's statements, which consistently renders him incoherent."

Well, when someone says "rulers are a terror not to go works, but to evil," and virtually all contemporary examples of rulers in Paul's day seem pretty evil, I'd say it's a rather incoherent statement. And still, I have no idea whom he might have had in mind.

David: "Elsewhere on the blog, have you written up a concise statement of why you think the Christian worldview

lacks a good understanding of concepts?"

I have not devoted a blog to this specific question, and I don't see any need to do so. But it's pretty simply: either Christianity has its own theory of concepts, or it doesn't. I have no burden to prove a negative here. It's a simple observation: there is no such animal in Christianity. If you believe otherwise, I'd like to know.

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 19, 2008 4:07 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson: *I see. So she can say what the bible teaches is true, but she can't determine what it teaches without going through all the rigmarole that you described?*

That isn't what I said. She may be correct through no fault of her method. For instance: I can say that since my hair is blonde then it's 5:30pm. The belief that it's 5:30pm may correspond with reality. Surely I can determine that it's 5:30pm using a host of methods, but not all of them will actually justify my true belief.

Dawson: *Are we to believe a 24-year-old college student who's recently learned to flex in four- and five-syllable words, or a seasoned man of the cloth whose preaching has touched thousands for some 40 years?*

Thanks for the ad hominem attack, but actually I am a software consultant and have been out over college for over a year. Speaking of which, I have a business trip to VA Sunday - Tuesday so our conversation on revelation may get pushed back.

Dawson: *Okay, now we're getting somewhere. So in one place the bible says it's not okay to resist the ordinance of God, and in another place it says it is okay to resist the ordinance of God. That's quite an admission, David.*

That's quite an assumption Dawson. ;) You're imputing your interpretation to me and thus have incorrectly concluded what my position is.

Dawson: *Well, when someone says "rulers are a terror not to go works, but to evil," and virtually all contemporary examples of rulers in Paul's day seem pretty evil, I'd say it's a rather incoherent statement. And still, I have no idea whom he might have had in mind.*

Consider this:

1. Is Paul speaking from experience or from his Jewish background?
2. Is Paul's purpose to prescribe the ideal role of government or describe how it is currently functioning?
3. Does "rulers are a terror" imply Paul's perspective or is he talking about the fear of punishment that accompanies doing evil (thus the government wield the sword keeping this in check)?

Dawson: *I have not devoted a blog to this specific question, and I don't see any need to do so. But it's pretty simply: either Christianity has its own theory of concepts, or it doesn't. I have no burden to prove a negative here. It's a simple observation: there is no such animal in Christianity. If you believe otherwise, I'd like to know.*

No I don't think you have to do anything, but you haven't defined concepts, so there is no way for me to even know what you expect Christianity to lack in this area. That's cool, just hoping I could look into it during my trip this weekend. Philosophy is so much more enjoyable to read on an airplane for some reason....up in the clouds! :P

[September 19, 2008 4:38 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I wrote: *Are we to believe a 24-year-old college student who's recently learned to flex in four- and five-syllable words, or a seasoned man of the cloth whose preaching has touched thousands for some 40 years?*

David: "Thanks for the ad hominem attack,"

I don't think this is an ad hominem, David. If I had the choice of listening to a pipefitter or a dentist about a pain in

my tooth, should I listen to the pipefitter, or the dentist? I would not consider the suggestion that I listen to the dentist over the pipefitter an ad hominem against the pipefitter. I doubt the pipefitter would either. According to his own claims, Dr. Young called by God to preach the gospel, and has been doing so for over 40 years. And given the size of his megachurch (many thousands I'm assured), certainly one could say that God has given the increase, no? Also, he has the title of "Dr." Doesn't that count for anything?

David: "but actually I am a software consultant and have been out over college for over a year."

Congratulations! It should be a good gig for you. But all the more reason for me to question, when faced with two sources, the one who has earned doctorates in his field, while the other has a profession in a completely different industry...

David: "Speaking of which, I have a business trip to VA Sunday - Tuesday so our conversation on revelation may get pushed back."

That's fine, David. No hurries. Safe travels and come back safe!

I wrote: *Okay, now we're getting somewhere. So in one place the bible says it's not okay to resist the ordinance of God, and in another place it says it is okay to resist the ordinance of God. That's quite an admission, David.*

David: "That's quite an assumption Dawson. ;) You're imputing your interpretation to me and thus have incorrectly concluded what my position is."

Well, I've been asking straightforward questions here. The facts are that, on the one hand, we have a verse in the bible which commands believers not to resist authority because that authority is appointed by God, and on the other, when I asked whether or not there is "a passage elsewhere in the bible which says it's okay to resist the ordinance of God," you replied "Yes." What else could I conclude from this?

I wrote: *Well, when someone says "rulers are a terror not to go works, but to evil," and virtually all contemporary examples of rulers in Paul's day seem pretty evil, I'd say it's a rather incoherent statement. And still, I have no idea whom he might have had in mind.*

David: "1. Is Paul speaking from experience or from his Jewish background?"

I would suppose that either Paul is speaking from his knowledge, or from divine inspiration.

David: "2. Is Paul's purpose to prescribe the ideal role of government or describe how it is currently functioning?"

I would tend to think neither. His purpose seems to be telling believers what to think or believe.

David: "3. Does 'rulers are a terror' imply Paul's perspective or is he talking about the fear of punishment that accompanies doing evil (thus the government wield the sword keeping this in check)?"

Hmmm... I'll have to think on this.

I wrote: *I have not devoted a blog to this specific question, and I don't see any need to do so. But it's pretty simply: either Christianity has its own theory of concepts, or it doesn't. I have no burden to prove a negative here. It's a simple observation: there is no such animal in Christianity. If you believe otherwise, I'd like to know.*

David: "No I don't think you have to do anything, but you haven't defined concepts, so there is no way for me to even know what you expect Christianity to lack in this area."

Then I'll ask this: how does Christianity (assuming it has a theory of concepts) define 'concept'?

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 19, 2008 9:23 PM](#)

[david](#) said...



1. A degree and 40 years experience (I didn't know he was that old) certainly lends credulity to his statements, but it doesn't necessarily mean they're true; the arguments would have to sort that out. One of the reasons I quote so many sources from Christian and non-Christian scholars is so that I don't appear to be speaking simply from my own authority.

2. I'll be honest: I'm not a fan of huge churches. I think it's harder to have a community in that setting, and it becomes more segmented. Theology and beer is my favorite pastime! In my opinion, churches can grow for a lot of reasons. There is some rhyme and reason to figuring out what makes people want to sit in a room for an hour. The intent is to share the gospel with as many people as possible. I don't think this is totally wrong, but the bigger a church gets the harder it is for it to be deep and broad at the same time...it becomes shallow and entertainment oriented. The positive thing is that bigger churches can do more for their community (food banks, charity, etc.) But at some of these huge churches, the churchgoer sits there being entertained from week to week, not actually implementing what they hear from the preacher or the Bible, but still thinking somehow his weekly attendance will please his wife or accomplish some other goal (feeling like a good person, scoring points with God, raising good kids, etc.).

Dawson: *The facts are that, on the one hand, we have a verse in the bible which commands believers not to resist authority because that authority is appointed by God, and on the other, when I asked whether or not there is "a passage elsewhere in the bible which says it's okay to resist the ordinance of God," you replied "Yes." What else could I conclude from this?*

Along with Romans 13, there is 1 Pet 2:13-17

*13Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, 14or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. 15For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. 16Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. 17Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. (ESV)*

In 1 Timothy 2:1 we see Christians encouraged to pray for their leaders.

*1First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. (ESV)*

In tension with this, we have clear examples of civil disobedience in light of a government requiring what God forbids or forbidding what God requires: Acts 4:18-21; 5:17-29, and also

Acts 17:6-7

*6And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, 7and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."*

Jesus himself said to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, but the decrees of Roman or Jewish authorities didn't stop Jesus from proclaiming his message - a message he knew would certainly get him crucified.

In Revelation 13 and 18 there are also examples of a government set up against God's purposes which is ultimately brought to destruction.

So the point is that God places the authorities there for a reason, but this does not ensure that they will perfectly accomplish the task; indeed only when judged in light of what God has said in the Bible can any conclusions be made as to whether or not the government is violating those "God-given rights" that all men are entitled to.

[September 20, 2008 1:25 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "1. A degree and 40 years experience (I didn't know he was that old) certainly lends credulity to his statements, but it doesn't necessarily mean they're true; the arguments would have to sort that out."

Of course I already realize this. I just wanted to show you I wasn't indulging in an ad hominem.

David: "One of the reasons I quote so many sources from Christian and non-Christian scholars is so that I don't appear to be speaking simply from my own authority."

I have no problem with this. I like to quote from scholars as well. I also quote from Christian sources as well.

David: "2. I'll be honest: I'm not a fan of huge churches."

Obviously neither am I. ;)

David: "Theology and beer is my favorite pastime!"

Well, I sure like the beer part.

David: "In my opinion, churches can grow for a lot of reasons."

Did Pastor Young's church grow for the reasons he attributes to its growth? He of course is going to credit God for giving the increase.

David: "There is some rhyme and reason to figuring out what makes people want to sit in a room for an hour."

Or more. And every week, too. It might be more rhyme than reason. I know many, many churchgoers who never even so much as mention Christ in their daily conversation, but yet they make sure to fulfill their duty to go to church every week.

David: "The intent is to share the gospel with as many people as possible."

"Share" must be a euphemism here. Propagandizing is the real intent.

David: "I don't think this is totally wrong,"

Is it wrong at all in your view? I mean, going to church? Or, just belonging to a bigger church?

David: "but the bigger a church gets the harder it is for it to be deep and broad at the same time...it becomes shallow and entertainment oriented."

Perhaps that's God's intent for the church: to facilitate its congregants in the godly task of occupying until his Son returns.

David: "The positive thing is that bigger churches can do more for their community (food banks, charity, etc.)"

...influence local politics...

David: "But at some of these huge churches, the churchgoer sits there being entertained from week to week, not actually implementing what they hear from the preacher or the Bible,"

Gee I hope you're right!

David: "but still thinking somehow his weekly attendance will please his wife or accomplish some other goal (feeling like a good person, scoring points with God, raising good kids, etc.)."

Of course, stuff like this is going on at the smaller church level as well...

I wrote: *The facts are that, on the one hand, we have a verse in the bible which commands believers not to resist authority because that authority is appointed by God, and on the other, when I asked whether or not there is "a passage elsewhere in the bible which says it's okay to resist the ordinance of God," you replied "Yes." What else could I conclude from this?*

In response to this, you pointed to I Peter 2:13-17, part of which Wells also cites in his point that the early epistles seem to have been written without knowledge of the story of Jesus' passion as we have it in the gospels (cf. *The Jesus Myth*, p. 91). You then quoted I Tim. 2:1 which urges believers "to pray for their leaders," as you put it. But

then you draw attention to what the apostles are portrayed in Acts as actually doing, which is not in compliance with Romans 13:1-3 and I Peter 2:13-17. Apparently what we have here is either various traditions which developed independent of each other and are not actually rooted in historical fact (such as the legend theory proposes), or we have an ethic which reduces to: do as we say, not as we do.

David: "In Revelation 13 and 18 there are also examples of a government set up against God's purposes which is ultimately brought to destruction."

Yeah, that one's quite a storybook.

David: "So the point is that God places the authorities there for a reason, but this does not ensure that they will perfectly accomplish the task;"

I suppose it would be easy to imagine any supernatural being behind the scenes choreographing the events of history according to its "purpose." My pen broke, because Almighty Blarko had a reason for it breaking. My co-worker's daughter gave birth to a baby with spina bifida which died two days after birth because Almighty Blarko had a reason for this. The sandwich ham at the nearby 7/11 is rancid because Almighty Blarko had a reason for it. The stock market fell 945 points in two days because Almighty Blarko had a reason for it doing so. Hurricane Ike destroyed homes and lives because Almighty Blarko had a reason for it. Islam has taken over one third of the world's population because Almighty Blarko has a reason for this happening. Etc. Almighty Blarko sure has a lot to account for.

David: "indeed only when judged in light of what God has said in the Bible can any conclusions be made as to whether or not the government is violating those 'God-given rights' that all men are entitled to."

I'd like to know more about these "God-given rights." Where does the bible discuss them? Or does it?

Apologist J.P. Holding says of man's individual rights:

*The idea of individual rights is a byproduct of modern individualism, a way of thinking that has only emerged in the last hundred or so years (with the Industrian Revolution) and only in Western nations. The ancients, and most of the world today, does not speak of "individual rights" but of group obligations. Thus there is no "right" to do anything. [sic]*

I've encountered other Christians who openly deny the view that man has any rights at all. Then again, I do not find any outline of a theory of man's rights in the bible. In fact, I don't think that biblical teaching is at all compatible with the objective theory of rights, for according to this theory man's fundamental right is the right to exist for his own sake, and according to biblical teaching we are all here to serve the purpose of someone other than ourselves.

Hey, have you had a chance yet to decide whether logic is conceptual in nature, or something else?

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 20, 2008 7:13 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson *Hey, have you had a chance yet to decide whether logic is conceptual in nature, or something else?*

As it pertains to the brain and those physical processes that comprise logical thinking, or logic as an objective abstract invariant universal entity?

[September 27, 2008 11:45 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I asked: *Hey, have you had a chance yet to decide whether logic is conceptual in nature, or something else?*

David responded: "As it pertains to the brain and those physical processes that comprise logical thinking, or logic as

an objective abstract invariant universal entity?"

Is this a stalling tactic? I mean logic as a systematic method of non-contradictory identification.

By the way, I do not think logic is an "entity."

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 28, 2008 9:31 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

As a descriptive process, it seems logic would fit in the conceptual category as I understand it.

My question is why this process results in truth in an invariant, universal, objective fashion?

[September 28, 2008 9:49 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "As a descriptive process, it seems logic would fit in the conceptual category as I understand it."

Okay, we're making progress! So logic, as you understand it now, *is* in fact conceptual. Would you ever say that logic is *not* conceptual? Also, if logic is conceptual in nature, how do you account for it without a theory of concepts? Or, do you still maintain that you have a theory of concepts, but are having difficulty locating it at the moment? Since you say "as I understand it," I think it would be useful to probe your understanding of logic, especially in light of your discovery now that logic is conceptual.

David: "My question is why this process results in truth in an invariant, universal, objective fashion?"

My answer to this is: because it is conceptual (concepts are, as I explained, open-ended, that's their universality), and also because it is anchored in the truth of the axioms (whose truths do not change). If you had carefully noted what I stated earlier about concepts, you might have been able to anticipate this answer. It's a mystery to you now, because you do not have a good understanding of concepts, and until now you've never thought of logic as a conceptual system before.

How does your worldview answer this question? Of course, by pointing to an invisible magic being, right? But why suppose this, what supports it, and how does that move us any closer to understanding the human mind, logic, and its applications? The notion that the Christian god is the ground for logic because logic allegedly "reflects" its thinking, is most dubious, since the Christian god would not have its knowledge in the form of concepts, as I have shown in my blog [Would an Omniscient Mind Have Knowledge in Conceptual Form?](#) A being which does not have its knowledge in the form of concepts would not think in terms of concepts, so logic - since it is conceptual in nature - needs a different explanation, one which recognizes its conceptual nature.

Meanwhile, now that you are beginning to understand that logic is conceptual, how does this change your understanding of how your question can be answered?

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 29, 2008 9:04 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

I'm going to take some time to read what you've written on the subject and try to get a grasp on it. No sense in firing off a response yet if I honestly don't have my head wrapped around it.

[September 29, 2008 10:24 PM](#)

[Post a Comment](#)