SESSION #65 (29 Nov 11)

SPECIAL SESSION: DEUTERONOMY'S IMPLICATIONS FOR THE THREE GREAT LIFE QUESTIONS

I. INTRODUCTION
(Explain about George and David and people in your workplace or business or family)

The three great life questions everyone consciously or unconsciously answers every day because everyone is made in the image of God and has to live in God's world.
- Everyone has to deal with His Presence in the conscience, in the designs of nature, in His providential control of circumstances, and--depending upon one's exposure to the Bible and believers--in His special revelation (His communication to humanity).
- Everyone is in a hostile or harmonious relationship with God.
      A. The Metaphysical Question: What is reality, the true state-of-affairs? Is there ultimate purpose in existence and therefore in my life?
      B. The Epistemological Question: How do I recognize truth? How can I be sure that your assertions are true?
      C. The Ethical Question: What is "just" and "right"? What is your moral authority to justify imposing your ethics upon me and others?

II. THE THREE GREAT QUESTIONS AND THE BIBLE

   A. The Interrelationship of the Three Great Questions.

      1. Questions A and B are *indissolubly wedded together*. You can't answer one without answering the other.
- Question A requires that you are sure you are able to know reality, i.e., you already have answered question B, in order to be confident you know what the true state-of-affairs is.
- Question B requires that you know what reality is, i.e., you already have answered question A, in order to be sure that an assertion truly describes the actual state-of-affairs.

      2. The union of Questions A and B creates a dilemma for those who reject biblical revelation. Since there is no "higher" standard, no way to get beyond these questions to verify them (they control how any verification would proceed), Bible rejecters must start out their attempts to build a worldview with *an arbitrary guess, a "leap," to answer Questions A and B*.
- Early Greek rationalism ended when Socrates pointed out that it is impossible to intellectually penetrate the relationships necessary to answer these questions. Answers must simply be postulated.
- Early European rationalism ran into the same problem when Kant argued that man can only act "as if" he has answers to such questions.
- Both Socrates and Kant insisted that man should not give up in total skepticism because his social and political life depended upon maintaining order of some sort.

This dilemma comes about because finite man lacks the omniscience that is necessary to answer Questions A and B. As *fallen* finite man, he rejects revelatory information from God's omniscient mind preserved in the Bible thus cutting himself off from the only source of answers.[1]

        3. <u>Question C turns out to be a key to solving the dilemma</u>.
Because fallen man rejects God's Word as his ultimate authority, he has replaced that Word with his own subjective ideas and has become his own moral authority. In doing so, he follows the example of Adam and Eve. It thus turns out that the answer to Question C determines the answers to Questions A and B.
As Greg Bahnsen has noted,

"We must recognize that most philosophers do not want intellectual matters to reduce to a question of morality (obedience or rebellion to God's Word). They want to hold the intellect or reason to be above matters of moral volition. They hold that truth is obtainable and testable no matter what ethical condition the thinker is in. . . . Whether most philosophers like it or not, Scripture assuredly tells us that the way a man uses his intellect *is* an ethical matter (e.g., rebellion against God leads to a darkened mind). Irrespective of the way in which men respond to it, God's clear revelation [in nature, in man's own constitution, and Scripture] is the only escape we have from the skepticism that would otherwise result from the necessity of coordinating metaphysics and epistemology."[2]

      B. <u>Deuteronomy and Question "A"</u>.
Discussion of one aspect of Question "A" raised by David in Session #62--the uniformity of natural law or "how can you be sure that natural processes observed today will work tomorrow?" Is reality stable? Science requires this condition in reality. Thus it's one part of the Metaphysical Question A.

        1. <u>Deuteronomy's philosophy of history</u>.
Deuteronomy establishes the view of history held by all subsequent prophets of the OT and Jesus.

- Against pagan "cyclic/seasonal" views, Deuteronomy insists history is moving under God's sovereign providential control toward an end state (a teleological--purposeful--view) that establishes a physical, public, global, righteous and just Kingdom of God (e.g., Deut 30-32).
- Against pagan amoral manipulative views, Deuteronomy insists that specific historic outcomes in Israel's existence are contingent upon her submission to or rebellion against God (an ethical view of history, e.g, Deut. 28).
- The promises of Deuteronomy involve the entire physical universe because to effect geophysical and biological changes on earth, there must be control of extra-terrestrial matter and energy repeating the implication of the prior Noahic Covenant (Gen. 9--implicit confidence in forecasting the future).
- The Diaspora after the collapse of the theocracy in the 7th century BC apparently is the source of radically new confidence around the globe that man can think effectively about reality--that reality is, in fact, rational (although the world of unbelief failed to learn that such rationality was primarily ethical, not amoral).

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[1] I am indebted to Cornelius Van Til for showing the role of Socrates and Kant in his book, <u>Christian Theistic Ethics</u>.
[2] From his book <u>Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended</u>, 85f.

2.   Part of the answer to Question A is that a rational uniformity of nature exists because <u>the Bible is necessary and sufficient to justify such assurance.</u> David asked why do we say the Bible is "necessary", i.e., it is the <u>only</u> assurance we have of the uniformity of nature. Can't the unbeliever challenge us by saying he, too, has an answer: "*Nature always has been uniform, so I expect it always will*" so the Bible is not "necessary."

- Logical Problem #1: The premise "nature has always been uniform" is by itself an unjustified speculation since historical observations exist of miracles like the creation and the resurrection--observations that must be first eliminated by naturalism's philosophical filters. Unless this filtering is somehow spelled out, as it stands the premise is the logical fallacy of "**hasty generalization**" based upon an "**unargued philosophical bias**".
- Logical Problem #2: There is an unstated logical step between the premise, "nature has always been uniform," and the conclusion "it always will"; this argument is an **enthymeme** (one with an unstated proposition). That in-between step must be "the coming future will be the same as the past with its past-past and past-future" which is precisely the point at issue whether the coming future will be like the past!! Thus this line of speculation is a case of "**circular reasoning**."

3. Deuteronomy (and the rest of the Bible) because it constitutes information transfer from the Creator's mind to man's mind (verbal revelation) is *necessary* as well as sufficient to provide a base for everyday confidence in a knowable future. *No other rational source of confidence in the uniformity of nature* exist--only circular reasoning or an arbitrary guess.

C. <u>Deuteronomy and Question "B"</u>.
Discussion of one aspect of Question"B" raised by David in Session #64--the necessity of non-contradiction for truth to exist. I had commented that a local college music professor's claim that you can have "a" and "non-a" together is unmitigated irrationalism that characterizes contemporary culture with its mysticism and semantic manipulation. David asked why an unbeliever couldn't claim that we Christians tolerate contradictions in our theology such as the Trinity.

1. <u>Deuteronomy's (and the Bible's) view of God</u>.
Deuteronomy continues the Old Testament revelation of a certain "multiplicity" within the one God (note Gen, 1:26-27) with the word "echod" (Deut.6:4).[3] This multiplicity becomes more evident with the Incarnation of the Son of God in the New Testament. Is it a contradiction to insist upon both the multiplicity and the unity of God ("a" and "non-a")?

- Deuteronomy presupposes non-contradiction throughout Moses' exhortations, but chiefly in its judicial proceedings in capital criminal trials: the theological consistency test in 13:1-5 and the empirical evidence test in 18:19-22. Clearly the multiplicity and the unity must not refer to the same aspect of God or there would be a contradiction.
- The Biblical revelation of God's multiplicity asserts this multiplicity about the Creator as revelation from that Creator Who is the source of logic so the claim of contradiction needs to consider the implications of the Creator/creature distinction for logic.

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[3] "Echod" is a Hebrew word translated "one" that includes the idea of multiplicity (e.g., Gen. 1:5; 2:24; Num. 13:23) in contrast to another Hebrew word "yachid" also translated "one" that expresses solid unity. Nowhere in the Old Testament is yachid used of God. See for extensive discussion John B. Metzger, <u>Discovering the Mystery of the Unity of God</u>.

2. <u>Logic--Biblical vs. Aristotelian</u>

The Church spent about four centuries considering the Trinity doctrine (as well as the Hypostatic doctrine) against the solitary monotheism view so this was not a casual, snap judgment. In fact this four-century discussion exposed a difference in how logic works *with* the Creator-creature distinction and *without* it, i.e., in the pagan "continuity of being". The problem here is how to understand what "threeness" and "oneness" refer to when used of God since they must refer to different aspects of God.

a. In Aristotle (and Plato) there exist ideal forms or <u>logical categories</u> that are universal throughout all existence. Existence as Aristotle conceived it is unitary; it has a universal sameness (continuity of being). "Oneness" and "threeness" must be <u>the same everywhere</u>. Any application to God is conceived of as occurring within this unitary existence since, in this view, *God Himself shares this unitary existence with us*. Thus it would seem that both such categories cannot simultaneously apply to God without a logical conflict. (Aristotelian logic is used by Jehovah's Witnesses and other non-Christian cults in their use of John 1:1 as well as by classical Unitarians, Judaism, and Islam.)

b. Immediately we have a <u>contrast with biblical thought</u> that holds there are *two kinds of existence*—the Creator and the creature—not *one*. How do know that "oneness" and "threeness" categories act the same across the Creator/creature boundary? To help us think this through, let's define three terms that concern word meanings: univocal, analogical, and equivocal. *Univocal* meaning of "oneness" and "threeness" would say that these terms mean identically the same thing for God and man. *Analogical* meaning would say that these terms are similar for God and man. *Equivocal* meaning would say they have totally different meanings of God and man.

(1) From Genesis 1 we learn that God created via language and that man was created as an image of the Triune God. Man thus is an *analogy* to God. He isn't the same as God, but he is similar to God. We shouldn't be surprised, then, that human language with its terms and categories turn out to be analogical to God's language and concepts. Terms and categories like "oneness" and "threeness" when used of God should not be taken as *univocal* to what they mean when addressing created objects. Their meaning "down here" in our creature existence is similar but not identical to what it is "up there" in the Creator's existence. Nor should we conclude skeptically that their meaning when used of God is *equivocal* to what they mean in our creature existence. That would land us in total skepticism cut off from any relationship with God.

(2) How can we recognize the ways in which such terms are analogical to what they mean regarding God? We do so by <u>noting the way He reveals Himself to us in Scripture</u> (special revelation) and in creation (general revelation). For example, He uses terms like "Son", "Father", "Spirit" in the Bible that are analogous to our experience of family relationships and of physical wind and breath. He expects us to relate our everyday experience to our understanding of His self-revelation.

(3) To understand God's "oneness" and "threeness" we think upon our everyday experience of *unity* and *plurality*. *Political experience* shows the tension between unity (all power in a centralized government) and plurality (power distributed among many as in anarchy).

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We know—sometimes vaguely—that both political unity and political plurality must somehow coexist to a limited degree. Few would argue that one should overwhelm the other in order to eliminate the "contradiction." *Experience with* arithmetic also shows the tension between unity and plurality. Take "2 + 2 = 4". Clearly a plurality here of countable objects is assumed to exist. Yet this statement also presumes that two objects remain two objects while we are counting them and that the symbols "2", "=", and "4" remain the same whenever they are used, i.e., there is unity to existence. So to eliminate any "contradiction" which is more ultimate—unity or plurality? In practice no one does that except, perhaps, the radical Hindu monist who thinks that all diversity is an illusion. We simply live with both assuming that *there are two different aspects of reality we are experiencing though we can't seem to state what that difference is*.

       c. We can legitimately claim that the two worldviews of the Bible and of paganism carry two distinct views of logic. The Bible uses Trinitarian logic asserting the equal ultimacy of unity ("oneness") and plurality ("threeness") that recognizes *analogies* between ultimate meaning to God and derivative meaning to man. Western paganism has tended to use Aristotelian logic that asserts a continuity of being with the resulting *univocal* meaning of terminology throughout all existence whether human or divine thus ending in unnecessary contradictions.[4]

      3. <u>To sum up</u>: the unbelieving critic who casually accuses us of contradictions (Trinity, sovereignty-freewill, etc.) most likely has not thought deeply enough about the logic he is using. First, he offers no justification for using logic as a universal evaluation tool since he has no assurance that ultimate rationality exists; he can only join Socrates and Kant in ***arbitrarily positing*** that such rationality exists. In doing so, he thus lays rationality upon a foundation of **irrationality**.   Believers who trust divine revelation in the Bible, however, recognize God as the ultimate source of rationality for human use of logic. Second, the critic faults biblical Christianity of a contradiction while <u>accepting the same kind of contradiction</u> in his everyday experience of unity/plurality and fate/freewill. While unable to explain his rational acceptance of everyday paradoxes, he expects believers to explain their rational acceptance of the Trinity. We here observe **behavioral inconsistency**.

    D. <u>Deuteronomy and Question "C"</u>.
Discussion of one aspect of Question "C" raised by David in Session #18--the necessity of biblical revelation for objective morality in dealing with the Mt.Sinai event. David asked why couldn't a non-Christian argue for an objective ethic based upon human nature or evolution.

      1. <u>Deuteronomy's view of ethics</u>.
Very obviously Deuteronomy roots ethics in God's revelation of His holy nature and that nature's demands upon any who would seek a relationship with Him (Mt. Sinai event in Deut. 5 with ensuing 2nd exposition from chapter 5 through chapter 26).

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[4] I am indebted to Vern Poythress for his clarification of Trinitarian logic in his article, "Reforming Ontology and Logic in the Light of the Trinity: An Application of Van Til's idea of Analogy," *Westminster Theological Journal* 57 (1995) 187-219. The Church has not nearly enough developed the implications of the doctrine of the Trinity. As he points out, "Corrupt ontology and logic from Plato and Aristotle has deeply influenced the entire history of Western theology."

- The resulting ethics do not emanate from individual human speculation as though Moses originated it--his Egyptian education was trumped by God's inventionary revelation.
- The resulting ethics do not emanate from any social consensus--the 1st generation clearly did not consent to Mt. Sinai ethics.
- The resulting ethics do not arise from a meaningless, random evolutionary survival process--they are predicated upon six-day creation (Exod. 20:11) and supernaturally guided history (Deut. 5:15).

2. <u>No truly objective ethics exist outside of biblical revelation</u>.
By "objective ethics" is meant that ethical standards exist independently of individual feelings or desires or opinions. Otherwise the ethic has no moral authority over such feelings, desires, and opinions. In Session 18 and several subsequent sessions I argued that the Bible is necessary as well as sufficient for establishing objective ethics, i.e., every attempt by unbelief to establish ethics ultimately turns out to be subjective. I pointed out that ever-popular moral relativism-- ethical subjectivism--reduces to mere autobiographical expressions of one's likes or dislikes.

- Subjective ethical judgments ultimately say nothing about actions themselves; they <u>only reveal attitudes of people toward such actions</u> ➔ How can moral outrage exist when there might be other people who see nothing at all wrong with such acts? All that can be said is that attitudes vary toward such acts; it's all a mere matter of personal taste or appeal (**reduction to absurdity**) .
- Subjectivist ethical theory refutes itself since a subjectivist <u>can't live without making objective ethical judgments</u> ("should", "ought"), particularly the judgment that others ought not to impose their ethic upon them. Since actions betray real beliefs, that action shows they don't really belief in their own theory--"**behavioral inconsistency**."
- Politically it would result in anarchy so in the end <u>it causes totalitarianism</u> whereby the strong impose their ethic on the weak in order to maintain social order = arbitrary (positivist) law (**reduction to absurdity**).

3. <u>Popular attempts to erect objective ethics outside of biblical revelation fail</u>.
Because the subjectivity of moral relativism leads to such absurd results, at least four popular attempts exist that try, unsuccessfully, to support objective ethics.[5]
  a. The "coherence model". A society's common moral beliefs can be integrated in a self-consistent manner with what is known about human nature, the world, and social behavior. That such a system exists and works justifies its objectivity without reference to God. Problem: <u>coherence alone doesn't imply truth</u> (**logical fallacy**).[6] The 3rd Reich had a coherent system of morality, but that didn't prove that the Nazi order was objectively truth.
  b. The "human nature model". Whether an act is injurious to human nature appears to be an objective standard. Problems: (1) <u>Why choose human nature</u> as the "protected species"? Modern ecologists now are choosing animals and even plants as protected species so this model begins with an **arbitrary assumption**; (2) <u>One cannot move from a statement about a fact to an inference about a value</u> without intermediate supporting statements ("is-ought" **logical fallacy**).

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[5] I'm following here the discussion of Paul Chamerlain in his book, <u>Can We Be Good Without God?</u>
[6] Incoherence proves falsehood, but coherence doesn't prove truth. Note the truth tests in Deut. 13 & 18; they are phrased negatively and look for incoherence to disprove.

c. The "human need (social contract) model". For human survival certain ethical standards must be established in society that do not rest upon individual desires or opinions. Problems: (1) This model makes ethics contingent upon social agreement whereas objective ethics are true in themselves whether there is social agreement or not; (2) How is it decided about who is qualified to do the agreeing? (3) How is it decided when two groups agree to different ethics? (4) One cannot move from a statement about a fact (humans need to survive) to an inference about a value (it is wrong for them not to survive) without intermediate supporting statements ("is-ought" **logical fallacy**).

d. The "evolutionary model". This model argues that no objective morality actually exists--only the universal sense that one exists. Such a sense came about from evolutionary pressures favoring those actions promoting survival. Problems: (1) doesn't explain the sense that compassion and mercy toward the weak is right; (2) makes the sense of objective morality contingent upon evolutionary processes that could have been different elsewhere in the universe--if such diverse societies intermixed which ethical sense would be right? (**reduction to absurdity**) (3) ends up making ethics subjective--nothing is said about acts themselves--so it suffers from the inability to be lived out just as the subjective ethic of moral relativism (**behavioral inconsistency**).

E. Conclusion

God's Word, the Bible, is both necessary and sufficient to answer the three great questions.