

OpenTheo

Evaluating the Thought of Cornelius Van Til with Keith Mathison and James Anderson

November 27, 2024



Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

It is hard to exaggerate the influence of Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987) in conservative Reformed circles over the past hundred years. And yet, there continues to be much discussion about what Van Til believed and how he meant for his apologetic ideas to be put into practice. Kevin welcomes Keith Mathison, from Reformation Bible College, to discuss his new book *Toward a Reformed Apologetics: A Critique of the Thought of Cornelius Van Til* (Mentor). Also joining Kevin is James Anderson, a leading Van Tilian philosopher and a fellow RTS Charlotte colleague. In this stimulating conversation, Kevin talks to Keith and James about what Van Til got right, where he made some mistakes, and whether Van Tilians and non-Van Tilians are all that different when it comes to defending the faith in practice.

Chapters:

0:00 Sponsors & Intro

4:50 Who was Van Til?

15:26 Van Til's Theology

25:38 The Absolute Antithesis

40:00 Van Til's Chief Epistemological Insight

53:03 Sponsor Break

54:41 The Question of Either/Or

59:33 Van Til's view of the Trinity

1:18:06 Until Next Time...

Books & Everything:

ESV Teen Study Bible

Desiring God | Great Joy

Coram Deo Pastors Workshop

Puritan Treasures for Today

Westminster Theological Seminary Biblical Language Certificate

Toward a Reformed Apologetics: A Critique of the Thought of Cornelius Van Til

Transcript

I want to mention two of our sponsors for Life and Books and Everything. First, Crossway. I'm grateful for their partnership over several years.

I want to highlight today the ESV Teen Study Bible, edited by Pastor John Nielsen. The ESV Teen Study Bible features numerous study and resource materials, including 12,000 study notes, 365 devotions, 200 side bars, defining key doctrines, and I'll tell you, as someone who has many teenagers, that these resources designed for specific age groups really can be helpful. They do successfully target these age groups, and Crossway does a great job at putting this material, really solid material, but for teens, it's not gimmicky.

It just has good size. Solid stuff for teens to grow in their hearts and minds and lives as they follow Christ. ESV Teen Study Bible by Crossway.

Second, I want to thank our sponsor, Desiring God, and highlight today the good news of great joy, advent, devotion. Lots of Christians try and advent devotional for the 25 days leading up to Christmas. It's a great habit, and here's a new one by John Piper.

It starts on December 1 and goes up into Christmas. Good news of great joy, advent, devotional. 1 Timothy 1:15, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Piper says, what I want most for us this Christmas is seeing Christ and all of his fullness and together loving what we see with a love beyond our own half-hearted human capacities, a love made possible by the Holy Spirit, classic Piper. So check this out, desiringGod.org/advent. Greetings and salutations.

Welcome back to life and books and everything. My name is Kevin Deung, senior pastor at Christ's Covenant Church in Matthews, North Carolina. I also teach at Reform Theological Seminary in Charlotte, and that is important as we introduce these two guests.

I am really looking forward to this. We're going to do something a little bit different on the podcast. I have two guests, and they know each other and have talked to each other about this important book, and I'm guessing that they still have some differences on this book.

We're talking today with Keith Matheson with a new book toward a reformed apologetics, a critique of the thought of Cornelius Van Til, which just came out by mentor press. So Keith, thank you for being on LBE. Thank you for having me.

Keith was born and raised near Houston, Texas. We're just talking about that beforehand. Didn't grow up really in the church, but became a Christian later growing up and then graduated from RTS, began working for Ligonier in 1996, and he is professor of systematic theology at Reformation Bible College.

And then also joining us is James Anderson, who is my esteemed colleague here at RTS Charlotte teaching systematic theology and apologetics, and various other and sundry things like Islam and many others. So James, thank you for being on the program. Thank you for having me on, it's a pleasure.

Well, here's how I want to start, because I really appreciate what Keith has done in this book. He says, my prayer is that this work will honor the labors of our brother in Christ, Cornelius Van Til, who is now present with our Lord, he along with J. Gresham Echin, and many other faithful men stood firm against the tide of modernism in the early 20th century. And so I appreciate how though this is, as the title says, a critique of the thought of Cornelius Van Til.

In my estimation, you have really done an admirable job, set a good example for anyone who wants to offer a critique of another Christian brother of trying to be as fair as one can be and honor our father in the faith who has gone on to his reward. And I also commend you for this Keith. You say, I want to thank James Anderson, John Frame, John Meether, Scott Elephant, Lane Tipton, all of whom are Van Tilien scholars and all of whom answered my questions at various points during the research for this book.

Special thanks are due to James Anderson and Lane Tipton for extended discussions. So thank you both for being a model of, I think we're going to find some disagreement, but charitable brotherly disagreement. So maybe I'll start with you Keith.

Can you just tell us who is Cornelius Van Til and why are you writing a critique of his thought? I mean, you categorized the earlier forms of apologetics, usually using the label traditional apologetics and argued that they had all in one way or another synthesized or attempted to synthesize Christianity with great philosophy and things like that. And he was trying to remove that kind of inconsistency and argued that, well, he presented an argument for what he called the method of presupposition and claimed that it was consistent with Reformed theology, with the antithesis, with total depravity. And that gained a lot of ground.

It gained a hearing among many people. And he had critics early on who accused him of sliding towards idealism and pantheism. As I mentioned in my book, I think I don't think that criticism was fair.

But he was criticizing non-ventiline, earlier apologists of synthesizing and compromising

various doctrines of unintentionally more than likely. But it led to him espousing a view that he believes sincerely, I think, is the consistently Reformed view of apologetics. One that does justice to the doctrine of the divine decree, one that does justice to the doctrine of total depravity, to the antithesis, to all manner of things.

And he won the day, I think. I've had this discussion for 30 years, and I've always been in the minority. And it's always been an interesting discussion.

I just never imagined I was going to write anything about it. So James, true or false, James Anderson is a ventilian. I am.

Yes, I would definitely describe myself as a ventilian. And what do you mean by affirming that label? What I mean is that I adhere to what I think are the core principles of ventil's system, not every John Tittle, right? So to be a Calvinist, you don't have to agree with everything Calvin said, just this core ideas. And likewise with ventil.

So I think the central conviction of ventil's approach is that a distinctively Reformed theology implies a distinctively Reformed epistemology, theory of knowledge, and a distinctively Reformed epistemology will lead to a distinctively Reformed apologetic methodology. So there's this theology to epistemology, to apologetic methodology logic to ventil's approach. And that has implications for, well, actually has implications for everything that we think about.

But in terms of apologetics, it means that we want to find an approach to apologetics that doesn't adopt a kind of neutral standpoint, a neutral or secular epistemology on the basis of which we defend the Christian faith. And we want to avoid what ventil we call intellectual autonomy, the idea that the human mind is sort of a own final standard or ultimate authority of what is true, what is reasonable. And that leads in turn to some distinctive strategies and apologetics having to do with adopting sort of a world view level critique of the believer and the unbeliever.

And Keith brings this out actually very well in this book that the ventil's approach is a worldview versus worldview approach. And that's ultimately where we're directing our argumentation at the level of the worldview or the presuppositions. So, you know, there's more to be said.

But I'd say those are the starting convictions that I think ventil emphasizes, and they're the ones that drive my approach as well. So, Keith, you sit at the beginning of the book that Lane Tipton and James here in particular were good conversation partners in your writing. Can you just say a little bit? What did that look like? How did you and James go back and forth? And, you know, what did you learn as you had that conversation? And where do you think some of the key differences still lie? Yeah, I believe and James, you can correct me if you remember differently.

I think the first time I reached out to James was to ask about the different camps of ventilians. I was trying to get a little bit of a handle on who he thought was probably the best

representative of of a ventill's view since I had read Mather's biography and Mather pointed out all the different camps. And so I was just trying to get a variety of opinions from several people on who who is is the most most faithful interpreter of ventill.

I think that's where it started. And then just from time to time, we, you know, I would send him a question on something for clarification. And he was always very gracious with his time.

Both all of the gentlemen I mentioned were very gracious and responding to questions. I just, I singled out James and Lane because we ended up having a little bit more extensive discussions. Some of the others that I wrote to, it was just one or two questions at most, and that was that.

But I think in this case, and one of the things that became clear and one of the reasons this was so helpful was I think we both understand that this debate isn't a matter of somebody's orthodox here Christian faith. I think we both agree that this is an in-house family discussion and it doesn't need to descend into the kind of, the kind of things you see commonly on social media where it's just flamethrowers going back and forth at each other. I deeply respect James as a brother in Christ, as a teacher, as an author, and have benefited greatly from his writings.

And I, one of my hopes for this discussion and for that book is to generate those kinds of discussions, because early on when I was in seminary and first discovering this debate, it was brutal listening to various factions and frustrating where, you know, one side would accuse the other of being closet apostate Roman Catholic and the other side is accusing the other of being a pantheist and it would, or, you know, just various things. And I don't, I think that's become distracting when the goal of both of us is to present the gospel of Jesus Christ to an unbelieving and lost world. And these internal debates on how best to do that are important and necessary and useful, but I'd just have been for three decades, extremely frustrated by the tone of the discussion and how how it degenerates quickly.

So I really appreciated James's responses and Lane's responses, because it indicated a mutual respect and a willingness to, you know, we disagree on this, obviously, but we can talk about it. Yeah, and you've really modeled that well in the book, Keith, and so I really appreciate it's one of the reasons. You know, I think it's rare that you can even have these conversations.

So I'm grateful to both of you, just a little bit of background where I'm coming from. So I, you know, I grew up in the Reformed Church in America, apologetics as a discipline wasn't something that at least I remember talking about. But when I was in college, started reading voraciously lots of good reform stuff.

And, you know, you said it already, Keith, in some ways, Van Till kind of won the day and I may be representative of that because when I want to read some good reform stuff, what do I read on apologetics? I started reading frame, I started reading bensen, and of course I read a bunch of Van Till. And so just by these were the guys I was reading, I would have said pretty thoroughgoing Van Tilling in my approach to apologetics. So there was all sorts of philosophical stuff that was over my head and I didn't understand a lot of the debates, but it certainly

resonated with me.

I want to be authentically, I want to be truly, he didn't use truly reform and that has some negative connotations. But he talks about that often, you know, it's not Roman Catholic, it's not merely evangelical, it's a consistent reform position. Now, and then at Gordon Conwell for seminary, maybe I'm just forgetting, but I don't recall at that seminary even talking about these things.

So in the intervening 20 plus years, as I've read more, I think to be fair, my, well, I'm sympathetic with many of the points that Keith is bringing up. So I don't know if I'm a lapsed Van Tillingen or a soft Van Tillingen or I'm not a Van Tillingen, but I have appreciation for some of his apologetic method. And I think my, my lapsedness has come in chiefly by reading the intervening centuries and realizing from Junius to Turretin to Old Princeton, at least in my reading, wow, these reformed theologians made frequent use of, you know, proofs for God's existence.

I don't know if they would call them proofs, but certainly rational reasons for God's existence. They didn't seem to speak in some of the antithesis language that I think you see in Van Till. And I'm a, I'm a Turretin guy.

And but, you know, James, our mutual friend and colleague, Bob Cara, he's a Turretin guy and he's a Van Tillingen. So we've had a lot of talks about this. James, do you think that Van Till is consistent with the reformed tradition? Or would you say, as I've heard some Van Tillingen say, well, there were seeds of it there in Calvin and Calvin was a little inconsistent.

And then apologetic methodology, you really have to kind of jump over most of the reformed tradition to then get to Van Till, who gets it more or less right. How would you describe the history? So first up, I should say that, you know, the history side is not my strong point, you know, I'm a philosophical theologian. So at the end of the day, I'm more interested in the ideas and the arguments and so forth.

My reading of the history is that Van Till is certainly consistent with the reformed tradition in so far as his theology goes. And I think Keith brings this out in the book that in terms of his theological system, Van Till is, you know, very much in line with Westminster, with mainstream reformed theology. He is engaged by his own admission in a work of reformation.

He thinks that there's further reformation that needs to be done in the area of apologetics and philosophy. I think he does, I would draw a distinction between the substance of what he says and some of the rhetoric that he uses. So he often seems to put a lot of distance between himself and the reformed scholastics, as we call them.

I'm not sure that there actually is so much substantial difference there. And there's probably scope for recognizing more common ground that he has. I mean, when it comes to someone like, like, Turretin.

So I'm a Turretin guy as well. If whenever I'm wanting to, you know, refresh my views on some doctrine, the two books I pull off the shelf first are Turretin and Bathy, because I just think that they're solid guys. And I don't come across anything that I think is inconsistent with Van Till.

Sometimes the terminology is different, but I think that the core principles are the same. So, yeah, sometimes you've got to separate the substance of what Van Till says from some of the polemical expressions that he uses. And I think he probably overstates the, and sometimes he overstates the discontinuity between him and the historic reformed tradition, as he characterizes it.

So Keith, I'll ask you basically the same question. One of your chapters in the second half of the book where you raise concerns is called historical concerns. So what are your historical concerns relative to Van Till's method? Some of them are addressed in that chapter.

Others are addressed in other places where I'm talking through some of the same points. James was just making, in that historical chapter, I was most primarily focused on places where I think he was misrepresenting a certain view. Now, some of that may be due to the fact that he's getting this in the early 20th century, the historical theology that was available in the early 20th, early 20th century, was teaching some things that many people believe have been disproved today, like the Calvin versus the Calvinist thesis, things like that.

So I was giving a few examples of things I thought were problematic overgeneralization in historical studies. What seemed to me to be misrepresentations of Aquinas, of Calvin, of a few other things. But the point that James was making is important is trying to figure out with that rhetoric that he uses, a very strong rhetoric about the reformed scholastics.

It's difficult at times to really tell. I mean, one of the things I'm looking at in this book is he starts, quite frankly, by assuming the reformed confessions. That's his starting point.

Now, amen. That's where I want to start as well. It's trying to figure out, is he maintaining consistency with that? Or is all the strong rhetoric against the reformed scholastics undermining that? And I think whether he intended to or not, I think it does undermine that confession, a starting point.

Thankfully, the bulk of people who are our ventilians are strong, confessional, orthodox, reformed guys. My concern is that some have allowed that rhetoric to undermine their faithfulness to the teaching of the reformed scholastics, which is summarized in the reformed confessions written at the same time period, and are going off in bad directions on the doctrine of God and other things. So, the historical question is an ongoing one.

I think more work needs to be done there. I think the rhetoric, at least implicitly undermines what he sets out to do, but I'm willing to be corrected on that. It's what it looks like having read everything, you know, reading a stack of everything ventil wrote nothing else for months.

It just, when it's repeated over and over again, that these men were compromising every major

doctrine of the reformed faith. I think that, even if that's just to prove, if that's hyperbole to make a point about apologetics, I think at best it had unintended consequences. Yeah, so let's get into some of these specifics.

And wherever I can, I'm going to try to quote from some of the quotations you have in your book, again, we're talking with Keith Matheson about toward a reformed apologetics, this new book by mentor, and James Anderson is nice enough to come on and be a good interlocutor with us. You quote Vantil as saying, one of my great faults has been to deal with very general and basic thrust of a movement without giving adequate attention to details. And that's quoted in the Jerusalem and Athens book, which has just been republished and would be a great place for anyone to start.

So James, that's from Vantil's own mouth. So it must be fair, you know, as a Vantilian, what do you want to say about Vantil owning that and saying he was a bit too much of a generalizer? Is that true when it came to Aquinas and Butler and sort of making, not making, but almost lumping everything together as a kind of Descartes found Butler and summary, how would you summarize what Vantil is acknowledging there? Yeah, well, if Vantil issues a Mayor Culper, who am I to disagree, you know, he he says, yeah, I have overgeneralized. And I think I think that's true, because he's he's a big picture thinker.

He's and this is something that John Frame brings out in his book, the Vantil's very systematic. So he looks at the sort of overall system and isn't too concerned with some of the nuts and bolts details, because they're just not part of the main concern. So when he tells the history of philosophy, it's a story of, you know, submitting to God's revelation versus human autonomy, or he has this sort of rationalism, irrationalism dialectic tool that he uses to analyze history of philosophy.

And certainly that requires some generalization. He's he's looking for the big themes that serve his purposes. And you know, the reality is that we all do this when we teach, when I teach the history of philosophy, I have to gloss over some of the complications, because you know, people need to see the big picture and see the important themes.

So I think in some respects, Vantil, the story that he tells of the history of philosophy is a useful one. It's basically right in terms of are is this, you know, a Christian approach to philosophy, or is it a non-Christian approach to philosophy? Now there are different many different versions of non-Christian philosophy. And he recognizes that and brings that out in the in the discussion.

But in terms of the overall story that he's telling, yes, there are definitely some simplifications and generalizations. And the fact that he admits that, yeah, why wouldn't we admit that as well? Yeah, a couple of things that I find really helpful in Vantil. And this will lead us into our next line of discussion.

One, what's always stuck with me is, you know, his method is called presuppositionalism. And I think there's a lot helpful in understanding that when we come to talk to, especially a non-

Christian, because one aspect of apologetics is to help strengthen Christians in their faith. But in talking to a non-Christian, what I still find really helpful in Vantil is to remember, we are coming with presuppositions, and I should not sacrifice biblical true presuppositions to come onto the ground of the non-Christian.

So if the non-Christian says, well, you know, don't talk to me about the Bible. I don't believe the Bible. I don't believe in the supernatural proved to me that God exists.

I think one of Vantil's good insights is to say, no, no, no, that person is coming with their own presuppositions about how the world works. And they're actually less rational than the Christian convictions. And so one of the apologetic adherents of someone else's position that doesn't have the God of the Bible.

Now, a lot of this comes down to the famous antithesis. And a lot of what Vantil doesn't, his thought is this antithesis. So Keith, talk about the central role that that idea plays in Vantil, and maybe where it's helpful and where you think it became a distraction or perhaps its own assumption that was improved.

The antithesis, the big idea, I think, is absolutely true in terms of the division, the stark contrast between believers and unbelievers. That's a generalization that's true. You either among the sheep or among the goats on the last day.

And so there is that antithesis. Where it becomes foundational in my understanding of what Vantil's saying is, as he works through, the way I tried to explain Vantil's thought was by working all the way from the doctrine of God and the divine decree up through the fall and redemption and so forth. And at the point of redemption, now you have unbelievers and believers.

And so you have this antithesis there. And when he moves to discussing the foundations and the foundational reason for the necessity of the method of presupposition, he appeals to this absolute antithesis. And as far as that goes, that's basically, as best I can tell, the structure of the development of the argument he's making for presuppositionalism, where I think it becomes problematic.

And I think frame points this out as well in his book is the introduction of common grace into the discussion. Because you've made this absolute antithesis, the very reason for the necessity of presuppositionalism. In other words, the unbeliever and the believer share no facts, no laws, really nothing in common and the unbeliever, if in principle, can know nothing truly.

And that was always the part that, for a long time, it was confusing to me when I read Vantil was what in the world is he saying, but I think I was starting too late in his argument and needed to go back to the beginning to think through that. But every time he brings that up, you have this absolute antithesis. And it's for this reason that we have to use the method of presupposition.

So we step into the shoes of the unbeliever and show where his worldview does not account for anything and have the unbeliever for the sake of argument step into the Christian shoes, the worldview, and show him that on that grounds, it's the only grounds by which he can do anything, including arguing against Christianity. But if you go back, common grace throws a wrench into this because he says that the only time the absolute antithesis actually exists functionally in reality is after the separation of the sheep from the goats. And in this life, while we're still here, common grace prevents the unbeliever from working that principle out to its utmost and to its logical conclusion.

And therefore, the unbeliever does have some knowledge of things. And I find that's where in my experience, that's where a lot of the YouTube level Vantilians, they always ignore the common grace qualifications he makes. But then he also qualifies the believer on the other side of the antithesis, we still have remnants of sin and things that keep us from working out the true principle to its logical conclusion.

So I think that on the one hand, he makes the absolute antithesis, the foundational argument for the necessity of the method of presuppositionalism. But at the same time, he's saying the lines are fuzzy, which makes it a little more difficult to understand how you can argue for the exclusivity of the method of presupposition. There are, like you were saying, there are things that are helpful in that.

Dr. Sproul used to mention things that are helpful in the critique of the unbeliever's worldview. And there have been theologians down through history who have done that. Where I've always had the problem is with somebody insisting, this is the only method that a Reformed Christian can use consistently.

And working through his writings, the way the antithesis is argued, is it absolute or is it qualified? A qualified antithesis doesn't have the same implications as an absolute antithesis does. Yeah, let me ask you this follow-up question, James, because what Keith just explained there is, as I've read the book, a really important point. So for example, Keith says on page 219, because of the internal tension and vantill system between the absolute antithesis in principle, and the qualified antithesis in practice, some ventilians have tended to emphasize the absolute antithesis to the virtual exclusion of the common grace qualifications.

And he makes similar points about vantills on the one hand, seemingly absolute rejection of natural theology. And then another time it kind of comes back in. So do you think this is a fair point? Is there a tension in vantills thought between antithesis in principle, but then a much more qualified antithesis in practice? How do you see it, James? Well, I'm glad you asked that, because the way I see it is this isn't a tension.

This is actually the key to understanding vantill's approach. On the one hand, to have the epistemological antithesis in principle, but also to have the common grace operative in practice. So certainly vantill emphasizes that there is an antithesis in terms of one's ultimate authority.

So in terms of one's worldview or one's system of thought, there is an antithetical relationship between the Christian's commitments and the non-Christian's commitments. And this has a biblical basis, because the Apostle Paul talks in antithetical terms about believing thought and unbelieving thought, 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 and Ephesians 4 and other places. So there is a biblical basis for seeing that there is a fundamental opposition between the way that the believer approaches truth, knowledge, ultimate authority and the unbeliever as well.

Now that's all that you're saying, then that's going to sound very problematic, because you're going to then say, well, the Christian can know things, the non-Christian doesn't know anything. There's no basis for discussion. But vantill says, well, actually unbelievers do know things because common grace restrains their intellectual futility.

If they followed through the logical implications of their worldview, of their epistemological commitments, it would end in skepticism and relativism and nihilism. But they don't because, well, vantill says, because they're made in the image of God, they can't escape that, they're designed to think God's thoughts after him and they live in God's universe. So they can't escape his revelation and by common grace, they're still able to know things, to reason about things.

But then vantill says, so here's how we argue, we say, well, Mr. non-Christian, we both know these things. We can agree on these things. We agree that these things can be known.

But whose system of thought, whose epistemology can actually account for that knowledge? The common grace isn't a wrench in the works or whatever the terminology was used. The common grace is an integral element of the whole approach, because by common grace, there is shared knowledge, there is shared understanding. But the presuppositionalist wants to ask the question, who can account for that? Who can account for that common knowledge that the Christian and the non-Christian has? And so vantill says things like this, this is a good illustration.

He says, the unbeliever can count, but he can't account for his counting, right? So he can count. By common grace, he knows one, two, three, four, he knows basic mathematical truths and so forth. But what he can't account for in his system is his knowledge of these basic things that everybody knows and understands.

So where Keith sees the tension between the antithesis and the common grace, I see a complementarity that actually explains how vantill's approach works in practice. So let me press in on that, James, and I think I know how you'll respond to this. And this is my experience when I talk to James, or I keep mentioning Bob Cara, who's at RTS Charlotte, when I talk to you guys, I was like, yeah, I agree with all of that.

We must, I'm with you. So I'm wondering, is it reading vantill? Is it correcting vantill? Is it putting the best gloss on vantill? Because some of these quotations that Keith includes, for example, he says, vantill does that the believer and the unbeliever here, reason employed by a Christian always comes to other conclusions than reason employed by a non-Christian. Or in

other places, vantill will say that unless you have the whole system of facts and laws, what you know is ultimately false.

So there are these times, it seems like, vantill is saying, the non-believer cannot reason anything correctly. And if he doesn't know all of the facts together, he really doesn't know anything. And yet then if I'm relaying what Bob has said to me before, the tree.

You look at the tree and the non-believer can explain to you, perhaps photosynthesis works and the tree and what type of tree it is and its Latin name. He gives you all sorts of facts about the tree. But the unbeliever can't tell you ultimately why the tree is there, why it's there to give glory to God, how it serves to give breath to human beings that they might worship Christ.

So I agree with all of that. Is that what vantill is saying? Or are we trying to clean up some of vantill's more absolute statements to make them a little more reasonable? I ask with a leading question to you, James. Well, of course, he does make these extreme antithetical statements.

You know, vantill's followers' advocates have acknowledged that. Frame gets into a lot of discussion of this. I think the principle here is that when you're trying to interpret a writer, you want to, first of all, take into account everything that they say.

So you don't pick on just one thing and say, okay, that's the sum total of what they're saying and we'll critique it on that basis. So one principle is you want to look at everything that a writer says. And secondly, unless you have good reason to think that they are contradicting themselves, you should try to impute a consistent reading to them.

So all of us, that's how we would want to be treated in our writings. Now, of course, sometimes writers do contradict themselves. Usually not explicitly, it may be through the implications.

So that's always a possibility. But in the case of vantill, you do have these extreme antithetical statements. And Keith himself in his book recognizes that there's a sort of in principle and in practice distinction that vantill adopts.

So in principle, there's an absolute antithesis between the believer and unbeliever, because the believer is in submission to God's revelation and God's authority and the unbeliever is not. They're reasoning autonomously, at least according to their professed commitments. But in practice, there is a lot of agreement.

In practice, we can both know that the tree is 14 feet tall and has green leaves, right? So we can agree on these things. What we don't agree about is the broader framework within which we interpret these statements about trees and more significantly about human beings. How do we understand ourselves in light of God's revelation? One thing to note about vantill is that for him, when he speaks about knowledge, that usually has a connotation of understanding as well and interpretation.

So when we say, do you know that one plus two equals three, we think of it just in terms of,

well, here's a true proposition and we've got evidence or we've got reasons to believe that it's true. And we know it. We grasp it.

Whereas van Till has a more holistic view where to know a tree truly is not just to know that it's 14 feet tall and that it has green leaves and so forth, but that it is a created being and that it fits into a larger picture, which ultimately van Till identifies with God's decree, where God ordains whatsoever comes to pass and everything is part of God's plan. And then in that sense, everything is interrelated. But it doesn't mean that you can know that there's a tree outside in your yard and that's so many feet tall and so forth.

So you've got to again, you've got to recognize that van Till is drawing certain distinctions and is sometimes using terms not in the way that we assume that he's using those terms. And that does make interpretation of van Till challenging. I readily ground that.

So let me throw this over to you, Keith. One of your chapters of critique is where you raise biblical concerns and you deal with this very epistemological question. You say at the heart of van Till's apologetic is this epistemology, which says, as we've been talking about, that you must know the facts in their entirety.

You must know how the whole system comes together and you reference this line from van Till several times about how God is necessary for any predication that is to say anything meaningful about the world. And you say the problem we find is that the communication we see in scripture rules out the absolute epistemological antithesis that is itself the foundation of van Till's method of presuppositional apologetics. And you go through in some of the classic texts from Acts and from Psalm 19 and from Romans 1, but elsewhere.

You just go through and you say, don't we hear of God communicating all the time, even with non-Christians. We see angels communicating even with people who are unregenerate. So flesh out a little bit more.

What is this chief biblical concern? Because at the end of the day, all of us is Reform Christians. We want to test everything against the Bible. And so you're raising a serious concern wondering if van Till's chief epistemological insight is itself not derived from scripture.

Yeah, this goes back to what we were just talking about because as you're asking this question in the back of our minds, we have to keep in keep this idea that van Till had between the in principle and in the in practice. I think if you're looking at when van Till's talking about in practice, he's going to say, well, of course, communication occurs. And I granted that I couldn't tell you the page number right now.

I understand that he would grant that in practice because of common grace. We have the shared knowledge. What it comes back down to is for me is that the claim for the absolute antithesis in terms of being the key premise when he argues for the soul, the method of presupposition is the only method that somebody who is reformed should use if they have a

problem.

There's plenty of cases where you can point out the inconsistency of the unbelievers worldview that happens in apologetics all the time. So I'm trying to work backwards from that, that exclusive claim about the method of presupposition and treating all other methods as quasi-Arminian or Roman or something like that. And then going back, it's this absolute antithesis that grounds the exclusive argument.

And the absolute antithesis can't be, in my opinion, doesn't line up with the facts that we see in scripture in terms of what scripture is as a revelation from God and what scripture records is plenty of communication between believers and unbelievers, God and unbelievers and so forth. So that was the key point, at least in the way I was looking at this, he was carrying forward this argument, working step by step from fall to redemption and so forth to the absolute antithesis in principle. And that principle grounds the claim for the exclusivity of the reform of the reform method of presupposition.

But again, tracking back, it's qualified. And I understand James sees this as that this correlates with this and it's part of the very structure of it. I just don't understand how once he qualifies it, at least in the pre eschatological age, that you can come down and say that this method alone is consistent with reform theology because you do have shared points now.

You do have agreed points that you're saying the unbeliever does know this. Now obviously he doesn't know it as and understand it in its broader framework. But if he knows that tree is a tree and I know that tree is a tree and if we're communicating about the tree and we have a shared vocabulary, a shared knowledge of what that vocabulary entails, then there's a starting point.

It may not be the best one, but there's something that we have in common. Going back to the biblical question, then it was, I'm just trying to make a point in the book that scripture itself is communication from God demand is using existing human languages that presupposes the knowledge of those languages by the hearers. They know the vocabulary.

They know what every word in the vocabulary, whether Hebrew or Greek or Aramaic means. So there's some kind of assumption of shared knowledge there, a shared knowledge of the language, a shared knowledge of the vocabulary and a shared knowledge of what the vocabulary signifies. And obviously that's grossly oversimplified.

Speaking of oversimplification, I think we would all know that the philosophy of language is way more complicated than that. But the basic point being God communicates with man and unbelievers and believers are communicating all the time to me is really emphasizing what I think day until we want to call that qualified antithesis. You have to have a qualified antithesis to communicate, but does a qualified antithesis require you to say the kind of things I've been hearing for 30 years that only this method is valid rather than saying that this is this is a valid argument.

It's the only valid argument that's what I've been hearing for 30 years. That argument, if you follow that method, you believe that God and his word are the absolute ultimate standard. If you use any other argument apologetically, you believe that human reason, autonomous human reason, is the ultimate standard.

And I just don't know of any reformed person, whether R.C. Sproul or the reformed scholastics who would ever in a million years say that once rationalism came along, some of them were saying things like that. But the ones I'm thinking of would never say that autonomous human reason is the ultimate standard, but that's the way it gets. That was why I was initially inclined to it, because all the students were telling me, well, this view, if you hold this view, that the Bantilian view believes that God is the ultimate standard.

The other views believe that man is the ultimate standard. If that's the choice, it's an easy choice for most people. Just as I moved along and read more, I don't think that's a fair representation of the non-Vantilian views and the non-Vantilian reformed theologians who, for the 400 years, before Vantil was born or before he taught that view.

So I mean, we could go more into the biblical view. I don't think it's something that any Vantilian would disagree with. It just, to me, points in a different direction for the conclusion of apologetic methodology.

Yeah, that's really well said. And I love for James to respond to that, because I think you've summarized, Keith, what a number of non-Vantilians would feel, and that is, okay, people have heard that line by what standard? There's books and videos with that very title. You're either have God-standard or man-standard.

And I think if I'm understanding Keith's critique here, is it possible that what Vantil giveth, he also take it the way, meaning he has this antithesis and principle, which maybe erstwhile overzealous students come at you really hard and say yes. And then in practice, it's not all that different than a lot of other apologetic methods. How do you respond to that, James, in some of the 30 years of, perhaps, frustration that maybe Keith has felt around this issue? No, again, I'm sympathetic to some of the confusions that non-Vantilians find when they approach this material.

Let me deal with the Keith's treatment in the book. In the first half of the book, he's laying out Vantil's views. And for the most part, he does a very fine job of recognizing the nuances.

So when he describes Vantil's epistemology, he recognizes what Vantil says about this absolute antithesis and principle, but also the qualifications brought on by Common Grace. So Vantil says very, very clearly that the unbeliever knows many things. They have true knowledge as far as it goes.

And this is, you know, this is accounted for by Common Grace. So all those nuances, the in principle, the in practice distinction, they're all in place. And then when it comes to this chapter

on biblical concerns, Keith looks at scripture and he says, look, the Bible says that unbelievers know lots of things.

They know how to use language. They know basic things about logic and about the world. And says, and this contradicts Vantil because Vantil hosts this absolute antithesis.

But of course, all of the qualifications were set out in the first part of the book. So Vantil's qualifications can account for all of this biblical material about the unbeliever knowing many things, again, by Common Grace. So it was surprising to me to find Keith acknowledging all of these qualifications that Vantil makes.

And then, as it were, setting aside these qualifications in order to make this case that the Vantil's view is unbiblical. Now, again, he thinks that the Common Grace qualifications put a wrench in the works. My position as I've tried to articulate it here is that Vantil's acknowledgement of Common Grace is a feature, not a bug.

It's not something that actually upsets the system. It's an integral part of the system because it allows for the communication between the believer and the unbeliever, but it also allows the believer to engage in this presuppositional critique saying, well, your own understanding of your place in the world, your own understanding of knowledge can account for what you and I agree that you do actually know. Now, one thing that Keith brings out, and this sort of goes back to what you were asking about Kevin, does this actually remove some of the gap between Vantil's method and other approaches? And I'm more with John Frame on this that I think that the core of Vantil's approach is right, that when it gets, when the debate moves to the presuppositional level, when you're actually debating ultimate standards of truth and knowledge and reason, then you have to adopt something like Vantil's method of presupposition.

It's the only way you can resolve these disagreements at the presuppositional level. But at the same time, because of Common Grace, because of shared knowledge, I think that there's a place for more traditional, theistic arguments, like the argument from fine-tuning, or even certain versions of a cosmological argument, arguments from moral values. I think there's a place for those, evidential arguments.

Vantil himself says he has no problem with historical evidential arguments, as long as they're handled in the right way, they're not presented as being intelligible on a secular or neutral basis. So there actually is a lot of scope for Vantilians and non-Vantilians to use some apologetic material that's available to both. So I'm more inclined to look for points of agreement here and points of shared resources, rather than to say, look, it's Vantil's transcendental argument or bust.

So yeah, that's where I land on this. I want to thank a couple other sponsors, Reformation Heritage Books. As we've mentioned several times over the past few months, RHB puts out so many good resources, both new things and old things, and in the category that is old, but a

little bit new, Puritan Treasures for Today.

RHB has taken a number of Puritan classics from authors like John Owen, and they have put them in an accessible way for the modern reader with updated language helpful introductions. So check out Puritan Treasures for Today at HeritageBooks.org slash Puritan Treasures. Use the coupon code clearly.

You can see theological seminary as we've been mentioning. They have an online biblical language certificate program. This is a great way from where you are.

You don't have to move anywhere, and you can learn some Greek and Hebrew from trusted professors and from Westminster Theological Seminary. It's an opportunity to get an online certificate building your proficiency in Greek or Hebrew by the end of vocabulary needed to read a Hebrew Bible by the end of Greek one. You'll be reading the prologue of John and the entire book of Philemon.

So you start with zero knowledge. That's fine. You can complete the full program in as little as a year.

Learn more at [wts.edu](https://wts.edu/language) slash language. Just to press in on something, James, I wonder how would you respond as a ventilian to the popular way in which you see ventil claim today? And I'm thinking in particular of some of the political debates. I'm just going to go out on a limb, and I don't think you self-identify as a Christian nationalist.

Though I suppose there's ways in which all three of us can own certain things about Christian influence and the like. But you often find this kind of ventilian antithesis language. Well, you're either going to have a Christian nation or a pagan nation.

You're either going to have this business or school or this association. They're either going to be Christ honoring or Christ hating. And when you put it like that, of course, there's only one choice that any Christians going to make.

Well, I don't want the God hating. I don't want the pagan. So I must have Christian.

But then there's a whole lot of other ideas that seem to be, I don't want to say smuggle because that makes it sound like there's a bad motives behind it. But how would you use or not use this antithesis language in some of these popular level debates, James? Yeah, well, I've kept something of a distance from these, you know, smart political debates again. Well, you could say smart.

You could say how it is. Yeah, that's right. You know, we're always looking for the middle way.

But, you know, I think ventil is right in that any system of thought is either going to be in line with Christian principles or it's not. And when we get into the political realm, the political realm is not value free. It's value laden.

Okay, so any political system is going to be based on some ultimate value system. And I think it's obvious that that value system is either going to be in line with a broadly Christian worldview or it's not. So that point to me is unavoidable.

You're always going to be working on the basis of certain value system and on certain authorities. You know, where does political authority come from? Where do the basis for civil law? What are the foundations for that? These are sort of questions or meta-political questions. And when we get to that level, then it becomes clear that either one is approaching things from a Christian perspective, recognizing the Christian authority structures, or you're not.

But of course, then when it gets to the nitty gritty of, well, what does that look like in practice? On what basis should a civil government legislate? To what extent should distinctively Christian values be imposed as it were or legislated? That's a more complicated question. So the sort of the pop soundbite that you're talking about, Christ or paganism, yeah, we can all agree on that. But once we get into specifics of what that looks like in terms of the nuts and bolts of running government, there can be disagreement even among vantilians.

I mean, you just look at those who identify as vantilians and you get a range of different views on political philosophy, the role of civil government, the basis for legislation and so forth. So we just need to have a responsible grown up debate and not reduce things to simplistic soundbites. Can you be a vantilian without being a reconstructionist or a theonomist? Well, I hope so, because that's what I am.

Although, of course, again, it depends a lot on definitions. I think some of my views about cultural engagement and cultural transformation, some people might hear them and say, well, he sounds a bit like a reconstructionist or a little bit like a theonomist on certain points of how he approaches the relationship between biblical law and civil law. So again, definitions are going to be key here.

It's not simplistic. Well, either this label fits you or you don't, people are more complicated. Right.

And I would just say with the political philosophy in particular, one might argue, as I would, for say religious toleration, not as a capitulation to paganism, but as a Christian virtue itself, that the state in the church are distinct entities, ultimately both under God's authority, but he means, let's take the Abraham Kuiper quote, yes, every, there is not a square inch about which Christ Jesus does not say this is mine. And yet, he does not mean to reign over all of those square inches in exactly the same way. And the purpose of government may have a more limited focus.

But that's another discussion. I want to get into it just a couple of things while I still have you and go back here to Keith, because we haven't talked about it yet. But perhaps one of the the chief critiques, which you bring out both at the in both halves of the book of Van Till is his view on the Trinity.

So just explain what was some of the language that Van Till used about the the person of God and the person of the Trinity, what you find problematic about it. And then James, I'll let you do a clean up on aisle three. And that's really not a short answer question.

That's an essay question. The it goes back to some language language he uses about God being three persons and one person. And all of the Van Tillians I've read who, you know, trying to explain what he meant by that or are suggesting that the reason he uses the language of one person is to say that God's not an impersonal force, not some kind of abstract thing, but deeply personal.

And you know, I think we would, all Christians would affirm that God's not an impersonal force or or some kind of abstract thing like that, but is deeply personal. But the language of one person and three persons, in my opinion, is is is regressive. It's moving back to something that was a source of many of the problems in the fourth century debates.

Just in terms of using, you know, if you compare the 325 Council of Nicaea to 381, the, you know, the chain, the more solid definitions of some of that terminology that in 325 overlapped and was roughly synonymous, become one of them ends up becoming what we use to speak of what is one in God and another we use to speak of what is three in God. So going back to that kind of thing, one person, three persons, I think is inherently just as confusing as saying one essence and 30 essences or one hypostasis, three hypostasis, any, anything like that where you're using the same terminology to speak of what is one and what is three in God, I just believe that's inherently confusing. And then when he adds to that, the way he explains it is by paralleling the way we speak of multiple attributes in God with the way we speak of the three persons, that adds another layer of difficulty to the discussion because the way we distinguish attributes is not the same way we distinguish the persons with personal properties, for example.

So I don't think it's helpful. I don't think it was necessary. I believe that he, you know, if all he intended to do was say that God is not an impersonal force than fine, but I don't see any reason why we need to keep defending that just, you know, he wasn't infallible.

This looks to me like a clear place where that was not a good idea and it's just going to cause the sheep and the pews to stumble. So I'm trying to read him charitably and assume he did not mean to say anything more than that God is impersonal, but the way it's been defended and the way he used the way he paralleled attributes and personal properties or attributes and persons, if it's carried forward, it's going to cause more problems with the doctrine of God, which I think is the last thing we need today with the amount of controversy surrounding the attributes of God, debates about eternal subordination and so forth, things like that. I just, I would like to move beyond that.

Right. Right. Here's, this is you quote from Fantills.

I think this is his introduction to systematic theology. We speak of God as a person, yet we

speak also of three persons in the Godhead. Later, he says God is a one conscious being and yet he is also a try conscious being.

And then another place we do assert that God that is the whole Godhead is one person. So James, is this as simple as saying, you know, if I were defending Vantill, I would say he was trying to say something helpful. He never meant to deny the Westminster standards, but yup, this was not a one.

I can't defend it. Would you say more or less than that? I would say something different. So I'm a little awkward position here because Keith says in the book that no confessionally reformed Christian should ever have defended Vantill's position.

So, you know, if I defend it now, I'm automatically the bad guy. It's a little like the guy gets accused of racism. And when he tries to defend himself, it's just proof that he's so, you know, I have to step step carefully here.

We got to put this in some context and in some proportion. These are three pages in thousands of Vantill's pages of Vantill's works. And Keith says a few times that Vantill is trying to recast the doctrine of the Trinity.

Well, that's not at all what's going on. I mean, you hardly get a mention of this outside of this short section. Nor is Vantill deviating from the Westminster Confession.

Nothing that Vantill says contradicts anything in the Westminster Confession. What Vantill thinks he is doing is simply explaining or clarifying one particular implication of how we view God. And what Vantill is saying when he says that God is a one person, what he's saying is that God's unity is a personal unity.

Or the substance of God is not an impersonal substance. It's a personal substance. And he's not saying that God is one hypothesis and three hypotheses.

He doesn't deviate from the language of Useah for the oneness of God and hypotheses for the threeness of God. When he says one person, he's not saying one hypothesis. He's just saying that the unity of God is a personal unity rather than impersonal unity.

And he's really piggybacking on what Homer Barvink says about God as absolute personality. That God is both the absolute, but God is a personal absolute. And Vantill wants to say that personality or that personhood of God applies both to the unity of God and the threeness of God as well.

So my sense, and Keith, of course, can respond to this. My sense is that when you dig to the substance of what Vantill is saying, rather than the way he says it, I don't think there's any disagreement here. I don't think Keith would actually disagree with the substance of what Vantill is saying.

His objection is really to the way that Vantill expresses it, to the language that's used. If you don't want to say God is one person in any sense at all, okay, you don't like that form of phrase fine. But let's talk about what Vantill was actually trying to affirm.

And it's not simply that God isn't an impersonal force. That's a given. Vantill is saying something deeper about the unity and trinity of the unity, the one is some threeness of God, both having personality or both being personhood in some sense.

I'll leave it at that for now. Yeah, I'm going to quote from the least esteemed among us, which is Kevin Deung from my daily doctrine book. Here's what I think you're saying, James, that I won't put words into your mouth.

I say this. Finally, the word personality, and I'm referencing something shed says, should not be confused with persons in the trinity, though the two concepts are related. God is one personal being who eternally exists as three distinct divine persons.

There is a single consciousness in God and a single self-determined will, but there are nevertheless three substances. This allows the one God to be fully personal by reason of the three persons. The divine essence is self-contemplative, self-cognitive, self-commuting.

So what I hear you saying, James, is if you look at what Vantill is saying, he's trying to affirm something like that. And it's a very fair point, James, that among thousands of pages, you know, this is not something that he's written a whole monograph on the trinity, where this becomes the linchpin of his thought. Very fair.

At the same time, it seems to me, just as a wording, if anyone came to a PCA, ARP, OPC Presbyterian Exam and said, God is triconscious, or God is one person and three persons. It's not that the floor falls out underneath them and they immediately fall into a pool of lava, but somebody is surely going to say, could you say more about that? And if the person says, oh, by one person, I just mean he's personal and not impersonal. I think the Presbyterian is going to say to that young man, all right, that's okay.

But let me encourage you to stick with more traditional language. Would that be a fair critique of Vantill? I think I was extremely well put. And notice there that in, I think this was you quoting from your book, you say that God has one will and one consciousness.

That really is no different from the substance of what Vantill is saying. So there's a sense of orthodoxy is both substance and language. Okay, I think the substance of what Vantill is saying is entirely orthodox.

The language is certainly a deviation from the normal way of stating things. And I think in that sense is to be avoided, unless you are getting into a really deep discussion with people who understand these kind of nuances, your average punter in the pew to tell them, oh, God is one person and three persons, not helpful. That is going to be confusing.

And in that area, I share Keith's concerns. But at the same time, I think for those of us who are well versed in the doctrine of God and some of the backgrounds of these discussions, I think we can have a nuanced conversation about what Vantill actually meant and whether that was consistent with orthodoxy, but also whether the form of expression is a prudent one. Sure.

Well said, let me bring this to a point here. You have been both generous to give of your time. At the very end, I love how Keith brings this to a good point.

This is practical concerns before he gets to the conclusion. He says, finally, all of us, Vantillians and non-Vantilian alike, must endeavor to keep the debate over apologetic methodology in perspective. These debates should be in service of a clearer presentation of the gospel and a clearer defense of the hope that is within us.

Debates over apologetic methodology cannot be allowed to replace the actual proclamation of the gospel to unbelievers. Debates over the best way to defend the faith cannot be allowed to replace the actual defense of the faith. That's very well, well put.

We don't want this to be simply a discussion. There's nothing wrong with having a heady discussion. We need that.

But we want it to be in service of real Christians talking to real people about the faith. So a question for both of you, start with Keith, you're meeting with a non-Christian. A student in your church says, I'm not a Christian, but I have a lot of questions.

And you're sitting down across from this student over lunch. And he says, look, I just, I don't believe that there's God. I see all this evil in the world.

And I don't see how God could even exist with the kind of world that we live in. I kind of like some of the people I've met in your church, but I can't believe the Bible. It's a book full of holes and myths and errors.

And I don't even believe God exists. What would you start to say? Put your apologetic method into practice. And then I'll have James, you do the same thing.

Because I'm very curious how different or how similar it might sound. My guess is it's not going to sound terribly different. I mean, assuming that I've shared the gospel with this person and talked to them about Christ, then my methodology is simply going to be to try to answer whatever their questions are one after the other and respond to whatever doubts they have, whatever questions they have, whether it's the existence of God, as you mentioned, or some, some doubt about some teaching and scripture, some ethical principles.

Just one of the things I did at Ligonier for four years was answer the phone. And we just would have people calling in believers, unbelievers asking, whatever you never knew what they were going to ask. And answer whatever questions they have.

I don't have a pat or a set one, two, three step way of approaching that. I'm trying to deal with each individual as a real individual human being. Because that's the way I would have liked to have been treated when I was a young man.

Nobody ever shared the gospel with me. Nobody ever answered any of the questions I had. And so I want to do that when I'm talking to somebody like that.

Treat them as a real individual and treat their concerns. And whatever questions they have, wherever they want to start, I'm happy to start with that question. Yeah, I think of it like this, and I appreciate what you said about honoring the person and trying to answer their questions.

I think if somebody came up to me like that, maybe this is a ventilian sort of insight, I might say, well, you know, friend, if you want me to prove to you that the God of the Bible exists in one level, one sense, I can't do that for you. Because I'm not going to put God in the dock. God exists.

And what I hope to show you, however, is that I think that there are some good rational reasons for what Christians think. So I would, I think maybe in a ventilian fashion, be eager to say, look, I'm not going to set this up in a sense that, all right, start with nothing. And you prove to me that this God of the Bible exists.

I'm not going to own that framing of the discussion. And yet I wouldn't hesitate to say, let me give you some some things to think about. Like Greg Coco talks about putting a pebble in somebody's shoe that they walk away, whether it's to say, you know, for almost all of human history, almost everyone on the planet has been religious.

Or one of the, the reasons that you read the Reform Scholastics make often, all the way in the 16th, 17th, 18th century, is they say, look, at most of the world through most of history has had some kind of sacrifice that tells them there's some kind of, might there be some kind of intuitive sense in the human person that we're not right with, with God or some being in the universe? And maybe I'd say, you know, I can't, I'm not going to prove to you from a rationalistic foundation that the Bible is the word of God, because you need to have the spirit convince you in your heart. And yet let me give you some reasons why we can trust our translations, why we can trust the manuscripts and the typical kind of apologetic things. So James, would you do anything much different than that kind of approach to talking to a non-Christian who is saying, kind of, and you've shared the gospel, but is saying, all right, prove to me that Christianity is right.

Yeah. Well, let me first say that, that what Keith says at the end of the book, I issue a hearty amen too. Yes, we, we're, we're, we have the common cause of proclaiming the gospel, defending the faith.

And, you know, if we could end on that note today, then hallelujah. As for what you said there, you know, I wouldn't take issue with any of it. One thing I would add, though, is that if someone

is coming as you described and they say, well, I don't personally believe in God and there can't be a God because of all the evil in the world, one thing I'm going to say is, well, actually, I think you do know there's a God, even though you deny God's existence deep down, you do know there's a God, and you betray it in the way that you live in the world.

Even when you say, look at all this evil in the world, that's right, you're presupposing, oh, there's the presupposition, presupposing that there's a distinction between good and evil, but if there is no God who defines what absolute goodness is, then you can't make sense of that. So I'm going to sort of gently probe this position and show them that they're actually, they can't make sense of what they're saying without acknowledging the existence of God. But then also, there needs to be an answer to the question of evil.

And so I'm going to, in the same way that I'm sure you and Keith would point to what the Bible says about God permitting evil in order to accomplish a greater good and that scripture says lots of things. It doesn't dodge the problem of evil, but scripture gives us many important things about God's relationship to his creation and how he permits evil in order to accomplish his greater good purposes. So again, as Keith says, we want to listen to the person, we want to adapt what we say to that person's background, their particular concerns, their level of understanding.

And I think presuppositionalism at its best is flexible enough to be able to do that. At the very beginning of this book, in the introduction, Keith quotes from James in Anderson, three things are certain in life, death, taxes, and debates over Cornelius Van Till. So thank you both for being on here.

I hope that everyone listening has found it helpful as I have both to see where there's still some differences. And sometimes it's differences in interpreting Van Till, and maybe not so much differences in how we might approach apologetics. But want to thank Keith Matheson again for this book toward a reformed apologetics critique of the thought of Cornelius Van Till just out by mentor, and then James Anderson also for being on.

Thank you both of you brothers and friends for modeling both in the writing of this book, Keith, charitable sharpening and disagreement, and then both coming on here. And I think it provides a very good example. And I anticipate there will be rejoinders and sur rejoinders as this book comes out.

And I'm optimistic that it might lead to more light than heat. So thank you both for coming on. And until next time, or if I got, enjoy him forever and read a good book.