

Presuppositions in Apologetics

Hey guys, I'm here to talk to you today about presuppositions, and how they relate to apologetics. So presuppositions are something that exists in everyone's mind. Basically the word presuppositions refers to ideas which we assume in advance to be true, or ideas which we take for granted. So whenever we approach pretty much any topic, we often have ideas, things that we're assuming that we know about that, or about the world. And that affects how we view the world, how we view the topic that we're talking about, and what actions we might take.

Let me give you an example: two different reactions to toenail clippings. Aren't you glad you signed up for this deep intellectual course? So something that happens somewhat frequently in our house, which is totally baffling, is that occasionally on the stairs going to the second level of the house, we will find toenail clippings. And we don't know how they get there. We have interrogated all the children, no one knows anything about it. I don't put them there; my wife doesn't put them there. I don't know if someone's clipping their toenails in their sleep, or what...it's kind of a mystery.

So let's say that you came to my house, and you happen to see these toenails on the stairs. So let's say two different people come to our house. Let's call Person A "normal." They react in more or less a "normal" way. When they see these toenail clippings, they're like, "Ew. That's kinda gross, why would somebody just leave those there, why wouldn't they pick them up?" Now, Person B, imagine this other person who comes, and this person actually has a very strong belief in an evil chipmunk named Eugene, who is stalking him or her, and who spits toenail clippings when angered or agitated. This person is utterly convinced that Eugene exists and is stalking him or her. So when Person B sees these toenail clippings, they're not going to be like, "Ew." Their blood is going to run cold, and they're going to be like, "Eugene knows where I am. He's here. I need to get out of here." So Person A and Person B are approaching the toenail clippings with completely different presuppositions. They view the same evidence in totally different ways and react differently.

So how would presuppositions affect topics related to apologetics? Well, first of all it could affect how you view miracles. If you hear about a miracle that supposedly happened, or you read in the Bible about a miracle that happened, like Jesus healing somebody or feeding the 5000 or something...if you're a believer in God, there's no reason you wouldn't believe in miracles, right? Probably. You at least believe that if there's a God, He could do miracles, so this is something that could possibly happen, so maybe I should pay attention, maybe there's something to this. But if you were an atheist, if you did not believe in God, there's no way miracles could happen because there's no God. So when you hear a report about a miracle, or read about it in the Bible, you will think "this or this or this might have happened," but God doing a miracle is not one of the options, it's not something you would consider. It wouldn't enter your mind as a possibility, because there's no God, so how could He do a miracle?

Or how you view nature...same kind of thing, right? You see the complexity in nature, and how our planet is made just perfectly for life, and if you're a believer in God, you're kind of just marveling at that, you see the hand of God in every little detail. But if you're an atheist, your mind starts working, you come up with all these possibilities and reasons, but it doesn't enter your mind as a possibility that maybe there's a Creator Who did this. You have this presupposition that there isn't a God, that there can't be a God, so that's not an option in interpreting the data I'm seeing.

And same thing with how you view the Bible. If you're a Christian, you might view the Bible as God's Word, everything is there for a reason, everything means something, everything is important for me somehow, I need to pay attention to this, I need to believe this. But if you're an atheist you view it as strictly a human creation, a human text, and you analyze it, maybe this is why this happened, this is why it's like this...but the thought that maybe a God had a role in making this book doesn't enter your mind, so you kind of treat it that way.

And you can go on and on with other examples on how presuppositions affect how you view things, and particularly apologetics topics. So it's really important, guys, to be aware of presuppositions in other people and in yourself too. And we'll talk more about presuppositions as we come to it in the course.