

APOLOGETICS & ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS

Review: We started out this series on apologetics defining it as being able to defend your faith – explaining why you believe as you do. But we quickly said that apologetics does not win a person to Christ; evangelism does. We cannot “reason” a person into heaven.

However, Christian apologetics help to:

1. Answer non-Christian’s questions and remove distractions from belief.
2. Point non-Christians toward faith in Jesus. The point of apologetics is not to win an argument but to help a person see the rationality of putting their faith in the person & work of Christ.

Introduction: As we conclude this series, I want to talk about some general principles to help us in our interactions with non-Christians.

- I. Our attitude in handling objections.
 - A. Never argue. (Prov. 17:14,19)
You may win the argument and drive a person further from Christ.
Remember: “The man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.”
 - B. Show a positive attitude.
 1. Phil. 2:5 says we are to have the same attitude as Christ (loving, kind, positive).
 2. What was His attitude toward people who were lost and in the bondage of sin?
 - a. Mark 6:34 – He had compassion on them.
 - b. Matthew 9:11-12 – He saw them as sick, in need of a doctor.
 3. “I’m glad you asked that. That’s a good question.”
 - C. Use sincere compliments.
“Obviously you’ve thought a lot about this.”
- II. Use your “so-what testimony” to pique their interest in Christ.
 - A. When we think about a testimony, we usually think about how you came to accept Christ as Savior and how Christ has changed you.
 1. There is nothing the matter with this kind of testimony.
 2. We see Paul sharing this kind of testimony in Acts 26 before King Agrippa.
 - B. Another kind of testimony is to share in normal conversation how your relationship with God has impacted your life this past week – your “so-what testimony”.
 1. For example, if you are experiencing a trial right now, how is God helping you?
 2. If you have had a conflict with someone, how is God helping you respond with an attitude of forgiveness?
 3. If you messed up this week, how does your relationship with God help you deal with failure?
 4. This helps a person see that Jesus Christ is relevant to your life and impacts how you live.

5. The idea is that this might pique an interest in them to ask more about Christ & spiritual things.

III. Why questions may be better than answers.

A. Have you ever noticed how Jesus used questions in His ministry?

1. Rich young ruler – “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17-18) Jesus responds, “Why do you call Me good?”

2. Religious leaders ask Jesus if it is right to pay taxes. Jesus referred to a coin and asked, “Whose portrait is this?” (Matthew 22:17-20)

3. When the Pharisees, “looking for a reason to accuse Jesus” , asked Him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”, Jesus responds with a question, “If any of you has a sheep, and it falls in a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out?” (Matthew 12:9-12)

B. Have you ever had someone ask you a question about your faith and you went on the defensive and gave them all the reasons that you believe only to have them shrug in unbelief?

C. It’s been said that declarations tend to harden the heart, but questions tend to soften the heart.

D. Asking questions can help a person consider the assumptions behind their skepticism.

1. For example, a guy asks attackingly, “Do you believe all non-Christians are going to hell?”

2. Instead of answering, you could ask, “Do you believe in hell?”

3. The guy says, “No, I don’t, I think it’s ridiculous”.

4. You could then ask, “Then why are you asking me such a ridiculous question?”

5. If he says he does believe in hell, then you could ask, “Is there anyone in hell? Is Hitler in hell?”

6. If he says, “Sure”, then you could ask, “What determines who goes to hell and who doesn’t? Does God grade on a curve?”

7. The hope is that as a result of asking good questions, you move from just being defensive and cause the other person to consider their assumptions and have a civil conversation about real issues.

E. Answering a question with a question can take the pressure off you (the one being asked) and puts the pressure on the one asking the question.

1. This is important because as long as we’re on the defensive, the questioner is not really wrestling with the issue.

2. For example, the chief priests and the teachers of the law once challenged Jesus: “Tell us by what authority you are doing these things. Who gave you this authority?”

Jesus replied, “I will also ask you a question. Tell me – John’s baptism, was it from heaven or from men?” (Luke 20:1-8)

a. As a result, the religious leaders were confronted with their insincere nonquestion and said they didn’t know.

b. Jesus showed them their insincere nonquestion deserved an appropriate non-answer: “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

F. Answering a question with a question might pave the way for the questioner to consider ideas that they might otherwise not consider.

For example, the guy who was asking about hell when questioned was confronted with dealing with the issue of divine judgment.

G. On a practical note, answering a question with a question might help to alleviate hostility. If someone is being hostile to you in their question, asking them a question reflects the heat back to them. As a result, people will often temper their question so you can have a productive conversation. Why does God allow suffering? How do you explain suffering?

H. A direct answer at times if warranted.

1. Some questioners are sincere and benefit from a clear, concise answer of what the Bible says.

2. For example, when Jesus was asked, "Which is the most important commandment?", He gave a direct answer. (Mark 12:28-31)

I. But often answering a question with a question will pave the way to greater receptivity. So that as the conversation proceeds, you can actually begin to answer their questions because now they want to know the answers.

J. Asking good questions also gives us the opportunity to do more listening than speaking and more inviting than demanding. It allows us to not just proclaim the truth but enter into a dialogue.

IV. Lessons learned from Proverbs

A. Recognize a fool.

1. Prov. 23:9 "Advises us not to speak to a fool because he will scorn the wisdom of your words."

2. Prov. 18:2 "A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions."

3. What is the point that the writer of these Proverbs is getting at? If a person isn't really interested in a true dialogue and examining their beliefs then you are wasting your time.

4. How can you recognize a fool? Ask some key questions:
a. "Why are you bringing up these things?"
b. "Are you asking these questions because you really want an answer?"

c. "If I give you an answer to your question, would you be convinced that Christianity is true?"

d. "What's the biggest issue that keeps you from being a Christian?"

e. "Are you willing to read something that I think answers your questions?"

5. Until someone is more interested in truth than in airing his/her own opinions, it's best to talk about the weather.

B. Remember, people are people.

1. People are multidimensional: body, mind, emotions, will.
2. When engaging people, we can't just focus on one aspect and ignore the other.

3. It's true for all people, "They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

4. Some guidelines for better relating to people:

a. Don't criticize, condemn or complain.

b. Give honest, sincere compliments.

- c. Arouse in others an eager want. (That's what a "so-what testimony" can do.)
 - d. Become genuinely interested in people.
 - e. Smile.
 - f. Remember a person's name. It's the sweetest sound they know.
 - g. Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves.
 - h. Talk in terms of the other person's interests.
 - i. Make the other person feel important. Do it sincerely.
5. When sharing with people, we need to break down barriers so they'll be willing to open up. We do this by expressing care. Prov. 19:22 "What a man desires is unfailing love."
6. In sharing the gospel with people, try to discern what their greatest need is.
- a. Are they ignorant of the gospel and need instruction?
 - b. Are they hesitant because of being hurt and need comfort?
 - c. Are they uninterested because they think that surrendering to God means loss of freedom?

Conclusion:

God loves people and wants us to love people enough that we will build relationships with unbelievers and share the gospel. We discussed some practical ways to do that:

1. Share "so-what testimonies" of how your Christian faith is impacting your life this week. Interject this into daily conversation.
2. Use questions in talking with others.
 - a. You can get a conversation going by asking specific questions.
 - b. You can answer questions with questions as Christ did to break down barriers that lead to genuine conversations.
3. Remember all people want to know if we care. Focus on others. Be kind. Be a good listener. Don't make assumptions. Pray for them. Be bold, and ask them about Christ.