

October 2023

THE HERALD

Newsletter of the Orrville Grace Brethren Church

The Use of Apologetics in Evangelism

By Dustin Segers

“Jake” comes up to you with a load of questions. He explains that last semester he took the required religion course from an atheistic Jewish professor who taught that the Jesus of Nazareth presented in the New Testament didn’t really exist. Instead, He’s a cobbled together mythological figure that the clever originators of early Christianity created by borrowing from first-century pagan mystery religions. Jake is in a dither. He openly admits that his faith has been shaken to the core. So, what do you do?

This is when it is extremely important to know what you believe, what the basic arguments are against our faith these days, and how to respond in a winsome and attractive manner. As Greg Koukl notes, being an effective ambassador requires knowledge, wisdom, and character. Thus, I want to focus on those three essential qualities in this article.

Knowledge

This is the raw information needed to have an intelligent discussion about the

relevant issues. To have this information, you have to read certain books and study that information, listen to lectures/podcasts, and know your Bible, biblical theology, and systematic theology very well.

Evangelists like George Whitefield were often trained to the master’s degree level because Christians at that time believed that you needed to know not only the message and themes of the Bible very well, but you also needed to know and be able to read the biblical languages, understand how to apply basic hermeneutics (Bible interpretation skills), be conversant with systematic theology (the Trinity, justification by faith alone, the doctrine of the atonement, etc.), logic, philosophy, and rhetoric. The reason many of these early American evangelists were so effective was that they were anointed by the power of the Holy Spirit and they were a very sharp sword in the hands of the Holy Spirit because they were well trained and well read. These men knew their stuff! They took very seriously God’s command to love Him with all their minds, and it paid off in time and eternity.

Today, if you are evangelizing in any context in the secularized West, you need to be conversant with the basic arguments

from secular humanism, deism, atheism, agnosticism, and now, Islam. You need to understand why unbelievers don't believe the gospel and what their main objections to the faith are. This sounds complicated but it's not. Most objections center around the person of God, the work of Christ, and the authority and inspiration of the Bible. If you focus most of your apologetic and theological study on those three great themes, study church history, and understand basic logical fallacies, you will be well on your way to giving a good "reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). You also need to understand that everyone asks and answers what I call the "Five Great Questions":

- 1) Who am I?
- 2) Where did I come from?
- 3) Why am I here?
- 4) What's the difference between right and wrong?
- 5) Where am I going when I die?

These questions get to the heart of what philosophers call "issues of ultimacy"—the stuff that really matters. Obviously, as Christians who are concerned that people come to know Jesus, we need to have the requisite knowledge to be able to answer those questions and objections the way that God answers them in His Word.

Wisdom

Wisdom is the ability to have a productive conversation with an unbeliever respectfully but strategically using the relevant information. Instead of constantly answering silly objections that are designed to breed controversy and aren't aimed at really seeking truth, focus on the people

who do seem to be asking honest questions. We are commanded to not "cast your pearls before swine" (Matthew 7:6)—giving truth to people who obviously don't want it, and to "avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife" (2 Timothy 2:23). You can't have a productive conversation with people who don't listen, and that includes you! I have heard many open-air preachers cutting people off and dismissing them as mere fools when the questioner's body language and tone indicated that they had a legitimate, sincere question. The Lord's slave must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patiently instructing those who oppose themselves... (2 Timothy 2:24,25). Our character must be kind and patient, and we must have the ability to teach our faith. This seems like a no-brainer, but sadly, when I watch many open-air preaching videos, all I see is two people arguing over religion on a street corner. Instead, when we are reviled, we should bless; when we are persecuted, we endure (1 Corinthians 4:12), and sometimes, we just need to be quiet or ignore the person who is purposefully trying to cause problems. After all, King Herod "questioned [Jesus] with many words, but He answered him nothing" (Luke 23:9). You can't teach the unteachable.

Character

Above all, our character must be winsome and attractive. Our speech and actions must "always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:6). We should never use *ad hominem*

attacks (name calling), and we should never slander or seek to unnecessarily cause conflict, but we must seek to live at peace with all people as much as possible and do good to them if they'll let us (Romans 12:18; Galatians 6:10). When we enter a room we should bring the joy of the Lord with us and look for the best in people whether they know our Lord or not. Yes, I realize that all unbelievers are sinful, depraved children of the devil, but God's common grace is in all unbelievers to one degree or another and the image of God still shines forth in them even though it's fractured. I always seek ways to "talk up" my unbelieving colleagues at work, making note of their special and unique skills to our customers. I do this because this is a manifestation of doing good to all people and respecting what is right in the sight of all men while promoting peace and goodwill with all people as much as possible.

In conclusion, God cannot use those who make themselves useless. You can have the strongest arguments, the best evidences, and the sharpest mind in the world, but if you're a jerk, you'll find that people won't listen to you. Consider the following questions:

- 1) Are you snarky and rough around the edges when dealing with unbelievers and even other people in general?
- 2) Are you considered to be a "contrarian," someone who is always looking for a debate?
- 3) Do you run roughshod over people with the truth of the gospel and your keen mind?

If you have examined yourself in light of those questions and answered them in the affirmative, then God graciously calls you to repent and accept a higher standard of communication and character, one that is grounded in preferring the other person above yourself even to the expense of you winning an argument (Philippians 2:3-5). God doesn't ask us to win arguments; He asks us to win people, and that can only be done by having the sufficient knowledge, wisdom, and character to be a more useful tool in the hands of the Holy Spirit, as well as the prayerful disposition to put these truths into practice in your evangelistic endeavors.

<https://livingwaters.com/thoughts-about-the-use-of-apologetics-in-evangelism-part-1/>

~~~~~

**If I were your...**

**Wife**, and you missed supper, I'd want to know where you were.

**Boss**, and you missed work, I'd want to know where you were.

**Coach**, and you missed practice, I'd want to know where you were.

**Golf Partner**, and you missed our tee-off, I'd want to know where you were.

**Car Pool Friend**, and you missed picking me up, I'd want to know where you were.

**Teacher**, and you missed class, I'd want to know where you were.

**But, I am your pastor**, and you missed **Church on Sunday**, but I'm not supposed to be nosy?

# FUNNIES

"Did you thank the lady for the party?" a mother asked her son. He replied, "Well, I was going to, but a girl ahead of me said, "Thank you," and the lady told her not to mention it. So I didn't."

-----

Several people were waiting on a street corner for the light to change and a dog was waiting with them. One man asked another, "Does your dog bite?" "No," the other man said. So the first man reached down to pet the dog, and the dog bit him. "Ouch!" the wounded pedestrian yelled. "I thought you said your dog doesn't bite!" The other said, "That isn't my dog."

-----

Two teenagers visit a museum where there's an exhibit of Egyptian artifacts. Beneath one of mummies is a card that says, "3218 B.C." The first teenager wonders out loud what the card means. The second teenager answers, "Must be the license number of the car that hit him."

-----

It's difficult to save money when your neighbors keep buying things you can't afford.

-----

A German Shepherd starts chasing rabbits and before long, discovers that he's lost. Wandering about, he notices a panther heading rapidly in his direction with the intention of having lunch.

The old German Shepherd thinks, "Oh, oh! I'm in deep trouble now!" Noticing some bones on the ground close by, he immediately settles down to chew on the bones with his back to the approaching cat. Just as the panther is about to leap, the old German Shepherd exclaims loudly, "Boy, that was one delicious panther! I wonder if there are any more around here?"

Hearing this, the young panther halts his attack in mid-strike, a look of terror comes over him and he slinks away into the trees. "Whew!" says the panther, "That was close! That old German Shepherd nearly had me!"

Meanwhile, a squirrel who had been watching the whole scene from a nearby tree figures he can put this knowledge to good use and trade it for protection from the panther. So, off he goes. The squirrel soon catches up with the panther, spills the beans and strikes a deal for himself with the panther. The young panther is furious at being made a fool of and says, "Here, squirrel, hop on my back and see what's going to happen to that conniving canine!"

Now, the old German Shepherd sees the panther coming with the squirrel on his back and thinks, "What am I going to do now?" But instead of running, the dog sits down with his back to his attackers, pretending he hasn't seen them yet, and just when they get close enough to hear, the old German Shepherd says... "Where's that squirrel? I sent him off an hour ago to bring me another panther!"

Moral of this story... Don't mess with the old dogs. Brilliance only comes with age and experience.