

— CHAPTER 3 —

Some Common Objections...
and Some Reasoned Responses

“In your heart set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”

– I Peter 3:15-16

Jesus: “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my Father in heaven.”

– Matthew 10:32-33

A General Introduction

The Scandal of Christian Exclusivism.

- Nothing could be more controversial and “intolerant” than to claim that the Christian faith is uniquely the one true belief system.
- The critical question is this: “Are the exclusively truth-claims of the Christian faith factual, rational, and defensible?”



Christian Apologetics: Rules of Engagement.

- Apologetics requires preparation, discernment, and spiritual sensitivity.
- The goal: “Speak the Truth in Love” – Eph. 4:15.
 - ▶ The process of engaging non-believers in serious conversation and challenging their misconceptions is a form of spiritual warfare.
- Apologetics and the spiritual disciplines:
 - ▶ Study prepares our mind.
 - ▶ Prayer and meditation prepare our heart.
 - ▶ Dallas Willard: *“It is by stepping experientially into the practices of spiritual transformation ... that all truths about God and his kingdom become truths about your actual existence.”*
 - ▶ As we explore the depths of our soul and increase our own self-awareness, we sharpen our awareness and sensitivity to others and their needs.

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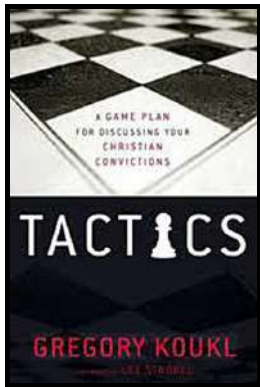
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- Types of encounters:
 - ▶ Some people are sincere spiritual seekers.
 - Their questions and comments should be handled seriously, respectfully, and patiently.
 - ▶ Some are argumentative contrarians – resistant to the truth and interested mainly in arguing, distracting and confusing us.
 - ▶ Some people are so mentally confused or morally perverted as to be beyond our ability to help.
- Spirit-led responses:
 - ▶ Jesus: *“Do not give that which is sacred to dogs, or throw your pearls to pigs.”* – Matt. 7:6
 - ▶ Prov. 26:4-5 – *“Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.”*
- Be patient with honest and sincere spiritual seekers.
 - ▶ Don’t argue or become emotional, and don’t take criticisms personally.
 - ▶ Don’t apologize for what the Bible clearly teaches or try to make the Christian faith correlate to modern humanistic sensibilities and political correctness.
 - ▶ Stand your ground and don’t back down amid pressure, but always share the Truth in Love.
- Avoid no-win scenarios for which you are unprepared or situations that are not conducive to a serious and focused discussion of the issue.
 - ▶ If you do not know the facts or the rationale behind a particular issue, honestly admit it and promise the other party that you’ll research it and get back with him/her.
- Greg Koukl in *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*.
 - ▶ Rather than being put in the position of constantly asserting and defending what you believe, shift the burden of proof onto the skeptic.
 - ▶ Learn to master the technique of asking simple leading questions such as...
 - *“What do you mean by that?”*
 - *“Why do you believe that?”*
 - *“Have you ever considered...?”*
 - ▶ Questions are interactive and engaging, and they can be remarkably effective.
 - ▶ When we ask honest and sincere questions, we show genuine interest in the other person.
 - ▶ Questions provide insight into the other person’s character and beliefs, and they force them to think about their assertions.



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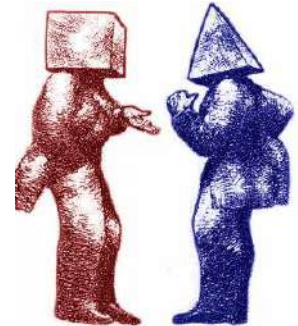
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- ▶ Questions can also help diffuse tense encounters: rather than responding defensively or negatively to fallacious comments, we can challenge the other person to defend his/her beliefs.
 - ▶ Questions also shift the burden of the argument onto the other person.
 - ▶ Asking simple questions is an almost effortless way to redirect a conversation in a positive way without coming across as abrupt, negative or defensive.
- Any Christian who shares his/her faith with others can expect to encounter resistance from those who regard Christianity as a form of religious fascism and fanaticism.
 - As Christians, we have the truth on our side.
 - ▶ Our challenge is to study and prepare so we can convey the truth as naturally, effectively and persuasively as possible.



Some Common Objections

1. *“There is no absolute truth; everything is merely a matter of opinion.”*
 - Engaging Paul Postman in a DPD (Deep Philosophical Discussion).
 - Q: *“Why do you think truth is relative? How did you come to that conclusion?”*
 - Q *“So you’re telling me that it is absolutely true that there is no absolute truth? Isn’t that an obvious contradictio, like saying that something can be absolutely relative?”*
 - Q: *“Why do you prefer your opinion to mine?”*
 - Q: *“Do you believe people ever have wrong opinions about things? Furthermore, do you think there is anyone doing anything in world right now that is wrong?”*
 - Q: *“If everything is merely relative, why would we ever disagree with another person’s opinions or actions? What would it matter if everything is just relative and there is no such thing as truth?”*
 - Q: *“If everything were relative, that would apply even to your own statement, wouldn’t it?”*
 - Jesus: *“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to [God] except through me.”*
 - Jesus: *“Whoever believes in me has eternal life.”*
 - Q: *“What if objective truth really exists? What are the consequences if you’re wrong? What if Jesus Christ truly is the sole spiritual savior of humanity? Are you willing to seriously open your heart and ask God to lead you to the truth?”*
2. *“There is no absolute truth. Truth is whatever we accept, or whatever most people believe.”*
 - The “consensus theory of truth.”
 - Q: *“But what if I don’t believe that truth is decided by majority opinion? Who is right – you or me?”*
 - Q: *“Can the majority ever be wrong about something?”*

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3. *“Truth is whatever is practical, or whatever you can get away with.”*

- The pragmatic (or functional) theory of truth.
- Q: *“You’re not really serious that truth is whatever you can get away with, are you? What if I purposely deceived you or fed you misinformation? Would you mind? Would it be honest and truthful if I tried to make you believe something that is morally wrong or factually inaccurate?”*

4. *“Truth is whatever we sincerely believe.”*

- Q: *“Do you really think you can make something true simply by thinking it is true?”*
- The reality of self-evident propositions.
- Q: *“What if I sincerely believe in objective truth rather than your idea of that “truth is whatever we sincerely believe”? Can we both be right?”*
- Q: *“Is your statement true only for you, or is it true for everyone? If your statement is true for everyone, then obviously it is not true only for you. On the other hand, if your statement is not true for everyone, then it is self-refuting.”*
- When it comes to the search for truth, sincerity is essential but it is not sufficient. Facts and reason determine what is true – no sincerity and/or motives.

5. *“Perhaps there is such a thing as truth, but can never know it.”*

- Q: *“How do you know that we can’t know the truth about something? Is it absolutely true that we can’t know the truth about something?”*
- Q: *“If you don’t know for certain that we an’t know the truth bout something, then maybe we can – in which case your statement, which is an absolute assertion that we can’t know the truth about something, is fallacious.”*

6. *“No one is perfect – everyone is fallible – so how can we ever know that we are right about anything?”*

- The statement, “To err is human,” is an argument against relativism because the concept of “error” presupposes that there is an objective standard by which to judge something as erroneous.

7. *“Christians who believe in moral absolutes are arrogant, intolerant and close-minded.”*

- Moral values would only be arrogant if we made them up ourselves and tried to pass them off as universal truths.
- Christians believe that absolute moral values are revealed by God in Scripture and in nature.
- The distinction between “tolerance” and “acceptance.” [Ref. pp. 61-63.]
- Q: *“Don’t you hold certain views that you think are right and true? Does that necessarily make you arrogant, intolerant and close-minded?”*
- Q: *“Can’t skeptics be just as arrogant and intolerant as some Christians?”*
- Q: *“Do you consider open-mindedness to be an absolute virtue? If not, then when is it better to be close-minded than open-minded?”*
- Q: *“If you disagree” with me, what right do you have trying to impose your values on me? Aren’t you being intolerant and close-minded whenever you judge me as being wrong?”*

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8. The “infinite regress of premises” argument.

- Nothing can be absolutely certain because every proof depends upon its premises being true.
- Aristotle and the principle of “First Principles” – “self-evident truths.” [Ref. p. 98.]
- Winnie-the-Poo’s epiphany.
- C. S. Lewis: We only search in order to find (Truth).

9. *“Many people disagree about truth; therefore, relativism must be true.”*

- Disagreement does not mean there is no truth.
- The “Elephant of Truth” parable.
- The allegation that “Everything is a matter of perspective” is either an absolute statement, in which case it is self-refuting, or else it is a relative statement and merely a matter of opinion.

10. *“There is no absolute truth; we all create our own reality.”*

- There are definite limitations to our capacity to alter reality just as there are unchangeable realities over which we have no control. [Ref. Argument #4 above.]

11. *“Reality is shaped by forces beyond our control.”*

- This is the inverse of Argument #10 above.]
- Metaphysical determinism.
- The pompous pretensions of Charles Darwin, Francis Crick, B. F. Skinner, *et al.*
- As human beings made in the image of God, we have (within certain parameters) a measure of free will.... Otherwise, we could not be held accountable for our moral failings.

12. *“In lieu of scientific proof, the burden of proof is on those who believe in absolute truth. Therefore, skepticism is the sensible default position.”*

- Q: *“If the burden of proof is always on the one who believes any idea, wouldn’t the principle also apply to those who are skeptics?”*

13. *“Logic is just Western thinking.”*

- In their efforts to refute Western thinking (including Christianity), critics must employ factual evidence, logic and reasoning – i.e., Western thinking.

14. *“I’m not a Christian, but I’m comfortable with my belief system; it works just fine for me.”*

- Q: *“Please define what you mean when you say your belief system ‘works.’”* Wouldn’t a legitimate belief system correspond to reality when it comes to...
 - (a) *The origins of the universe*
 - (b) *The origins of life*
 - (c) *The nature of Ultimate Reality*
 - (d) *The realities of human nature*
 - (e) *Our sense of meaning and purpose in life*
 - (f) *the existence of morality*
 - (g) *what happens when we die.*

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