

Defending Your Faith – Additional Readings

Defending Your Faith – *Additional Readings for Probe's course on basic apologetics*

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- The Christian Mind: www.probe.org/the-christian-mind
- Hindrances of the Mind: www.probe.org/hindrances-of-the-mind-the-scandal-of-evangelical-thinking
- Faith and Reason: www.probe.org/faith-and-reason

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- The Apologetics of Peter: www.probe.org/the-apologetics-of-peter
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- What Constitutes Good Proof? (Ronald Nash) [Access article by clicking here.](#)

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“Is Laminin All That Louie Giglio Says It Is?”

There are some crazy-popular YouTube [videos](#) featuring Louie Giglio about a cross-shaped molecule called Laminin that holds us together. What’s your take on it?

As a biologist myself I was intrigued when I heard about it and watched one of his YouTube videos. He really had to pump the crowd to get the reaction he wanted when he put it on screen. He almost always uses the crafted diagram, not an actual photograph, because the diagram shows the cross far better. Seemed a little forced to me.

Some observations:

1. The cross is not Jesus, so we are not held together by a symbol of Jesus. The cross is just the symbol of crucifixion, maybe.
2. Any adhesion molecule is going to need a way to interlock with another and this shape works well.
3. As mentioned above, when you see an electron micrograph (tiny tiny photo) the cross shape is not so clear. Textbooks will naturally lay it out differently.
4. Sorry, no goose bumps for me.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin, Ph.D.

Bringing the Truth of Christ to Your Generation

Are you a believer wondering if you're part of a dwindling population? Do people who follow hard after Christ—and show it by their actions and attitudes—seem to be a vanishing breed? Do you get the feeling that we're living in a post-Christian culture? We're not announcing the end of the Church in America and the West, but there is much cause for concern. We have the evidence straight from the mouths of believers—many of them caught up in captivity to the culture.

Here at Probe, we have been analyzing both existing and new original survey data to obtain a better grip on the realities of born-again faith in America today. Although the evangelical church has remained fairly constant in size as a percentage of our population over the last twenty years, these surveys show its impact on our society has continued to decline as the percentage of non-Christians has grown considerably over the same period. We see two reasons for this change:

1. The increased acceptance of pluralism removes the felt need to share our faith with others. In our new Barna survey, almost one half of all born-again 18- to 40-year-olds believe that Jesus is one way to eternal life, but Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, etc. when followed well, will also result in eternal life.

2. Captivity to the culture rather than to Christ's truth shapes believers' perspectives on nearly every aspect of life. The recent National Study of Youth & Religion, a survey

of 18- to 23-year-olds, shows that only a quarter of those affiliated with an evangelical church have a consistent set of biblical theological beliefs and that less than 2% of them combine those theological beliefs with a consistent set of biblical beliefs on behaviors and attitudes.

A combination of pluralism and cultural captivity eliminates both the reason for and the evidence of changed lives needed to effectively share the great news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, these problems are not unique to our time and country. In fact, these problems were key issues addressed in the letters of Peter, John and Paul back in the first century. In this article, we will use the writings of Peter to introduce Paul's response to this problem as laid out in the book of Colossians with special emphasis on Col. 4:2-6.

As advocates of apologetics and a biblical worldview, we often focus on 1 Peter 3:15, which exhorts us to always be ready to give a defense for the hope of the gospel to anyone who asks. However, Peter points out that our testimony for Christ, goes far beyond our ability to make a reasoned defense. In the first chapter of his letter, Peter provides an excellent description of the hope of the gospel. He makes it clear that only through the resurrection of Christ can we receive eternal life. He then goes on to describe the ways that we are called to "proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light." Specifically, we are told to proclaim Christ through:

- *our excellent behavior (1 Peter 2:11-17),*
- *our right relationships with others (1 Peter 2:18–3:14),*
- *a verbal explanation of why we believe the good news (1 Peter 3:15-16), and*
- *sound judgment for the purpose of prayer (1 Peter 4:7)*

As our behavior and relationships cause observers to ask us to fully explain the hope that is driving these actions, we have the opportunity to speak the truth to them with words empowered by prayer (1 Peter 3:15-16). So Peter makes it clear that pluralism and cultural captivity are counter to the message of the gospel as portrayed in the lives of genuine believers.

Given this message from Peter, let's take a more in-depth look at how Paul addresses this topic in his letter to the Colossians. In the first two chapters, Paul gives an in-depth description of what the gospel is and what it is not. In the New American Standard version, the reader is told to "set your mind on the things above" where we are living with Christ. Because we are residents of heaven, we need to consider our life on earth from that eternal perspective. From this point on in the letter, Paul lays out the same four instructions as Peter laid out on how we are to share Christ in this world.

In Colossians 3:5–17, we are given the standard for excellent behavior that our *new self* is being renewed to live in accordance with. As Paul makes clear in the first two chapters, this excellent behavior is not a qualification for heaven; after all, according to Colossians 2:9, the audience of believers is already "complete in Christ." Rather, the purpose of our excellent behavior is so the world can get a savory taste of heavenly living.

Then, in Colossians 3:18–4:1, Paul instructs us on the importance of **good relationships** in our families and at work. It is through our good relationships that the world can see the true meaning of "love your neighbor as you love yourself." As Paul points out, in all of these relationships "it is the Lord Christ whom you serve."

Paul then points to the remaining aspects of fully proclaiming Christ: through **our prayers** and **our words**. He addresses our prayer life as follows:

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak (Col. 4:2-4).

First, we are to devote ourselves to **prayer**, making it a strong player in ordering our lives. I think that “keeping alert in it” gives us the idea that we are to be ready to take something to prayer at any time during our busy daily schedule. Prayer is not to be strictly relegated to a set prayer time, but rather a real-time, always-on communication with God in response to the interactions and challenges of our day. Paul also indicates we should not be praying as a rote habit, but rather with an attitude of thanksgiving, knowing that God hears and responds to our prayers.

Secondly, Paul gives us a consistent topic for our **prayers**: that God would open up a door for the word in the lives of those who need to hear. We may live a life characterized by excellent behavior and good relationships. But, if we are not praying that God will use our lives to open up a door for the gospel, then we are short-circuiting the purpose of God in our lives. Let me say it directly to you: If you are not seeing doors opening for the word through your life, perhaps you should ask, “What am I praying for? Am I praying that God will open up opportunities for me to share Christ with others?”

Note that in the first chapter of Colossians, Paul explains the mystery of Christ we are to “speak forth” saying,

*. . . That I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the **mystery** which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is*

Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:25-27).

We are praying for an open door to speak forth so that everyone can receive the promise of eternal glory through receiving Christ in their lives. In other words, we need to actively ask God to give us entrée into others’ lives to communicate the gospel so they can receive the riches of eternal life along with us. Do we really want this? It’s a prayer God is sure to answer. If so, we’re living according to a biblical worldview in one more essential way. If not, we risk the loss of succeeding generations.

Finally, Paul addresses the importance of our **words** in fulfilling our purpose as followers of Christ:

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person (Col. 4:5-6).

We need to be wise in our relationships with those who don’t know Christ. The verse literally says we are to redeem the time spent with unbelievers. As followers of Christ, we have the privilege of taking the most temporal and earth-bound thing in the world, time, and converting it into something of eternal value through our behavior, our relationships, our prayers and the words we speak.

We are to make the most of each opportunity to season our speech with the grace of Christ. If our speech is regularly salted with references to God’s grace in our lives, we can tell from someone’s reaction how we should respond to them. If we are not looking for it, how can we know when God answers our prayers to provide an open door for the gospel? And why would we be praying for it unless we value what God is saying to us here?

In summary, we must make clear to upcoming generations of evangelicals that we have a consistent message from Christ and His apostles on these two points:

1. Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God and the only possible way to eternal life. Religious pluralism just doesn't work.

2. We are called to live distinctly different lives—as captives of Christ not our culture—in our behavior, relationships, prayers and speech. Why? In order to be representatives of the good news of Jesus Christ in a world that desperately needs Him.

If we choose to live our lives as if these statements are untrue, we have allowed ourselves to be deceived by the persuasive arguments of the world. Let's make the choice not to be taken captive and, instead, be bold and caring in proclaiming the truth for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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Tactics for an Ambassador: Defending the Christian Faith

Most Christians equate evangelism with conflict: an all-out assault on the beliefs and values of others. In our relativistic, live-and-let-live culture, even the most motivated believer feels like he's committing a crime by entering into a spiritual discussion. Are there ways to take the anxiety out of evangelism?

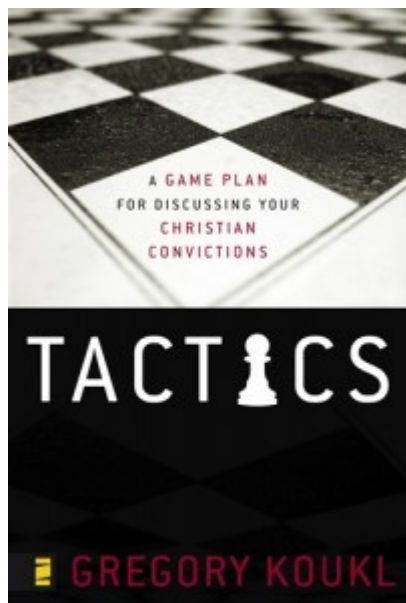
The idea of doing Christian apologetics, a fancy word for

defending the Christian faith, has lost some luster among church goers. The word conjures up images of conflict, anxiety, and even anger. But most of all, it generates thoughts of inadequacy and lack of confidence among those called to “give an answer” (1 Pet. 3:15) for the hope we have in Christ. Most people are trying to avoid conflict and the emotional fatigue that comes with defending a controversial set of beliefs that are often ridiculed in our culture.

We live in an era that values diversity and tolerance above all other virtues. Anyone claiming to have true knowledge about important things like the nature of God, good and evil, or the purpose of human existence will be accused of intolerance and a mean spirited attempt to impose their beliefs on their neighbors. You are allowed to believe almost anything today, as long as you don’t claim that it is true in any universal sense.



Part of the reason that Christians in American churches do so little evangelism is that they are convinced that it constitutes a spiritual invasion, an attack on the beliefs of a friend or neighbor who will resist this apologetic assault with everything he or she has to offer. They also believe that they will have failed miserably unless every encounter ends with someone trusting in Christ. It’s either total victory or utter defeat, and there are no innocent bystanders.



Gregory Koukl's book *Tactics* helps to give Christians the right perspective on evangelism and apologetics.^[1] He argues that the D-day invasion model for evangelism is counterproductive, and that seeing oneself as an ambassador for Christ makes more sense. We need fewer frontal assaults and more embassy meetings. The skills necessary to be a successful ambassador are quite different from those of an infantryman. Persuasion rather than conquest motivate the ambassador, and

one's style of communication can be as important as the content being conveyed.

According to Koukl, an effective ambassador for Christ must master three skill-sets. First, a Christian ambassador should possess a clear understanding of the message being offered by his sovereign King. Second, he needs to exhibit a personal character that reinforces the message he's been charged with, not distract from it. Finally, an ambassador needs sufficient wisdom to know how to communicate his message in a manner that draws people into dialogue and then to keep the conversation going. This kind of wisdom translates into specific tactics for communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ to a culture that has been preconditioned against the message.

Why Do We Need Tactics?

In his second letter to the church in Corinth, Paul says that we are Christ's ambassadors and that God has entrusted us with a message of reconciliation to a lost world (2 Cor. 5:20). But, although we have good news to share, Christians often don't feel capable or confident to share it.

Being tactical has to do with the way one arranges his or her resources. The effective tactician knows when to be aggressive

and when to hold back and gather information. Commanders on a battlefield don't unleash every weapon available at the beginning of a conflict, nor do ambassadors immediately unveil all of their arguments.

Apologists know that one of their most important tactics is the well placed question. Picking up important personal information about someone's background and worldview provides critical insight into the best way to steer the conversation. The ability to ask good questions, combined with good listening skills, helps to avoid stereotyping people in ways that can cause the conversation to end suddenly. It also shows that you care about someone as an individual, not just as, for example, a Mormon or a Muslim. Even when someone labels oneself, let's say as a Hindu, it's important to discover what that term means to them. Hinduism contains a wide variety of possible beliefs and it would be counterproductive to argue against something that this person doesn't adhere to. As you can imagine, being a good listener and shaping your comments to fit the individual will most likely have a greater impact on them than just memorizing a tract and delivering it regardless of the setting.

Employing wise tactics implies a thoughtful rather than emotional approach to conversations. Emotions can quickly get the best of us, especially if we are unprepared to respond to the questions and challenges that we may encounter. Good planning helps us to accomplish our goal of guiding people to the truth about Jesus. It can also help us to avoid provoking someone to anger. Once people get angry they rarely hear our defense of the gospel. It's even worse if we get angry.

Some might respond to this call for wise tactics in sharing Christ by saying that you cannot argue someone into heaven. I would respond that you cannot love someone into heaven either. Neither arguments, or love, or a simple telling of the gospel alone will win someone to heaven. Only the Holy Spirit can change someone's heart, but it doesn't follow that God doesn't

use these methods to build His kingdom.

Becoming Sherlock Holmes

Sometimes we Christians are tempted to dump our entire theological systems on anyone willing stay put long enough to listen. This doctrinal dump might be a light load for some but a train load for others. The problem is that we are often trying to answer questions that people haven't even thought up yet and we can add confusion and distractions to the gospel message without even being aware of it. How can we avoid making this mistake?

When we sense that a conversation is headed toward spiritual territory, perhaps our first inclination should be to ask good questions so that we better understand the person we desire to share Christ with. Good questions protect us from jumping to conclusions and to deal with the actual beliefs a person holds rather than some straw man position that we might prefer to attack. They also have the tendency to naturally promote further dialogue and shape the discussion.

Once a person makes a statement regarding what they believe to be true, good questions can be particularly helpful. If someone tells you that it is irrational to believe in God because there is no proof that He exists, you now have an opportunity to ask key questions that will make your eventual responses far more effective. The first category of questions seeks further information and clarification. For instance, you might ask "What do you mean by God?" or "What evidence would you count as proof towards His existence?" You might ask if he knows anyone who believes in God and whether or not they might have good reasons for doing so. Asking someone how they arrived at a conclusion or how they know something to be the case helps to differentiate between simple assertions of belief and reasons for holding that belief. People often make statements of belief without much forethought, and when

challenged they find that they have little more than an emotional attachment to their view.

Don't panic if you run into someone who is prepared to defend his or her views. Even if they have an extensive argument supporting their position, good questions can get you out of the hot seat and provide time to build a stronger case for your next encounter. You might ask them to slow down and present their case in detail so that you can understand it better. You can also tell them that you want time to consider their position and will get back to them with a response. Giving someone the podium to clearly present their beliefs is usually well received. Listen carefully to what is said and then do your homework.

Suicidal Arguments

One of the more interesting parts of *Tactics* are Koukl's chapters on ideas that commit suicide. These are commonly called self-refuting ideas or ideas that defeat themselves. A fancier description is that they are self-referentially incoherent. It doesn't take long to encounter one of these arguments when talking to people about religion.

A simple example of a suicidal view is expressed by the comment, "There is no truth," or the more humble version, "It is impossible to know something that is true for everyone, everywhere." This statement fails its own criteria for validity by denying universal truth claims and then making a truth claim implied to be universal. If what the statement professes is true, then it is false. It commits suicide because it violates the law of non-contradiction which prohibits something from being both true and false at the same time.

Christians who are highly influenced by a postmodern view of truth often make self-defeating arguments as well. Koukl gives

the example of a teacher in a Christian college classroom asking her students if they are God. When no hands went up she proclaimed that since they are not God they only have access to truth with a small t; only God knows Truth with a capital T. The implication is that small t truth is personal and limited. A student might ask the teacher if what she just offered is truth with a small t; if so, why should the students accept the teacher's limited personal view of reality over the student's perceptions?

Another argument that's quite popular and self-defeating is, "People should never impose their values on someone else." A quick response might be, "Does that express your values?" Of course it does. Then ask the person why he is imposing his values on you. His statement violates the criteria of validity that it tries to establish.

Even comments that seem to make sense at first suffer from suicidal tendencies. For instance, some have argued that since men wrote the Bible, and given that people are imperfect, the Bible is flawed and not inspired by God. The problem is that although people are imperfect it does not follow that everything they say or write is flawed. In fact, if everything a human says or writes is flawed, then this comment about the Bible is flawed. Just because people are capable of error, it doesn't mean that they will always commit error.

Helping people to see that their truth claims might be contradictory must be done gently. The point is not to merely defeat their position, but to help them to become open to other ways of thinking about an issue. It is in this context of gentle persuasion that the Holy Spirit can change a heart.

Sharpening Your Skills

The list of self-defeating truth claims can get rather long. For instance, it is common to hear people say something like

“science is the only source for truth.” The problem with this statement is that it is not scientific. There are no scientific experiments that one can perform which establish that science is the only source of truth. It is a self-defeating statement.

It is also quite popular to assume that all religions are basically the same and equally true. If this is the case, then Christianity is true. However, a basic teaching of Christianity is that the core teachings of other religions are false and that Jesus is the only source of salvation. Again, the statement defeats itself.

Ideas that commit practical suicide include the notion that it's wrong to ever condemn someone, and that God doesn't take sides. The first comment is a condemnation of all who condemn others. The second assumes that God is on their side, even though God doesn't take sides. If you think through these ideas you can be ready to gently point out their self-contradictory nature and move on to subjects more profitable.

When dealing with difficult ethical issues like abortion or homosexuality, it is always helpful to have a preplanned set of tactics. Koukl gives the example of a Christian who is asked his views about homosexuality by a lesbian boss. He begins his response by asking if the boss is tolerant of diverse points of view. Does she respect convictions different from her own? Of course, true tolerance means putting up with someone you disagree with. Since very few people want to label themselves as intolerant, they will usually affirm their support of the practice, protecting you from being attacked for giving your viewpoint.

Gregory Koukl's book contains many more great ideas about responding to attacks on Christian belief. At the end of the book he leaves us with what he calls the ambassador's creed. An ambassador should be ready to represent Christ. He should be patient with those who disagree. He should be reasonable in

his defense. And, finally, he should be tactical, adapting his approach to each unique person that God brings into his path. Our wise use of tactics should improve the “acoustics” in a conversation so that people can hear the gospel well.

Note

1. Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

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God on Trial

Recently my friend, a good and decent man, was on trial because his daughter accused him of sexually abusing her from age five to twelve. His attorney amassed so much evidence of his innocence that he kept saying, “You’ll never see the inside of a courtroom,” but he did. For several years we prayed faithfully for God to vindicate him of these heinous charges, along the way learning of the depth of their daughter’s troubled adolescence. She had accused him of sexual abuse once before, right after her parents committed her into an adolescent psych hospital after some particularly violent behavior, and she threatened them with “You’ll be sorry.” None of the mental health professionals believed her, and even though her behavior and arrests for theft screamed “I am not a truthful person,” she manipulated the prosecutor into painting her as a poor, abused child whose acting out was perfectly justified because of the horrific wounds on her soul.

In the courtroom, I watched this master manipulator at work. Not only did she give a fine performance on the stand, but she got her sister to testify on her behalf, proffering stories of

invented violence and meanness from both parents. Her mother and father could identify the incidents she referred to, with some aspects embellished and others that provided context and important details conveniently left out. As I listened to the testimonies, not even knowing yet what had really happened, my spirit was struck with an awareness that only grew as the testimonies went on: *we're seeing a lying spirit at work here.*

I was really surprised that my friend's defense attorney didn't address these vicious attacks on his character, even though they would have been easy to counter with the truth, so the judge was left to believe that they were true. And I was also surprised that the judge was also left with other wrong impressions because of what I suspect was inadequate defense strategy.

Nonetheless, with pounding hearts as the judge rendered his verdict at the end of the two-day trial, we were relieved to hear him announce "Not guilty." But first, the judge fixed my friend with an intense look of disapproval and basically yelled at him for being a terrible father and awful disciplinarian, telling him that he thinks he really is the monster his daughter portrayed him to be and that he did do the horrible things she accused him of, and God help him if he did. But there was sufficient evidence of his innocence to justify a "not guilty" verdict, and we thanked the Lord for it.

As I continued to think about this very difficult experience and emotionally charged time, I was struck by how we can easily put God on trial for terrible things we think He did or didn't do. There is an enemy with a lying spirit, Satan and his hordes of demons, who slander God to us, twisting and manipulating details to make us judge Him guilty of being an unfair or uncaring or impotent or sadistic God who has wronged us. A big part of the problem is that we don't have all the facts, and we are not hearing the countering truth that answer the lies or the twists that have been offered so enticingly.

That's what is at the root of the problem of pain and evil and suffering in our world: we don't have all the facts, and we are hearing slanderous lies, many unanswered, from a spirit who hates God and wants us to hate Him too.

In the end, my friend heard the precious words "not guilty," and in the End, God will also be proven to be righteous and true and good. But in the meantime, we need to be aware of the evil work of a lying spirit. And when we hear a lie about God, stand up and speak the truth so people hear the other side of the story. Proverbs 18:17 says, "The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him." May we equip ourselves to be able to answer the slanderous lies against our God from "the first to present his case."

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/god_on_trial
on June 22, 2010.

A Trial in Athens – Apologetics in the New Testament

Acts 17 provides one of the best examples of Paul engaging in apologetics in the New Testament. Rick Wade shows how Paul finds a point of contact with people to get a hearing.

The Apologist Paul

When we think of a biblical basis for apologetics, we typically think of Peter's brief comments about defending the faith in 1 Pet. 3:15. We don't typically think of *Paul* as an

apologist. But in his letter to the church at Philippi, Paul said that they were “partakers with [him] in the defense and confirmation of the faith” (1:7; see also v.16). Apologetics was a significant aspect of Paul’s ministry.

An event that has received a great amount of attention in the study of Paul’s ministry is his address to the Areopagus in Athens, recorded in Acts 17: 16-34. That address will be my topic in this article. Maybe we can be encouraged by Paul’s example to speak out for Christ the way he did.

Athens was a still a significant city in Paul’s day. Although not so much a major political power, it retained its prestige for its cultural and intellectual achievements.^{1} What we see today as the art treasures of the ancient world, however, Paul saw as images of gods and places for their worship. And there were a lot of them.

Being provoked by this in his spirit, Paul began telling people about Jesus. He made his way to the synagogue as he had done in various cities before.^{2} There he bore witness to Jews and to God-fearing Gentiles.

He also went to the Agora—the marketplace—to talk with the citizens of Athens.^{3} Among them were Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. After hearing him for a bit, the philosophers started calling Paul a “babbler,” a term of derision that meant literally “seed picker.” F. F. Bruce wrote that “[this word] was used of one who picked up scraps of learning here and there and purveyed them where he could.”^{4}

Peddlers of strange new religious beliefs were fairly common in those days. But this was a risky thing to do. It was unlawful to teach the worship of gods that hadn’t been officially authorized.^{5} Not long before this event, Paul was dragged into the marketplace in Philippi for “advocating customs unlawful for . . . Romans to accept or practice” (Acts 16:19-21). Eventually the people of Athens took Paul to the

Areopagus, a powerful court which had authority in matters of religion and philosophy.[{6}](#) They wanted to know about these strange new ideas he was presenting.

Paul had the opportunity to tell the highest religious and philosophical body in Athens about the true God.

Greek Religion

As Paul looked around the city of Athens, his spirit was provoked within him. The people of Athens had surrounded themselves with idols that obscured the reality of the one true God.

Other historical writings affirm the prominence of religion in Athens. For example, a second century writer named Pausanias claimed that “the Athenians are far more devoted to religion than other men.”[{7}](#) His description of Athens names statue after statue, temple after temple. There were statues of gods everywhere, even on the mountains. There were temples built to Athena, Poseidon, Hephaestus, Zeus, Artemis, Ares, and more.

Paul spoke of the altar to the unknown god (Acts 17:23). There were quite a few such altars in those days. The late New Testament scholar, Bertil Gärtner, wrote that these altars were erected “either because an unknown god was considered the author of tribulations or good fortune, or because men feared to pass over some deity.”[{8}](#)

Greco-Roman religion was mainly about myth and ritual. Myths were the religious explanations of life and the world, and rituals were reenactments of them. Religion was mostly about appeasing the gods with the proper sacrifices to gain their favor and avoid their wrath.

Although morality wasn't closely associated with religion, that isn't to say that the way one lived was irrelevant.[{9}](#) As described in Virgil's *Aeneid*, the souls of the dead were led

by the god Hermes to the depths of the earth to await the decision about their eternal place. The guilty were sent to “dark Tartarus.” The pious went to the Elysian Fields.^{10} In later years, the place of the blessed souls was said to be in the celestial realm. The afterlife, however, was still one of a shadowy existence.

There was no sacred/profane distinction in the Greco-Roman world; religion was not only a part of everyday life, it was integral to all the rest. Because of that, Christianity was not just a threat to religious belief; it threatened to upset all of culture. This is why Paul ran into such harsh opposition not only in Athens but also in Lystra and Philippi and Ephesus.

We live in a pluralistic society today. So did the apostles. But this did not stop the spread of the gospel. As we see at the end of Acts 17, some people did abandon their pluralism for faith in the one true God.

Epicureanism

When Paul went to the Agora in Athens to tell people about Jesus, he encountered some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.

Epicureanism and Stoicism had “an influence that eclipsed that of all rival [philosophical] schools.”^{11} The late British scholar Christopher Stead wrote that they “offered a practical policy for ordering one’s life which could appeal to the ordinary man. It has been argued that this was especially needed in the disorientation caused by the decline of the Greek city-states in the face of Alexander’s empire.”^{12}

The school of Epicureanism was founded by Epicurus in the fourth century BC. His primary goal was to help people find happiness and peace of mind. He taught that a happy life is one in which pleasure predominates. These pleasures shouldn’t, however, cause any harm or discomfort. They aren’t found in a

life of debauchery. Drinking and revelry just bring pain and confusion.[{13}](#) Pleasure was to be found in living a peaceful life in the company of like-minded friends. The intellectual pleasures of contemplation were the highest, because they could be experienced even if the body suffered.

There was more to Epicureanism than simply a lifestyle, however. Epicureans held two basic beliefs which stand in stark contrast to the message Paul preached to the Areopagus. These beliefs were thought to provide the basis for a tranquil life.

First, although Epicureans believed in the existence of the gods, they believed the gods had no interest in the affairs of people. Epicurus taught that the gods were very much like the Epicureans; they were examples of the ideal tranquil life. Although Epicureans might participate in religious ceremonies and “honour the gods for their excellence,”[{14}](#) they didn’t seek the gods’ favor through sacrifice.

A second key belief was the denial of the afterlife. Epicurus taught that after death comes extinction. According to their cosmogony, the world was created when atoms, falling through space, began to collide and form bodies. Like the heavenly bodies, we also are merely material beings. When we die, our material bodies decay and we no longer exist.[{15}](#) Thus, there was no fear of judgment in an afterlife.

Stoicism

As Paul mingled with the people in the Athenian Agora, he spoke not only with Epicureans, but with Stoics as well.

Stoicism was a school of philosophy founded by Zeno of Cyprus who lived from 335 to 263 BC. During a time of political instability, Stoicism “provided a means for maintaining tranquility amid the struggles of life.”[{16}](#) As with Epicurus, freedom from fear was a motivating force in Zeno’s

thought. [\[17\]](#)

What did the Stoics believe that released them from fear? Stoicism changed over the centuries, but this is a good general description.

While the Epicureans believed the gods didn't get involved in the affairs of people on earth, Stoics denied the existence of personal gods altogether.

Stoics believed the—universe began with fire that differentiated itself into the other basic elements of water, air, and earth. The universe was composed purely of matter. The coarser matter made up the physical bodies we see. The finer matter was defused throughout everything and held everything together. This they called *logos* (reason) or sometimes breath or spirit or even fire. The idea of *logos* meant there was a rational principle operating in the universe.

Because the universe was thought to be ordered by an inbuilt *principle* and not by a *mind*, Stoics were deterministic. This raises a question, though. If everything was determined, what would that mean for ethics? Virtue was of supreme importance for Stoics. How could one choose the good if one's actions are determined? One answer given was this: while *people* had the freedom to choose, the universe would do what it was determined to do. But if one wanted to live well, one had to live rationally in keeping with the rational order of the universe. To do otherwise was to make oneself miserable.

Some Stoics believed that the universe would one day erupt in a great fire from which would come another universe. Others thought the universe was eternal. Some believed that in future universes, people would repeat their lives over and over. Others believed that death was the end of a person's existence. In either case, there was no immortality as we understand it.

Thus, Stoics sought peace in their troubled times by denying the existence of meddling gods and an afterlife that would bring judgment.

Paul's Speech

When Paul was allowed to speak before the Areopagus, he made a strategic move. By pointing to the altar to the unknown god, and later referring to the comments of the Greeks' own poets, he averted the charge of introducing new gods. At least on the surface!

Having brought their admitted ignorance to light, Paul told them about the true God. His declaration that a personal God made the heavens and the earth was a direct challenge to the Epicureans and Stoics. His announcement that God didn't live in temples or need the service of people was a challenge to the practices of the religious Greeks.

Paul told them that God wasn't far off and unknown. The phrase "in him we live, and move, and have our being," which refers to Zeus, likely comes from Epimenides of Crete. The line, "we are his offspring," is found in a poem by Aratus.^{18} Paul wasn't equating Zeus with God, but was telling them *which* God they were really near to.

Then Paul delivered a charge to the people. God was overlooking their time of ignorance and calling them to repent.^{19} This was more than simply a call to a virtuous life as with the philosophers or a call to perform the required sacrifices to the gods. This repentance was necessary, Paul said, for God has set a time to judge the world through His appointed man, and that judgment is assured by the raising of that man from the dead. (2:26)

This was too much for the people of Athens for a few reasons. First, Paul presented an entirely different cosmology. History, he told them, was bound by the creation of God on one

end and the judgment of God on the other. Second, there was no room for a historical resurrection in Greek thought. The dyings and risings of their gods didn't occur in space-time history.

By attacking the Greeks' religion, Paul attacked the foundations of their whole cultural structure. New Testament scholar Kavin Rowe writes that, because religion was so interwoven with the rest of life, Paul's visit to Athens –and to Lystra, Philippi, and Ephesus as well– “[displays] . . . the collision between two different ways of life.”^{20}

The gospel we proclaim doesn't just lay claim to our religious beliefs. It affects our entire lives. Paul knew what was central to the Greeks, what was the core issue that had to be addressed. Likewise, we need to know the fundamental worldview beliefs of our neighbors and how to address them with an approach that will get us a hearing.

Notes

1. F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 349.
2. Acts 13 gives a good picture of how Paul presented the gospel to his fellow Jews.
3. The Web site Ancient Athens 3D gives an interesting visual representation of the Agora, the marketplace, as it looked in Paul's day. ancientathens3d.com/romagoralEn.htm.
4. Bruce, *Acts*, 351, n. 20.
5. Charles Carter and Ralph Earle, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 256, and Richard N. Longenecker, “The Acts of the Apostle,” *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelin, gen. ed., J.D. Douglas, assoc. ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976-1992), CD.
6. See C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (New York: Oxford, 2009), 31.
7. Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, “Attica”, 1:24:1, written

c. AD 160, www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/pausanias-bk1.html

8. Bertil Edgar Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation*, Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis, vol. 21 (Uppsala, 1955), 245, quoted in Everett Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 270. See also the discussion in Carter and Earle, *Acts*, 259.

9. This may seem inconsistent. But one must keep in mind that religion wasn't one aspect of life that was clearly distinguishable from the rest. Life was all of a piece in the ancient world.

10. Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 233.

11. Christopher Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge, 1998), 40.

12. Ibid.

13. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, quoted in Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, bk. 1, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1985), 407-08.

14. Copleston, *History*, 406.

15. Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity*, 42.

16. Kelly James Clark, Richard Lints, and James K.A. Smith, *101 Key Terms in Philosophy and Their Importance for Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), s.v. "Stoicism."

17. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 333.

18. Carter and Earle note that this line also appears in Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus. I credited Aratus with the line because F. F. Bruce notes that Kirsopp Lake "points out that the immediately following lines of Aratus's poem have 'a strong general resemblance to v. 26 of the Areopagitica'" (Bruce, *Acts*, 360, n. 50). It could be that Aratus got it from Cleanthes (cf. Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 37-38).

19. Some Christians hold that the Greek word for "repent," *metanoēō*, means merely to change one's mind. This sometimes comes up in Lordship salvation debates. The basic meanings of the two parts of the word aren't sufficient for understanding its use. *Metanoēō*, in the New Testament, denotes conversion.

“The predominantly intellectual understanding of *metanoeō* as change of mind plays very little part in the NT. Rather the decision by the whole man to turn round is stressed. It is clear that we are concerned neither with a purely outward turning nor with a merely intellectual change of ideas.” Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1975), s.v., “Conversion, 358).

20. Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 50, 51.

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Teaching at Word of Life in Romania & Hungary

Editor's Note: The vision of Probe Ministries—to free 50 million captives and build them into confident ambassadors for Christ by 2020—promises to involve some 20 million believers overseas. Trips by Probe staff members near the time of this writing include destinations like Burundi, the Philippines, Belarus and—the topic of this report featuring Don and Deanne Closson, two of our staff veterans—Hungary and Romania. We hope you'll feel you have an insider's view of helping people think biblically and prepare to pass on a Christian worldview.

One of the things I enjoy about working at Probe is our tradition of partnering with churches and other ministry organizations. An example is Probe's partnership with Word of Life Fellowship (WOL) both here in the U.S. and overseas. The relationship began when our National Director Kerby Anderson taught at WOL in New York, and later at some of their international campuses. Additional Probe staff members began teaching other courses. In January, 2010, my wife Deanne and I

had the privilege of traveling to WOL schools in Romania and Hungary.



Actually, our invitation to Romania came about during our first trip to Hungary in 2008. Deanne and I became friends with students Alin and Iuliana Muntean and their 4-year-old daughter, Ruthie. Alin and Iuliana were mature beyond their years, serious students, and active evangelists in the various WOL outreaches. When we let them know that we were returning to Hungary this year, they invited us to Romania to teach as well! WOL Bible Training and Discipleship Center is only two years old but already has fourteen students. Needless to say, we were thrilled to accept their invitation.



Our four-day stay in Romania was a busy one. My class was made up of seven second-year students. I taught five hours a day on Apologetics and Worldviews as well as a one hour chapel that challenged our very capable translator, Wanna. She had an amazing ability to

translate difficult abstract ideas from English into Romanian. Her skills became evident as the students asked pertinent questions that demonstrated their grasp of the topics. They were eager to receive the apologetics information on the reliability of the Bible, the deity of Christ, answers to the problem of evil and other topics. I also spent one evening helping them to think through a response to the local Jehovah's Witnesses whom most had encountered. It was a lively discussion particularly when they realized they now have biblical answers to those false claims. Deanne sat in on the classes to interact with the students too. She prayed with the girls during a devotion and is continuing friendships with them via email.



Although we only had a few days to spend with Alin and his family, we sensed the considerable burden they were carrying as temporary leaders of the ministry. The director of WOL Romania is in the U.S. until May on a fundraising trip, leaving Alin and Iuliana in charge. Alin was not only overseeing the large building project but was also teaching classes, leading the other staff members, and serving with the various ministry outreaches into the local community.





On top of that, Alin, Iuliana, and Ruthie (now almost seven) live humbly in two of the small student dorm rooms because there isn't enough money yet to finish the construction of their WOL house (shown here). We were touched by Alin's love for the Lord, his family, and a desire to maintain a healthy team atmosphere in light of a demanding work schedule. Please join us in praying for this new outpost for the gospel in Romania and for Alin, Iuliana, and little Ruthie as they depend on God for their needs.

As Iuliana wrote in a recent email:

Thank you so much for praying for us. We need it so much! Thank you for your sensitivity for us and the students as well. God is faithful and will do even more we can ask or think. Thank you for your care!

From Bucharest we were on to Budapest. Fog made it impossible to land in Budapest or at a secondary airport so we circled back to our starting point and the airline put us up in a nice hotel. One benefit to our detour was getting to know Andrassy, a 29-year-old Romanian businessman who lives in Budapest who translated for us. When he found out that I was teaching apologetics at a Bible institute in Budapest, he mentioned that he had grown up going to Bible camps similar to those of WOL. Andrassy told us that he was recently engaged to be married and had yet to find a church to attend in Budapest. We

offered to ask our friends in Hungary for recommendations and to send them to him, which we did.



Our time in Hungary was also extremely rewarding. I had thirty students from nine different countries for a course on the cults covering the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientology, Kabala, the Unification Church, and others. Thanks to the expertise of our translator Chris, the students seemed to enjoy the class and always had great questions. In an hour-long chapel I offered a response to the accusations by the so-called "New Atheists" that there is not enough evidence for God's existence and that religion is the major source of wars in the world. I could tell that this information was new to the students. Afterwards, one student asked if he could meet with me. We ended up discussing for hours a variety of topics over two separate days. Since his list of questions about the Bible and Christianity was long, I agreed to work through the ones we didn't cover and email my replies to him. It was encouraging to me that this young man is serious enough about his faith that he wants answers to important questions.



The WOL ministry in Hungary is having a significant impact both in the Bible Institute and with evangelistic teams. While we were there, a team was invited to present a drama in Czech schools. Eleven boys met with one of the WOL staff members to talk about Christ after seeing the play, "Born to a Living Hope." WOL is very serious about evangelism and has effective tools to share Christ in schools, prisons, and in open-air settings. The ministry also has ambitious plans for the 100-year-old historic structure on their property. They have just rebuilt the roof of the building and hope to build new classroom and office space on the third floor.

Our time in Romania and Hungary was a great blessing. Now that we are home, I am meeting with a young man studying as an intern with Probe. I met John Nienaber, an Indiana native, when he was a student at WOL Hungary in 2008. He caught the "apologetics bug" and has wanted to learn more ever since.





WOL has ministry in sixty countries around the world and certainly could benefit from our prayers and support. Please pray for Alin and Iuliana Muntean in Romania as well as their students and staff. Pray too for Director Alex Konya, the students, and the rest of the staff in Toalmas, Hungary, that they will be able to continue their renovations for improved classrooms and as they witness to those in the surrounding eastern European nations. Pray for John Nienaber as he gains new tools for his apologetics toolbelt. Finally, pray for the Probe staff (Pat Zukeran was in Hungary last November and Michael Gleghorn taught there in March) as we link arms with partners such as Word of Life and other great ministries.

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Apologetics and the Age of the Universe

Appendix B: Apologetics and the Age of the Universe

Note: This is one of two appendices for Steve Cable's article [Are We Significant in This Vast Universe?](#)

Is the apparent age of the universe a critical issue for Christian apologetics? I would argue that when we make it a critical issue, we are likely to add another barrier to belief rather than tearing down barriers against belief in Jesus Christ as our Savior.

How should we look at the age of the universe in applying emerging scientific observations in defending our faith? In this appendix, we will take a brief look at this question.

The vast majority of theologians and researchers agree that the actions of the inorganic world are normally governed by a set of physical laws and forces: e.g. gravity, subatomic forces, magnetism, and light waves. By understanding these laws, we can predict both the future and past behavior of physical objects ranging from galaxies to our solar system to airplanes to golf balls. As Christians, we recognize that our Creator God can and does intervene at times to suspend or alter these laws in order to accomplish His purpose: e.g. Jesus walking on the water, healing of the sick. Thus, one of the ways to recognize the presence of our Creator is when we use our understanding of these laws to model backward from our present state and we come to a state in the past that is inconsistent with our current reality. In other words, it appears that some power must have intervened with the natural processes we currently observe because it would be practically impossible to get to our present state simply through natural processes.

Following this logic, there is a growing body of evidence from scientific observation consistent with the following two hypotheses:

1. Life as it exists on this earth is the result of the intentional work of an intelligent designer

2. Humans are significant to the designer of this universe

These two hypotheses are obviously consistent with the Bible. As apologists these hypotheses are very important because they support a biblical prerequisite for coming to God:

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Heb 11:6).

According to this passage, in order to come to God, we must believe that a God exists and that He wants us to seek Him. In many cases, if we can debunk the popular notion that science proves that there is no Creator God who cares about us, we can open the door to see what the Bible tells us about Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection.

The empirical evidence supporting these two hypotheses is strong whether the earth is 13.7 billion years old or 6,000 years old. However, some of the evidence for the significance of life on earth is based on looking at what it would take to get from an ancient creation event, e.g. big bang, to the current, observable universe. Should we ignore that evidence because it does not assume a young universe interpretation of Genesis 1? Or should we use this evidence to show that even the oldest estimated age for our universe still demands a transcendent Creator to account for life on this earth? I suggest that we don't have to make the age of the universe the central point in defending our faith against those who do not believe in our Creator God and who need to understand that God sacrificed His Son, Jesus to provide for their redemption from this decaying universe.

One of the areas where this tension between fixed physical laws and supernatural intervention applies is in scientific theories for the origin of the universe. The prevailing

scientific view is that the universe is expanding at an increasing rate. Combining this view with what we know about the relevant natural forces implies that all the matter in the universe began expanding from a single point approximately 13.7 billion years ago. If we take as an axiom that the correct interpretation of general revelation through scientific observation and special revelation through the Bible must be consistent, there are three possible situations consonant with that axiom:

1. The scientific data is incomplete, corrupted, or misinterpreted. There are many instances where the current prevailing view of science has been shown by new evidence to be wrong, so this is a definite possibility.

2. The universe is indeed expanding, but it is much less than 13.7 billion years old because it was created at a point where it was already spread out to near its current volume. This is the apparent age argument, i.e., when God creates a living being such as Adam, Adam is going to appear to be physically mature even when he was only seconds old. There are issues with applying this apparent age concept to the age of the universe. For example, we can observe supernovae that are hundreds of thousands of light years away. If the earth is less than 10,000 years old, then we are observing the explosions of stars that never really existed. Why would God want to confuse us in this way? Perhaps because these "past" supernovae are consistent with what would have happened to create the current state of our universe.

3. The interpretation of Genesis 1 as defining the time from the beginning of the universe to the creation of Adam as literally 120 hours is not actually the intent of that passage. This interpretation issue is a continuing topic of debate among evangelical scholars who believe that the Bible is God's inerrant special revelation.

I can appreciate those who consider finding out which of these

three alternatives is correct to be an important life issue. But, it seems clear that selecting the right answer is not a prerequisite for salvation (e.g. see Romans 10:9-10). I encourage Christians to understand how the current state of scientific knowledge can be used as a bridge to share the gospel. For a more detailed discussion of contrasting Christian views on the origins of the universe, see the article "[Christian Views of Science and Earth History](#)" on our website.

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Advocacy Apologetics: Finding Common Ground as a Way to the Gospel

As you examine your life, can you think of any lessons you wish you had learned earlier than you did?

I'm really glad I learned *this* lesson very early in my career as a Christian communicator. It's made a world of difference.

God has graciously sent me presenting Christ and biblical truth on six continents before university students and professors, on mainstream TV and radio talk shows, with executives, diplomats and professional athletes.

He's put me speaking in university classrooms and auditoriums, in embassies, boardrooms, and locker rooms. He's had me writing for mainstream newspapers, magazines, and on the Internet about controversial subjects like sex, abortion, the afterlife, and reasons for faith.

As you might imagine, I've encountered many skeptics and objections to faith. I've learned much from my critics, the unpaid guardians of my soul.

But if I hadn't learned this crucial lesson at the outset, would all those outreach doors have opened?

The Lesson

I learned it on an island in a river in Seoul, Korea. Over a million believers were gathered for Expo 74. One speaker that day was a prominent church leader from India who discussed how to best communicate the message of Jesus to the types of Buddhists in India. Here's my paraphrase of his advice.

We could use two methods, he said. One was to begin by stressing the differences between Buddhism and Christianity. But that often gets people mad and turns them off.

A second way involved agreeing with the Buddhist where we could. We could say something like this: "I know that you as a Buddhist believe in Four Noble Truths." (This is foundational to many strains of Buddhism.) "First you believe suffering is universal. As a follower of Jesus, I also believe suffering is everywhere. It needs a solution.

Second, you believe that suffering is caused by evil desire or craving. I believe something very similar; I call this evil desire sin."

Third, you believe that the way to eliminate suffering is to eliminate craving. I feel selfishness needs to be eliminated, too. And fourth, you feel we eliminate craving by following the Eightfold Path: right understanding, right aspiration, right behavior, etc.

Here's where I would suggest an alternative. For many years I, too, tried to eliminate my selfishness by seeking to think and do the right thing. But you know what happened? I became very

frustrated because I lacked the power to do it. I realized that if I relied on God, He could give me the inner power I needed.”

Do you see the contrast between those two methods of approaching someone who differs with you? The first emphasizes differences and has the emotional effect of holding up your hands as if to say “Stop!” or “Go away!” The second begins by agreeing where you can. Your emotional hands are extended as if to welcome your listeners. If you were the listener, which approach would you prefer?

Start by Agreeing where You Can

In communicating with skeptics, start by agreeing where you can. You’ll get many more to listen.

I call this approach Advocacy Apologetics. You’re approaching the person as an advocate rather than an adversary. You believe in some of the same things they do. Expressing agreement can penetrate emotional barriers and communicate that you are *for* that person rather than *against* them. It can make them more willing to consider areas of disagreement.

Don’t compromise biblical truth; but agree at the start where you can.

Paul used this approach. He wrote ([1 Corinthians. 9:19-23 NLT](#), emphasis mine):

I have become a servant of everyone so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with the Jews, I become one of them so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with the Gentiles who do not have the Jewish law, I fit in with them as much as I can.

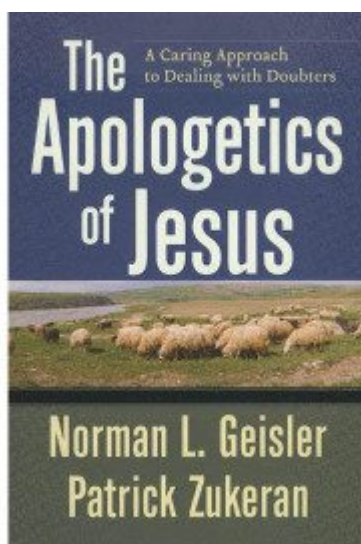
Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone so that I

might bring them to Christ. I do all this to spread the Good News.

Here's an experiment: The next time you encounter someone who differs with you, take a deep breath. Pray. Ask God to help you identify three areas of agreement. Can't find three? How about one? Discuss that first. Become an advocate for them. Maybe you'll oil some stuck emotional and intellectual gears and nudge someone in His direction.

Apologetics of Jesus: Interview with Author Patrick Zukeran

Written by Probe Ministries Administrator



Question: This is a very interesting topic, *The Apologetics of Jesus*. What inspired this book?

Zukeran: While I was in a doctoral class with Dr. Norman Geisler, he stated one day in class, "You may be surprised to

discover, the greatest apologist is Jesus Himself. Someone needs to write a book on the apologetics of Jesus. In 2000 years of Christian history, no one has written on this subject." The idea of studying the apologetic methods of Jesus and knowing that no one had written on the subject really stirred my interest. It thus became my doctoral project.

Question: You said that after you finished, you realized this would be an extremely important book for the body of Christ. Why do you feel this is a critically significant work?

Zukeran: There is a lot of confusion regarding the role and the need for apologetics in ministry. Many Christians believe our faith in Christ involves a blind leap of faith. In other words, our faith calls for acceptance of Christ without any reason or evidence. Therefore, in evangelism Christians should simply preach the gospel and the Holy Spirit will do the rest. When Christians are challenged by other worldviews or ideas of the culture, we often fail to offer well-reasoned and substantial answers. Often I hear Christians say, "You just need to believe" or "You simply need to have faith." That is not a good answer to an unbelieving world or even to Christians who are questioning their faith because they have been confronted by a challenge to the credibility of Bible or the claims of Christ. Jesus commanded us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Answers like these simply do not exemplify what it means to love God with our minds. Apologetics is the defense of the Christian faith. Apologetics uses reason and presents compelling evidence to communicate the message of Christ, defend the message of Christ and challenge unbelief. Apologetics was an essential component in the ministry of Christ and if it was important in His ministry, it is crucial for Christians as we engage our world for Christ as He commanded and modeled.

Question: Many Christians do not realize Jesus was an apologist. Scores of books have been written on His teaching methods, leadership skills, prayer life, etc... Few realize

apologetics was an important part of His ministry. Why is that?

Zukeran: Apologists defend the message of Christ but when it comes to Jesus, He was the message. Perhaps that is why this aspect of His ministry is overlooked. When you study the life of Christ, He made some astounding claims and He did not expect or want people to take a blind leap of faith. He presented reasons and compelling evidence to support His claims.

Question: People may be asking, since Jesus was God incarnate, why did He need to give a defense of His claims?

Zukeran: As our creator, Jesus understood that we are created in the image of God. God is a rational and morally perfect being and we reflect His nature. Jesus understood that we use reason and evidence to make our daily decisions. For example, when you see two fruit stands how do you decide which one to go to? If one looks clean, has bright looking fruit, and the owner is neatly dressed while the other one looks dirty, the fruit does not look as fresh and you spot a few flies buzzing in the area, which stand will you choose? Here's another example. What if you enter a hotel lobby and see two elevator doors open. One elevator has lights, the music is playing and people flow in and out of it. Next to it the elevator has no lights on, there is no music playing and you do not see people entering it. Which elevator will you choose? We examine the evidence and use our reasoning ability to make daily decisions. We do the same when it comes to deciding what we will believe and who we will entrust our life and eternal destiny to. Jesus understood that when it comes to persuading people to believe in His message, He would need to provide good reasons and compelling evidence and He did.

Question: What are some of the apologetic methods of Jesus?

Zukeran: Jesus used several apologetic methods. He used reason

and presented logical arguments to defend His claims and expose error. He used the evidence from the Scriptures, prophecy, His miracles, the resurrection and more. When you study His apologetics, you really appreciate the brilliance of our Lord. He truly was the greatest thinker as well as a powerful communicator.

Question: There are some passages that appear to teach against the use of reason and evidence such as Matthew 12:38-39. When Jesus was asked to perform a sign by the He rebukes them saying, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah” (12:39). Jesus refused to show them evidence. Isn’t this a passage that speaks against the use of apologetics?

Zukeran: One of the chapters in the book addresses several alleged anti-apologetic passages. There are no passages that speak against the use of reason and evidence. Jesus and the apostles did not ask people to make a commitment to Christ without good reasons. For example, to understand Jesus’ response, you must understand the context. Christ had already performed numerous miracles (Matt. 4:23-25, 8:1-4, 5-13, 28-34, 9:1-7, 9:18-26, 11:20). In fact, this confrontation occurs closely after Jesus’ healing of a man’s withered hand (12:13), and the deliverance of a demon-possessed individual (12:22-23). Despite these miracles, the Pharisees demanded that Jesus perform another sign. Knowing they were not sincere in their demand, He refused to appease them. Misunderstanding passages like these confuse Christians and their understanding of apologetics.

Question: What was it like writing this work with Dr. Geisler?

Zukeran: I have read many of Dr. Geisler’s works and he has had a great influence on my life. I consider him one of the premier defenders of the faith of our generation. It was a great privilege to work on this book with Him and Dr. Ron

Rhodes. They would not let me get away with weak arguments and often pointed out areas and questions I needed to address. It is too bad some of those issues are left out of the book, but they really challenged me to write and think at a higher level. Perhaps you could compare it to football player receiving a chance to play under the great Tom Landry or a basketball player learning under John Wooden, or an investor working with Warren Buffett. I learned a lot but also realized I still have a lot more to learn. It was valuable to see the precision in their arguments, and their foresight in anticipating how opponents may respond. These were valuable examples for me to learn from.

Question: How do you hope this book will impact the body of Christ?

Zukeran: One of the concerns of Christian apologists is that the body of Christ is neglecting the mind. Since the Great Awakening and the preaching of men like Charles Finney, there has been a shift in evangelical Christianity. We have moved to a more emotional faith based on a moving experience. But, an emotional faith can only take you so far. Sooner or later, you will need reasons upon which to base your faith when it is challenged whether through a tragedy or an intellectual challenge. The unbelieving world also needs to see that the Christian worldview offers the best answers to the issues we face in our culture. I hope when Christians read this book and see that Jesus modeled how to love God with our minds, they will be encouraged to engage their minds with their faith in Christ.

Question: Some may see this as an intellectual book. However, you state that there are a lot of practical lessons we can apply from the study of Jesus' apologetics. What are some examples of lessons we can learn and apply?

Zukeran: Since we use our reasoning capacity in daily life, apologetics is tremendously practical in our evangelism. If we

are going to have ministries that will engage a lost world that is in rebellion to God, we will need compelling reasons but we will also need to know how to present our case to various audiences, often a hostile one. Jesus was the master at this. This does not mean He was always successful, but He did show us how to communicate a powerful message. Each chapter ends with practical applications we can apply when engaging our culture for Christ. Hopefully, we will all be more effective witnesses for Christ as a result of studying the model of Christ.

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