

APOLOGETICS 101: ASK QUESTIONS

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When we do apologetics, it is important to listen much more than we speak. (Except of course, when we give formal presentations.) Learn to ask lots of questions and listen carefully. Questions provoke self-reflection. The answers provided often reveal a diagnosis of the soul and mind.

Consider Jesus and the many questions He asked. One author wrote: "In the Gospels Jesus asks many more questions than he answers. To be precise, Jesus asks 307 questions. He is asked 183 of which he only answers 3. Asking questions was central to Jesus' life and teachings." Here are a few examples: "I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?" (John 3:12), "Do you want to get well?" (John 5:6), "Does this offend you?" (John 6:61), "Why is my language not clear to you?" (John 8:43), "Is that your own idea, or did others talk to you about me?" (John 18:34).

Or, consider Paul. In Romans he asks many provocative questions, such as: "But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?" (2:3), "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" (2:4), "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" (7:24), "What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there?" (9:14), "Who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it?" (9:20).

In addition, think about Paul's polemic vocabulary against unbelievers and opponents in the book of Acts: "confound," "refute," "dispute," "convince," "win over," "prove," "debate," "argue," "dissent," "discuss," "allege," "persuade," "explain," and "point out." Paul was not shy about argumentation. And clearly, argumentation implies dynamic questioning.

Here are a few questions we might pose to our dialogue partners within an apologetic encounter:

What is the ultimate explanation of everything?
Why is there something rather than nothing?
Why do you care, if you are an atheist?
How do you know, if you are an atheist?
Why don't you go to church, if you are not sure that God exists, since you are an agnostic?
When did you stop believing in God? Why?
What is your definition of God?
What is there any good in the world?
Why is there so much evil and suffering in the world?
Where do the conditions that make this discussion possible, despite our different perspectives, come from, like logical and grammatical norms, consciousness, and a sense of right and wrong?

We should ask questions designed to probe the moral-spiritual consciousness of our neighbor. Attempt to elevate their spiritual self-awareness. Try to demonstrate (better yet, enable them to discover for themselves) the realization that their experience of God's goodness in life is in

tension with the wrath of God they deserve (See Acts 14:17 and Rom 2:4.) Help them to see the moral dichotomy of judging others while exempting themselves.

Ask questions that help them see how they assume the need for moral law, but usurp the role of law-giver for themselves. In other words, show them how they do not and cannot live by their own convictions and that they are really presupposing their creator, Lord, and judge all along.

Again, probe your neighbor's heart and mind. Pray that the Spirit leads you and gives you discernment about how to proceed. Look for the dissonances in your friend's soul, between what they really know and what they actually do or say. Look for inconsistencies between their professed belief and worldview, and what they really practice. And, keep in mind that often intellectual arguments are simply a mask or shield to protect a soul embittered by suffering due to sin, their own sin, and damage done to them through the sins of others.

When we do apologetics, we must learn to ask lots of questions and talk a lot less.