

CHAPTER 5: APOLOGETICS IN ACTION

And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled'.

- Jesus, Luke 14:23

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...

- Jesus, Matthew 28:19

Always [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

- 1 Peter 3:15

Go. Send. Or Disobey.

- John Piper

Apologetics should never exist in a vacuum. The context of the classic verse in the New Testament in which Peter invokes the Greek word “apologia” is that of evangelism. Good apologetics is inseparable from gospel evangelism. I often describe apologetics as one (of many) essential tools that the evangelist needs to have in his or her toolbelt. Bear in mind here that all Christians are called to be evangelists.

The evangelist is not just the guy who stands up and preaches on Sunday, nor is it just the missionary somewhere in southeast Asia, nor is it just the guy reading the Bible out loud on the campus commons. If a person is a Christian, she is called to evangelize—to share her faith with others, announcing the kingdom of Christ. If you’re born again, then you are an evangelist! The question is whether you will discharge that duty well and responsibly or whether you will be negligent and passive.

Many Christians I meet seem to think that apologetics is just a bunch of heady, nerdy stuff on par with a book club that sits around discussing C.S. Lewis books over coffee. While an apologetics discussion group can be a good thing, and while there's a definite role for private study of apologetics to strengthen one's convictions, the real "connection point" of apologetics occurs as we relate the timeless truths of who God is and what He has done, specifically in Christ, to reveal Himself to the world. In this final chapter, I want to share with you some practical advice for how you can become a more effective apologist and evangelist. I do not wish to separate those terms, as I am convinced that they were never intended to be separated. All effective evangelists are apologists, and all effective apologists need to be evangelists!

As we take the gospel of the risen Christ into an unbelieving world, we will often find ourselves in one of two broad classes of apologetics interactions. As in a football contest, we will either be on offense or on defense at any given moment. These positions are sometimes referred to as "positive apologetics" (being on the offense) or "negative apologetics" (playing defense). Don't confuse "offense" with being "offensive". Those are two very different ideas, although Truth—even Truth spoken in love—will often seem offensive to the lost. Also, don't take the word "negative" in "negative apologetics" to suggest that this is somehow depressing or bad or to be avoided. It merely means that we are answering challenges from skeptics about Truths like the existence of God, the truthfulness of the Bible, and the exclusivity of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as the way to be made right with God.

We might also distinguish between "passive" and "active" opportunities to present and defend Truth. Passive opportunities are more common when we find ourselves in a situation where Christianity is being challenged. For example, suppose you're playing recreational soccer and a biology major on your team disparages a teammate who has to leave early to attend a Bible study. "I can't believe people still believe the Bible," she comments to you, not realizing that you're also a Christian, "Science disproved creationism a long time ago!" If you choose to respond (and I would suggest that you typically *should* respond), then you are in more of a passive type situation, since you didn't bring up the Bible and its ostensible conflict with modern science; she did. On the other hand, we can create active opportunities by initiating conversations about the nature of Truth,

Christian beliefs, faith, spirituality, et cetera with those who God, through His providence, has placed in our path. There are, of course, many ways to do this, and I'll give you a handful of strategies that I have found to be particularly effective below.

Before we look at those strategies, I want to be forthright about the attitudes you will encounter when you endeavor to be faithful to the commission of Jesus by taking Truth onto the turf of the nonbelievers. You may have already noticed that the world, in general, does not like the message of the Biblical gospel. Evangelism and apologetics are typically not the best ways to make new friends (although that *can* happen).

This is because Truth divides before it unites. Truth will repel and even engender hostility from those who are committed to living in lies. Most typical are the angry responses that, by proclaiming Truth, you are “narrowminded” and not “inclusive”, you are “judging” people, and possibly even that you are “spreading hate”. People will try to paint you as the bad guy in an effort to silence you and to keep from having to deal with the message of Truth you are delivering to them.

It probably doesn't surprise you that this is how many (perhaps most) non-Christians react to the message that Christianity is not only true, but that it alone represents true, saving faith. What might surprise you is that a large (and growing) number of professing Christians have a similar attitude towards evangelism. We're not just talking about “progressive” mainstream Christians whose denominations have jettisoned the authority of the Bible and most of the central tenets of historic Christianity. I also am including those who would identify as Bible-believing “evangelical” Christians—people who would, on paper, agree that the Bible is the truthful, authoritative standard for Christian faith and practice and that faith in Jesus Christ alone leads to salvation.

In other words, you should not be surprised if many of your fellow church members or even friends in your youth or college group or house fellowship are not supportive of any type of deliberate, explicit presentations of the gospel outside of the wall of the church building. I would like to have a dollar for every time a professing Christian has told me that I'm “doing it wrong”! According to a recent report by the Barna Group (an evangelical Christian polling firm), half of all evangelical Christians under age 40 say that it is always wrong for a Christian to

share his or her faith with a person of a different religion or belief system. I've frequently heard people like this defend "lifestyle evangelism" or "friendship evangelism" as the only legitimate ways to live as a Christian among unbelievers. The basic idea here is that it's good to go out and be a "good person" doing good things in the community and that we should just try to be everybody's friend up front, hoping that, months or years down the road, they will ask us what we believe about God and Jesus.

There's just one big problem. This isn't what Jesus did, and it's not the approach his apostles and disciples took. If you've read the New Testament, you'll realize that they took the Great Commission very seriously. Had they followed the advice of the proponents of the lifestyle and friendship "evangelists", the message of the Cross would never have made it out of their tiny corner of Jerusalem. They risked offending people—they risked making some enemies—to carry the only message that can save people's eternal souls to the ends of the earth. As a result, "The Way" (as Christianity was first called) exploded onto the world scene across three continents within just decades of its inception. People were getting saved in droves, and droves of early Christians were experiencing persecution in one form or another, up to and including martyrdom.

Of course, this does not in any way suggest that we should go out of our way to make enemies. Jesus clearly commands us to love our neighbors and then teaches that everyone we encounter in our daily lives (in any way) is one of our neighbors. It's never okay to be cruel or demeaning or abusive of people. However, many people, especially in today's postmodern, post-truth, "progressive", "inclusive", "affirming" society will perceive you and label you as such simply by lovingly telling them what God says about sin and judgment and how that Christ alone can save them and make them children of God. We must always keep in mind that it is never loving to "affirm" people in their sin and error, especially when so much of that sin represents deliberate rebellion against God and His rightful reign and rule. Affirming people on the road that leads to destruction is hateful, not loving.

Before moving on, I want to say one more word about Christians deliberately seeking out close friends of worldly people who are hostile to the gospel in one way or another. Nowhere does the Bible tell us to do this. Yes, we are to be friendly to unbelievers, but that in no way equates to becoming their close

friends. This is one of the greatest reasons young Christians fall away, especially in school and into college. They start following their worldly friends (and often God-mocking friends), copying their styles of dress, tastes in music and entertainment, attitudes about sexuality, and so on.

It should not surprise you to learn that most of these young people (70%) report walking away from their Biblical faith by the time they graduate from college. Scripture warns: “Do not be deceived: Bad company ruins good character” (1 Corinthians 15:33). Why do you think Paul prefaced that statement with “Do not be deceived”? This doesn’t require a seminary degree. He said it because people everywhere and at every time have been deceived about this! Most of them probably thought that they would be the exception. Most of them were wrong!

When you look below the surface, it becomes evident what the real motivation is for Christians trying to be best friends with the world. The reason is usually selfishness. They want people to think highly of them and only to speak good things about them. They want to fit in and be well-liked. They aspire to be popular and to enjoy all of the social boons and benefits that accompany popularity. However, over against those desires, Scripture warns us very plainly: “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4). The Apostle John admonishes us: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). While the world pressures Christians to “love” the way they define that term—according to their rules, definitions, conditions and parameters—God’s Word says to love like the Father loves, which requires us to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) even when that is quite unpopular.

As I mentioned above, the Truth divides, but it also unites. Earnestly seek the LORD in prayer about helping you make one or two (you don’t need many) sincere Christian friends whose heart desire it is to honor God and to speak Truth. If you are consistent in that prayer and humble, I am convinced God will answer it. Also ask God to help you find a “person of peace”. This is an individual who may not yet be a believer but is respectful of your beliefs and moral standards and who wants to know more about what you believe and why.

What’s Our Goal?

True or false?—The primary duty of the evangelist is to make converts—to “win” people for Jesus. I say that statement is false. Clearly, we ask God to reveal truth to people, to change hearts and minds, and to bring the knowledge of Christ that leads to salvation. We would be remiss not to do that. However, we must always bear in mind that the results of our evangelistic and apologetics efforts are never up to us. We are to simply prepare, pray, and yield ourselves as dutiful to go and tell. God alone “gives the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:7). We could press this point even further and say that no evangelist or other human messenger has ever “converted anyone to Christ”—not me, not Billy Graham, not the Apostle Paul, not Bill Bright, not Josh McDowell, not any mere human agent! It is always only the work of the Holy Spirit to convince people and to bring conviction and repentance unto salvation.

Accordingly, when we seek the LORD, prepare, and go, speaking the Truth in love, we are always 100% successful. Our efforts are 100% effective! Does that mean that everyone “got saved”? Of course not. Very often, no one appears to have “made a decision for Christ” or prayed the “sinner’s prayer” (neither of which you will find in Scripture, by the way). Sometimes people will just seem to reject your efforts. Occasionally, all you will accomplish is to upset some people. Rest assured that Jesus Himself often had that same effect on people.

Never let the lack of converts be the standard by which you evaluate the faithfulness or success of your evangelism and apologetics. The kingdom of God and the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is not a business enterprise. It’s not a Fortune 500 company. We are not marketing Jesus or anything else. The main goal of the evangelist and apologist must be to present and defend the Truth of God’s revelation, to do this with humility and in love, and to trust God with the results.

What does Scripture say about the central role of the proclamation of Truth in the message of the Kingdom of God? You could do a study on this topic just by examining statements from the book of John. Here are four key verses from that gospel. Jesus announced, “If I be lifted up, I will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32). The drawing power of the gospel comes from the exaltation of Christ. In an often-referenced passage in chapter 14, Jesus proclaims, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6).

Notice that Jesus' claim isn't merely to speak Truth; He claims to be the very incarnation of Truth! In the "high priestly prayer", Jesus prays for His disciples, asking the Father to "Sanctify them with Truth, Your word is Truth" (John 17:17). The Truth of the Word of God is what operates in us and through us to set us apart from the world and to make us effective ambassadors of Jesus Christ. Finally, as He stands trial before Pontius Pilate, Jesus announces, "For this purpose I was born and came into the world—to bear witness to the Truth" (John 18:37). If that was the overarching purpose Jesus identified for His life and ministry, shouldn't we strive to make that our chief priority?

This contrasts with a prominent "non-goal" of apologetics that is so common that it warrants mention. We should never make it our goal to "win" arguments against unbelievers. This doesn't mean we refrain from giving compelling reasons for why we believe what we believe. We must do that. But sometimes it's not so much about the content of what we say but about how we say it. It's about our attitude and the posture of our heart when making the case for Biblical Christianity. This requires introspection. What's the desire of our heart? Is it to be seen as being "right" or somehow "defeating" the opposition?

If you sense yourself slipping into that mode (and I admit that I have done that more than I might want to admit and still sometimes do), I would encourage you to take a step away from engaging in any further debate at that point. Instead of arguing and debating, ask God to give you a loving heart and the right motives. I can tell you from much personal experience that He will answer that prayer. If you walk away feeling that you have somehow "won" the exchange, chances are good that what you actually accomplished was to come across as a proud jerk. Take it from someone who has certainly come across that way far too many times. It's been astutely observed that "People may not remember what you said, but they will always remember how you treated them". Let's be careful to treat all people, even those who are being hostile to us, as those who are created in the image of God and who are consequently worthy of being treated with dignity and respect.

Question to Consider:

Do you agree or disagree that the number one objective of the evangelist and apologist is to proclaim the Truth in love and we have “succeeded” whenever we do that? Why or why not?

Ways to Engage

I want to describe a few approaches or method that you can use to initiate apologetics and gospel conversations with people who may or may not have a Christian worldview. This is obviously not an exhaustive list. You may want to try each of the approaches, or you may want to try something else altogether. I would encourage you to ask the LORD not only to help you prepare to approach people but to give you insight into the best time, location, et cetera to make these sorts of conversations part of your daily life and walk with Christ. These methods represent some ways I have initiated conversations that have led to good times of sharing the Truth in love.

The first strategy is to simply ask people interesting questions, determining ahead of time to be a good listener. Don't ask the question in an effort to “set up” an apologetics conversation. Rather, be resolved to ask because you really want to get to know what the other person thinks, what conclusions she has come to, and why. This technique is especially effective in kickstarting great worldview discussions with classmates, lab partners, coworkers, the barista you see every weekday morning, and so forth. After reading my examples, let me encourage you to make your own list. Put it in the notes app on your phone and update the questions as needed.

Here are some example questions: “Do you feel close to God or far away?”; “If you could ask God just one question, what would it be?”; “How do you define truth? Do you believe truth is absolute?”; “Do you think there are many paths to God or just one?”; “Most people admit that they have some serious questions about God or spirituality for which they wish they had better answers. How about you? Can you relate to that?”; “Do you think God hears our prayers?”; “Who do you think Jesus of Nazareth was? Do you think he was just a man or something more than that?”; “What do you see as the biggest problem we face in society today? Do you think there's a workable solution?”

A second approach is to set up a table on or near the student union on campus or perhaps in a heavily-trafficked public sidewalk or park. (This works best if you have a partner or two.) Make a sign that says “Cookies for Conversations” or “Donuts for Discussions” (or something similar). Make the relevant snacks available on the table and get to know whoever comes by. Many people will be curious why you’re there. Just tell them that you’re followers of Jesus Christ, but are trying to meet different people to see what they believe and why. If they don’t ask when they approach, feel free to discuss something else up front, but then look for an opportunity to ask about their spiritual background. You can simply say something like, “Tell me about your spiritual beliefs. Do you believe in God? What do you think God is like?” Ask, then listen carefully! If you are a good listener up front, most people will want to reciprocate and ask you to share your views. (In social psychology, that’s called the “reciprocity norm”.)

A third strategy is to conduct what has been referred to as “spiritual interest surveys”. I’m very familiar with this approach, having worked alongside a ministry called “The Great Exchange” that uses it as its primary outreach tool. (You can check out their website at www.thegreatexchange.org). Just like the approaches above, the spiritual interest survey builds rapport by asking people to share and explain their views up front. The survey used can be found on their website by following the “resources” tab. (It’s even available in German and Hungarian!) It contains a series of nine questions, including some that I listed above. The final question on the survey is this: “If you could know God personally, would you like to?” In my experience, about 80% of the people who have gone through the survey with you will answer in the affirmative. This is a great opportunity to take a few minutes and share with them the essentials of the gospel, using something like the bridge diagram.

A fourth strategy is to take a fellow believer or two, purchase a dry erase board (preferably a double-sided one on an easel), go to a public area with good foot traffic, and set up your board. Write an engaging question and make response categories. The one we use most frequently is simply, “Who is Jesus of Nazareth?” We usually list five response options: “Lord”, “Liar”, “Lunatic”, “Legend”, and “Other” (or “Unsure”). As people walk by and say hello (or glance at the board), we simply ask them if they would like to weigh in on an informal poll we’re conducting. You’d be amazed at how many people will oblige! Regardless of the

response they choose, I just say something like, “I see you responded X. Can you take a minute and tell me how you came to that conclusion?” Of course, this is also a great opportunity to distribute literature like gospel tracts, New Testaments, or even books like Josh McDowell’s *More Than a Carpenter*. It’s also perfect for inviting people to visit your church.

The fifth and final approach I will mention here is certainly not for everyone. However, I am absolutely convinced that it is for far more believers than who actually go and do it. It involves the age-old, thoroughly Biblical method of open-air proclamation (preaching). This can simply take the form of reading from the Bible aloud in public, or it could consist of Bible reading interspersed with commentary and explanation. It can even include exhortations to turn from a lifestyle of sin and to trust in Jesus Christ for forgiveness, hope, and healing. It is certainly true that many people (even many evangelical Christians) frown upon open-air preaching in our modern society. Some think it’s too confrontational. Often, their opinions have been swayed strongly by caricatures of the method or abuses of the method they have witnessed either in person or in the media.

While it’s true that there are “open-air abusers” out there, it is also true that many knowledgeable, respectful, and loving men preach the gospel publicly on a regular basis and that God uses this to lead to many gospel conversations that would never have taken place otherwise. If this is a method that the prophets, Christ, and the apostles used and that has been used to such great effect during the “Great Awakenings” (think of the life and ministry of preachers like George Whitefield and John Wesley, for example), then it’s hard to imagine that the method should find no place in the contemporary context of the proclamation of the gospel.

As you can see, the important thing is to make these conversations happen. The gospel is an explicit message that we are commanded to take into the world by proclamation. It must be taken to people. We can’t wait around expecting them to come to us. You’ve probably heard this saying attributed to St. Francis of Assisi (who almost certainly did not say it): “Preach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.” That sounds good, doesn’t it? The only problem is that the gospel is an explicit, verbal message. It cannot be preached without words. Watching you be a nice person and do good things for people is not going to reveal anything to a

lost soul about their standing before God and their desperate need to repent and place their faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. In my experience, the key thing is to get to the questions people have, and then provide them with good, Biblical answers. Love them by proclaiming the gospel to them!

By now, the question has probably crossed your mind, “What happens if I get stumped?” This is a great question, because I can promise you that it will happen. No human has all of the answers. Nor should you feel like you need to reach some particular level of learning before you can go out and start asking questions and having gospel and apologetics conversations. If someone asks you something that you don’t have a good answer for, start by simply admitting it. Say something like, “You know], you ask a really great question there, and to be honest, I don’t know the answer. Tell you what, I am going to find a good answer for you. Can you meet next [day] at [time] to talk some more about it?” Alternately, you could get their phone number or email address (although meeting in person is by far the best approach, if at all possible).

Just make sure you actually go and do what you promised them you will do. Be diligent and do your homework. Below, I will give some good resources for answering the types of questions that are likely to come up within the context of public evangelism and apologetics discussions. By demonstrating humility and a willingness to dig deeper, the person will almost certainly feel respected. This also keeps the conversation rolling forward. As awkward as gospel conversations can be initially, in terms of “breaking the ice”, all of that is gone when you see the person again and say, “Hey, remember when you asked X and I didn’t have a good answer? Well, I looked into it, and I’d like to share with you what I found out”. Bottom line: Don’t worry about getting stumped. God can use even your *inability* to answer a question to draw people to Christ!

Questions to Consider:

What are one or two ways you can use the information above to start inviting conversations with those around you this coming week? When will you make time to do that? Identify one or two brothers or sisters in Christ who you can invite to accompany you. Take a minute and pray that God will bring that to fruition instead of just remaining a “nice idea”.

Preparing to Engage

Christ has commissioned us to be His ambassadors (1 Corinthians 5: 20). We must take this commissioning seriously. What could possibly be more important in life than being diligent and wholehearted in our service for the King of Heaven? We work hard at building large houses and houses of worship, earning college degrees, having beautiful homes, yards, and gardens, saving towards retirement, exercising to look and feel good, and so forth. Many invest inordinate amounts of time and energy playing sports or even just *following* a sports team! Why would we seek to “give God the crumbs” in terms of our time, energy, and money when it comes to carrying the message of the Cross to a world that is perishing for lack of hope? People always find time for what’s important. Let’s make sure that knowing God and making Him known tops the list of life’s priorities!

What are some practical ways to prepare to engage? How can we make sure that the instrument of our heart and mind is sharp as it carries the message of Truth out of the walls of the church building and into the mission field of the world? I am convinced that the single most important preparation we can do is to spend time in God’s Word and in prayer daily. Some have referred to this as “quiet time”, but it doesn’t necessarily have to be quiet. There are more ways today than ever before to take in God’s Word. Bible websites (which usually feature free apps) will allow you to plug in your earbuds, hit play, and listen to Scripture being read, with dozens of options for version and even language. Sometimes I mix it up and listen to the Bible in Spanish! The important thing is that you are saturating your mind and soul with God’s Word daily. Ask God to reveal something fresh to you each time before you read or listen to His Word. He’ll do it!

As far as supplementary “devotional” material is concerned, there are some good, classic resources (e.g., *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers, *Morning and Evening* by C.H. Spurgeon, *Captivating Grace*, with contributions by a variety of sound, reformed authors, et cetera). I would strongly caution you to focus on devotional materials that center on the majesty of God and the true, Christ-centered gospel. There is an entire market for feel-good, “cotton candy” devotionals out there that, more than anything, focus on making the reader feel better about himself. (Worse yet, many popular ones today focus on people’s subjective impressions of what they think God might be telling them, apart from

Scripture.) Your devotional time should be devoted to God and to Truth. While that might not always immediately make you feel as good about yourself as a pseudo-Christian, pop psychology pep talk, it will lead to real, substantive spiritual growth and an abiding joy as you grow in your knowledge of the Holy One.

With the starting point of daily time in the Word in place, it is important for the evangelist/apologist to go even deeper—to “present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the Word of Truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). To go deeper in your personal study, I recommend starting with a good systematic theology. My personal favorite is Dr. Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, which is now in its second edition. Grudem also offers a shorter and more accessible version of his systematic theology in *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*. Of course, there are several good systematic theologies out there, as well as some which should be avoided. Just be sure to do your homework upfront if you choose a different one. As I’m sure you’re aware, there is no dearth of false teaching out there. (If you would like to run a suggestion by me before you make a purchase, feel free to email me at askaformeratheist@gmail.com.)

Another invaluable tool for the evangelist and apologist and training is a library of good Bible commentaries. Fortunately, these also can be accessed online today. I often access them through Bible Gateway (www.biblegateway.com) and selecting the “Study Tools” tab. The options are much too numerous to list here, but some excellent classic works like *Matthew Henry’s Commentary*, the *Asbury Bible Commentary*, the *Reformation Study Bible*, and many others are available. You can access some of them for free, but paying a nominal membership fee gives you access to even more. I will also mention a wonderful Bible app for your smartphone called Blue Letter Bible. (You can also access their site on your PC at www.blueletterbible.org). The free version will allow you to easily do thorough searches through Scripture either for specific words or topically, to study word-for-word translations from the original Hebrew and Greek text, to access theological resources like Theological FAQs, to access and study catechisms, creeds, and confessions, and even to study cults like the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

You will also want to make it a habit to continue your apologetics self-education. There's a virtual cornucopia of resources at your disposal, and my suggestion is to "mix it up" so that it stays fresh and interesting. Let me encourage you to start with books and to keep these as the main courses of your apologetics menu. Here are several suggestions for good places to begin: *Expository Apologetics* by Voddie Baucham, *Classical Apologetics* by R.C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* by Francis Schaeffer, *Did the Resurrection Happen?* by Gary Habermas, *Van Til's Apologetic* by Greg Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics Stated & Defended* by Greg Bahnsen, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* by Normal Geisler and Frank Turek, *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* by C.S. Lewis, and *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel. (Please allow me to stipulate that I do not endorse every position of each of those authors on every matter. One will not get very far or end up very well-read if he only reads people he agrees with entirely. Part of developing a discerning mind will involve you comparing and contrasting everything you read with Scripture, reason, and the sound counsel of brothers and sisters in Christ who have more experience than you.)

As supplements ("side dishes"), I would suggest reading from and enjoying videos posted to apologetics websites like Ratio Christi (www.ratiochristi.org; YouTube: Ratio Christi); Apologia Church (www.apologiachurch.com; YouTube: Apologia Studios); Wretched with Todd Friel (www.wretched.org; YouTube: Wretched); Give Me an Answer with Cliffe Knechtle (www.givemeananswer.org; YouTube: askcliffe); Tom Short Campus Ministries (www.tomthepreacher.com; YouTube: Tom Short); The Institute for Creation Research (www.icr.org; YouTube: Institute for Creation Research); and, of course, this site as it continues to grow and I upload more content that is free to the public. I especially enjoy watching debates on all of these apologetics topics, although I do caution young evangelists and apologists against devoting too much time and attention to watching other people debate. The tendency can be to attempt to "plagiarize" their responses (some people do this almost verbatim) rather than mastering the concept or principle and applying it judiciously as the opportunities arise naturally during your interactions.

One final (and fun!) strategy worth mentioning is to host a “stump the chump” night with fellow believers. (You could also invite non-believers, come to think of it.) Order some pizza, sit in a circle, and take turns being the “chump”—that is, the designated Christian apologist who will attempt to give good answers to objections that the “skeptics” (i.e., everyone else who is designated to play “devil’s advocate”) raise. You could have people submit questions/topics on pieces of paper or via text before you get started and then randomly select topics to keep things flowing. This will help you to become more comfortable “thinking on your feet” in a mock environment filled with friends who all desire to glorify Christ by proclaiming the Truth in love.

The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail!

As we draw this primer to a close, be encouraged by the fact that we are literally guaranteed victory. We can’t lose! I think back to Caesarea Philippi, immediately after Peter makes that great confession that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:18). Jesus responds that the fact that He is the Son of God will be the “rock” upon which His church will be built, and then He makes a promise that every believer should find commensurately reassuring. He assures us that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”.

What is Jesus saying here? He’s promising us that there is no way in hell (literally) that the enemy is going to stop the advance of the Kingdom of God! Certainly from our perspective there might seem to be setbacks galore (rampant secularism, spiritual apathy, hostility to the gospel, persecution, and even martyrdom), but from heaven’s perspective, everything is going according to plan. The message of the Cross will be preached to all the nations (people groups), and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14). Jesus promised it, so you can take it to the bank!

What should we do in the meantime? Like Jesus, we must be about our Father’s business. We must “make the most of every opportunity in these evil days” (Ephesians 5:16). We must “run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1). We must commune with God, study His Word, sharpen our minds, plan ways to effectively engage our peers and culture, and we must keep our “spiritual antennae” up! What does that mean? It means that we must not only be diligent in asking God for opportunities to testify to the Truth before

others; we must recognize those opportunities as they arise. We must stay “tuned in” to the spiritual needs of the world around us. We can’t just go through life on autopilot, only paying attention to our own lives and schedules and expect to effectively accomplish the work of the Kingdom. We need to be strategic and deliberate and to make the most of the opportunities presented to us.

Thank you for some investing time in eternal matters by reading this apologetics primer. I pray that it has been a blessing to you. If you found it helpful, please forward the link to someone else who might benefit from it. Also, feel free to email me at askaformeratheist@gmail.com with any questions you have, or if you have ideas for how to improve the Ask a Former Atheist website and ministry. If you are a college or university student and are interested in starting a chapter of Ratio Christi on your campus, please reach out and let me know how I can assist you. I’m also available to share ideas, strategies, and to help you prepare if the LORD is leading you to get involved in “street evangelism” and/or abortion mill outreach.

A Prayer for You

I’d like to close with a prayer for you and for the body of Christ throughout America and around the world as we seek to live out the Great Commission! Dear heavenly Father, I thank You so much for these dear brothers and sisters in Christ and their desire to make You known to the nations. Thank You for revealing Yourself so plainly in nature and so clearly in Your Word. Thank you for sending Your Son to take on human flesh, to live among us sinners, to live a perfect life, and to die a sacrificial death for our sake. Thank you for raising Jesus Christ from the dead and furnishing proof that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life and the only way to be reconciled to You. I pray that you would raise up workers and call many to the harvest. I ask that You would give us wisdom, discernment, patience, and perseverance as we endeavor to be Your people, to live as salt and light in a world that has turned its back on You in countless ways. Above all, Father, please increase our love—our love for You, for one another, and for those who need to turn from their sin and trust You. May Your Name be glorified in our hearts, our words, and our actions. In Jesus’ name.