

**Problems and Pathways to the Gospel in a Post-Modern World:  
An Apologetic Approach to Evangelism  
By Dave Geisler ([www.meeknessandtruth.org](http://www.meeknessandtruth.org))**

**1. Introduction**

I would like to suggest a framework for a better use of Christian evidences (apologetic elements) in evangelism that could be helpful in witnessing situations with those who are more skeptically minded about religious truth. Joan Osborne recorded a song about God called "One of us." There is one line in her song that is very revealing about why some people do not believe in God. It says, "If God had a face, what would it look like, and would you want to see if seeing meant that you would have to believe in things like heaven and in Jesus and the saints and all the prophets."<sup>1</sup>

This song illustrates an important point, which is that people, in general, do not reject Christianity because there is not enough evidence, but rather what it would cost them personally. They do not want to accept the truth because of what it would mean in terms of how they live. Jesus pointed out this same idea in His parable about the rich man and Lazarus where He said, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31). I once had a very honest conversation with a graduate student about religion and belief in God. He admitted that "It would be hard for me to change my worldview in favor of a belief in a theistic God, because I would then have to admit that I was wrong in my thinking, and I tend to be too arrogant to allow that to happen." The Apostle Paul made it clear in Romans 1:18-20 that everyone has evidence of who God is based on creation itself, but that they suppress that evidence.

There are some very good reasons, however, why we should know something about Christian evidences (apologetics). Apologetics is not, contrary to what some people think, "the art of apologizing." The word for apologetics comes from the Greek word *apologia*. We see it used in 1 Peter 3:15 where it refers to giving a reason or reply for our faith. This word is a legal term that describes what a lawyer would do in defending his client. "Apologetics is offering each person evidence and reasons for the truth of Christianity that turns the gears of his/her mental machinery."<sup>2</sup>

Not only do we need to know something about apologetics, we need to better understand how to incorporate apologetics with evangelism. Why is it that you can walk into any Christian bookstore in the U.S. and find many different books on evangelism and apologetics, but very few on how to actually use apologetics to do evangelism? Perhaps one reason is that Christians do not know when to use apologetics. Yet if we use apologetics to only give evidence for our faith, we may do nothing to change the perspective of those who are comfortable with their beliefs. For example, Luke records in Acts 28:23-24 that though the Apostle Paul had argued persuasively to the Jews that Jesus was the promised Messiah, some would still not believe."

---

<sup>1</sup> From "One of us," by Eric Bazilian, as recorded by Joan Osborne, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Koons, *Effective Apologetics*, Colorado Springs, June 1998.

There are people who have legitimate questions about faith issues which they feel have never been satisfactorily answered. These unanswered questions may have even contributed to a rejection of Christianity. We need to develop discernment in determining when to use apologetics in the presentation of the Gospel and develop a balanced approach in using apologetics in the evangelism process.

Not only is there a need for a balanced perspective when using apologetics in evangelism, there is a great need for people to be more compassionate when they use apologetics in the evangelism process. We need more compassionate apologists who can gently persuade others of the truth of Christianity with meekness and reverence

(1 Pet. 3:15). The Apostle Paul was not ashamed to speak the truth, yet he did so with a deep compassion for the lost. While Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy in Athens (Acts 17:16 – 17), "he was greatly distressed" to see that the city was full of idols. Therefore, he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews, the God-fearing Greeks and those in the marketplace. His spirit was so disturbed by all the deception that he was motivated to speak out and challenge their thinking process. In 1 Cor. 9:22, the Apostle Paul said, "I have become all things to all men so that I might by all means save some." No sacrifice was too great because he cared deeply about people. In a similar way, we also need to care so much about reaching people for Christ that we are willing and able to help them overcome any intellectual obstacle that keeps them, one day, from receiving Christ. There are also some very practical reasons why you and I should learn how to better use apologetics in witnessing situations. We need to know something about apologetics and recognize its importance.

## **2. Why the need for an apologetic approach in evangelism?**

### ***Because of the kind of world we live in:***

We live in a world characterized by the discarding of moral absolutes, a tendency towards skepticism (especially religious skepticism), and an indifference towards truth. Due to the nature of world, it has become increasingly difficult to share the Gospel with our non-Christian friends and acquaintances. As a result, there probably has never been a time in recent history where we have had a greater need to put "new wine in new wineskins" (Matthew 9:17), especially as we consider the challenges of evangelism in this new millennium. It is more imperative today than ever that we learn how to use apologetics more effectively in the evangelism process, especially with those who have rejected a belief in a theistic God and are indifferent or outright skeptical about the claims of Christ.

- *The rejection of moral absolutes*

Sheryl Crow's song, *Every Day is a Winding Road*, sums up the world's philosophy of life with the words: "These are the days that anything goes." We live in a different world than our parents did – a different world with a totally different value system. Unfortunately, we are quickly discarding the moral values that make up the fabric of our society. This rejection of moral beliefs has caused some major repercussions that hinder effective evangelism. Cultural anthropologist Gene Veith points out that, "it is hard to proclaim the forgiveness of sins to people who believe

that, since morality is relative, they have no sins to forgive."<sup>3</sup> He goes on to say, "it is not the lunatic fringe rejecting the very concept of (absolute) truth, but two-thirds of the American people."<sup>4</sup> Christian philosopher and apologist J.P. Moreland says, "As we approach the twenty-first century, it does not take a rocket scientist to recognize that our entire culture is in trouble. We are staring down the barrel of a loaded gun, and we can no longer afford to act like it's loaded with blanks."<sup>5</sup>

If God does not exist then anything goes, for all ethical and behavioral values become relative and subjective absent an absolute, transcendent standard. Unfortunately, this pervasive perspective has led to many serious consequences to our society. Newspapers popular entertainment reminds us daily of all the painful repercussions of moral relativism. This has also made it very difficult to share Christ with those who have bought into relativism. As a result, we might have to defend our concept of absolute truth and explain more clearly to those around us why we believe that Christianity is true and other religions are false. We also might have to explain more clearly that when Jesus said he was the way the truth and the life in John 14:6, He was not claiming to be one of the ways to God, but the only way to God.

- *The skepticism of our society*

We also live in a world that is becoming increasingly more skeptical about whether you and I can know anything as objectively true, especially religious truth. This skepticism is especially prevalent in the academic community, which creates problems when we try to evangelize within those ranks. Evangelism methods that worked 20 to 30 years ago are not as effective today partly because many people are increasingly skeptical about the validity of "knowing" religious truths.

The men of Issachar were men who "understood the times...and knew what they should do," (I Chronicles 2:32). Part of understanding the times in which we live is to realize that, quite often, people will not take what we say at face value as being true, especially if it is religious truth. There tends to be a modern attitude that if something cannot be proven as true through the scientific method of repeated observations, it must not be true, or there is no way to verify that in fact it is true. As a result, we may have to do more pre-evangelism in this new millennium than in the previous one.

Unfortunately, this skeptical disposition has led people to even question the historicity of Jesus; whether we can really know that what was said about Jesus really did happen 2000 years ago. For example, after witnessing to a graduate student by giving him some evidence for Christ's resurrection, he said, "If I was living at the time of Christ, I could make decisions about who Jesus is but it has been 2000 years, so we can not really make decisions like that any more."

In general, people in Jesus' time did not have the kinds of major obstacles that we have 2000 years later in believing many of the details that the New Testament writers recorded concerning the life of Christ. There was even acknowledgement by some non-Christian writers at that time

---

<sup>3</sup> Gene Veith, *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton Ill: Crossway, 1994), 16

<sup>4</sup> Veith, 16

<sup>5</sup> J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind* (Colorado Springs, Co.; Navpress, 1997), 21.

that Jesus did some miraculous things.<sup>6</sup> Luke records for us examples that show that the miraculous events surrounding the life of Christ were quite obvious, even to most non-believers (Luke 24:18; Acts 26: 25-26). For example, in Luke 24:18 two disciples were walking with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, although they did not know it was Him. As they were talking about the events of the empty tomb, Jesus asked them what they were talking about. As a result one of disciples asked Jesus, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happening in Jerusalem in these days?" They were trying to point out that you had to be living under a rock not to know what has been happening in Jerusalem in those days. The apostles and disciples did not have to prove the existence of God or miracles because many of the people that they preached to already believed in a theistic God. They also believed that something miraculous happened because of the empty tomb. This was common knowledge.

What non-Christians struggle with nowadays is much more difficult than in Jesus' day. Non-Christians struggle with the question, "Can we even know truth at all, even if it does exist?" In fact, there are people today that even deny that we can even know historical truths such as the Holocaust, even though there are still people alive that lived in Nazi prison camps.<sup>7</sup>

- *An indifference towards truth*

Our society not only rejects truth and moral absolutes because of a deep skepticism, it also has an indifference towards truth in general. The definition of "truth" is now lost to many people. As a result, some will say, "It is nice for you that you believe in truth," or "that it is nice that it works for you, but it does not work for me or mean anything to me. It may certainly be true for you, but not for me."<sup>8</sup> For example: One international graduate student said to me, "I agree with the point that religion is good to the society... but what that religion is, is not that important. It is better to have people believe in something, rather than nothing. After I came to the U.S., I found that people who believe in God are generally better off than those who believe in nothing. But it has nothing to do with the existence of God. It's a kind of social psychology." We find what Paul warned of in 2 Timothy 4:3-4 to be especially relevant today, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths." I believe that as the moral fabric of our society deteriorates more and more, we will need to do more pre-evangelism just to get a hearing in this new millennium.

### ***To help lower people's intellectual barriers so that the Holy Spirit can penetrate their heart***

Not only is apologetics important because of the kind of world we live in, it is also helpful in lowering people's intellectual barriers that hinder the Holy Spirit's penetrating their hearts and exposing their underlying prejudices towards the Gospel. Sometimes it is difficult for a person to acknowledge that they harbor these prejudices. This is not surprising, for as Jeremiah 17:9 says,

---

<sup>6</sup> This is clearly seen in the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus and the Roman Historian Tacitus and others.

<sup>7</sup> Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: Free Press, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> For a further explanation of this point, see Paul Copan, *True for you, but not for me* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1998).

"The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" In fact, there are times in our lives when all of us have trouble admitting to ourselves what is really going on below the surface. Therefore, it is possible that some of our non-Christian friends and acquaintances may sometimes, consciously or subconsciously, hide behind intellectual walls rather than acknowledge the truth of Christianity. As a result, we may need to gently remove some of the intellectual barriers before skeptical unbelievers will seriously consider the claims of Christ. It is also possible that our non-Christian friends may have intellectual questions about faith issues that have never been satisfactorily answered. These lingering questions can be a barrier to belief in Christ. For this reason, it is very important to help them find the answers they are looking for.

Keep in mind, however, that even after providing answers to unbeliever's intellectual questions, other issues may surface that are even greater barriers to faith in Christ which need to be addressed as well. For example, I remember talking with an international graduate student about the evidence for Christianity. After a period of time, he finally told me that he did not have any other intellectual questions that were obstacles to trusting Christ. The question that finally surfaced in his mind was "what would it mean to have a personal relationship with God on a daily basis?" Removing these intellectual barriers to faith in Christ can, in some cases, surface underlying needs or concerns that are keeping unbelievers from embracing Christianity.

The Bible teaches us that we are to answer firmly those who form speculations that have no firm foundation. The Apostle Paul says that we are to "destroy speculation and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:5). This does not mean we have to answer all of their troubling questions before we can meaningfully share with them about Christ. For some, we need to help them make progress on intellectual barriers before they will more seriously consider Theism and Christianity. Removing the intellectual barriers to faith in Christ is sometimes necessary before some people will consider the deeper spiritual issues that they need to wrestle with. This is called pre-evangelism. For example, I worked with one student for one year in continual dialogue on worldview issues to help him move from a closed-minded atheist to an open-minded theist. Yet we must use some discernment here because their stated objections may not be real, but rather a smoke screen to avoid a still hidden barrier!

We must also remember that Satan tries to twist the truth in unbeliever's minds while we are trying to remove obstacles to faith. 2 Corinthians 4:4 says, "In whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Our job then is to help them see clearly the truth of Christianity, and then invite them to trust Christ.

### ***It is biblical***

Some Christians may be surprised to realize that apologetics and evangelism actually worked hand in hand in the New Testament (Matthew 4:23; John 5:36, 10:37-38, 20:30-31; Acts 9:22, 14:1, 17:2-3, 26:28-29, 28:23). The Bible documents that both Jesus and the apostles used evidence to encourage others to believe in Christ. Jesus gave evidence of His supernatural power to prove He was the Messiah (John 5:36). The apostle Paul also used evidence to persuade both Jews and Greeks to accept Christ. In Acts 28:23, Paul's goal was to help Jewish non-believers

see that Jesus' life and death was the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures, which they had already accepted as being true. Acts 28:23 says, "And when they had set a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening."

Therefore, as we examine the New Testament, we see that apologetics and evangelism worked hand in hand. Now, if Jesus and the apostles felt the need to give objective evidence along with the proclamation of the Gospel, how much more should we be prepared to share more than just our personal testimonies of what Christ has done in our lives? This is especially true when we are trying to reach those who have a hard time believing that we can know anything as being objectively true.

In trying to discover why Christians do not use apologetics more in doing evangelism, we found that they often have misconceptions about evangelism. In addition, many Christians have misconceptions about how apologetics and evangelism actually work together.

### **3. Identifying misconceptions about Apologetics**

#### ***The relationship between faith and reason***

One of the greatest misconceptions that Christians have about apologetics concerns the proper relationship between faith and reason. The apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:14 that, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain." Therefore, our faith is only as valid as the object in which it is placed. In other words, what makes faith have merit is the object of that faith. The fact that somebody has faith does not automatically validate the truthfulness of that belief system. For example, the Mormons and the Moonies have faith and yet these belief systems are not internally consistent and are not substantiated by solid evidence. Hence, before one puts his trust in Christ, one should have good reason to believe that Jesus really is who He says He is.

Yet, sometimes I hear people say that those who use apologetics are trying to argue someone into the kingdom of God. This misunderstanding comes from not clearly distinguishing between "belief that" and "belief in." For example, when I am witnessing to someone, I always point out that there are two decisions that they need to make concerning Christ. First, they have to decide if there is sufficient evidence to "believe that" Jesus really is who He said He is. Once they have decided that Jesus is who He claimed to be, then they have to make the most difficult decision, whether to put their faith and trust in Christ (believe in Him).

The fact is, one could have good reasons for believing that Jesus really is God, but still not believe in Him. James points out in James 2:19 that even the demons "believe that" God does exist. However, demons certainly do not have a relational "belief in" God. The *evidence* for Christianity bears on "belief that" not "belief in." Given this distinction between belief that and

belief in, there is no real conflict between faith and reason.<sup>9</sup> For example, one may have good reasons to believe that some person would make a great spouse based on the evidence. However, that evidence leading to the belief that a person would make a great spouse does not in and of itself force him or her to say, "I do" to that person. That is a decision of the will, not merely the intellect. Therefore, the evidence for Christianity can never force one to trust Christ, regardless as to how strong the evidence is. Reason and evidence should be used to support faith (1 Peter 3:15), but it can never be the basis or cause of faith (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Above all, we know that the Holy Spirit *must* work in a person's life if he or she is to accept Christ. Jesus said in John 6:65, "No one can come to me unless it has been granted him from the father." So the task of apologetics is not to reason someone into the kingdom. Apologetics can never actually force someone to make a decision for Christ. The Holy Spirit must work in their heart to move them towards faith in Christ. Therefore, faith and reason must work hand in hand to effectively reach others for Christ. For example, Paul spoke in such a manner that "many believed," (Acts 14:1). Yet we also know that apart from the Holy Spirit, no one would have been moved to believe in Christ. Apologetics can help someone to "believe that" Jesus is the Messiah, but can never force one to "believe in" Him.

#### *Misapplications of when and how to use apologetics*

1 Peter 3: 15 tells us to be ready to give an answer whenever someone asks us for the reason why we believe what we believe. However, some people have the mistaken notion that this just means we only respond to questions asked by the non-believer. Being ready means more than just waiting for someone to ask us a question. The word "ready" in the Greek (*Hetoimos*) is used in anticipating Christ's return, as in Matthew 24:44 and Luke 12:40. So in 1 Peter 3:15 "being ready" means to anticipate their questions or objections. Now if we combine 1 Peter 3:15 with 2 Corinthians 10:5 and I Cor. 9:22, it is clear that our responsibility as Christians is also to *eagerly anticipate* the questions and objections that our non-Christian friends may raise against Christianity. Furthermore, we must be ready to give adequate answers to their troubling questions, whether we are asked a specific question or not! Unfortunately, many times as Christians we have the wrong perspective about what it means to be ready. Let me illustrate what I mean. When I was a child, getting ready to go to Dairy Queen to have ice cream and getting ready to go to the dentist had two different meanings in my mind. One I eagerly anticipated, the other I secretly feared. Sometimes, Christians can have the latter perspective in getting ready to answer people's questions. As a result, we shy away from witnessing opportunities that God opens up to us.

Similarly, we are to anticipate the questions and spiritual concerns of non-believers just as a mother may eagerly anticipate the needs of her children. For example, a mother knows that her children may become thirsty after playing outside in the heat for a few hours. As a result, she might have a cold pitcher of lemonade waiting for them to drink when they come inside after they are done playing! This is the same kind of mindset that we need to develop in our witness to others.

---

<sup>9</sup> For a more comprehensive explanation of the role of faith and reason see Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 239-243.

## *How to use apologetics*

Another reason why we shy away from using apologetics in our evangelism with others is that we don't know exactly how to use it, or we see it used improperly in witnessing situations by other Christians. We need to remember that apologetics should not be used as a club to whack people over the head with the truth. Instead, we need to use it, as 1 Peter 3:15 says, with "meekness and reverence."

A few years ago I heard a Christian Apologist give a defense of Christianity on a college campus. Afterwards, there were a number of Christians who were talking to people about what he had said and answering some of the questions of some of the more verbally hostile people there. I noticed that some of these Christians were winning the battle but losing the war because they did not come across as very loving. The apostle Paul said, "If I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing." (1 Cor. 13:3b)

Let me shift analogies and describe it another way. Apologetics should not be viewed as a wrestling contest whose goal is to twist our non-Christian friend's intellectual arm to get them to cry, "Uncle!" Rather, our goal is to help them to see the truth about God that has been clearly revealed to them, so that they will cry out "Abba" Father (Romans 1:20, 8:15).

I think it is important, however, to find a balance in how we use apologetics. Remember that you do not go to war with a peashooter, but you also do not go to target practice with a bazooka. You and I should use apologetics only to answer those questions a non-believer has raised. We also need to deal with questions that will help uncover the distorted worldview that unbelievers hold and move them closer to a belief in God and Christianity. The fact is that we need to be very careful not to just blow them away with our knowledge of the subject. In addition, we should not raise questions that non-believers are not asking. For example, if I am talking to someone and they already acknowledge a belief in a Theistic God, I do not need to share with them some of the evidence for establishing Theism as the correct worldview. Rather, I should focus on the evidence that Jesus is the Messiah.

So, how are we to use apologetics? We are not to use it as a club, a wrestling contest, or a bazooka for target practice, but rather as a means of removing foolish speculations (2 Corinthians 10:5) with an attitude of meekness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). The word for meekness, "prautes," in 1 Peter 3:15, according to Vine's Expository Dictionary, carries the idea of not having any personal agenda with people. It means more than gentleness, as gentleness describes more outward actions. Meekness describes more the condition of the mind and heart, and is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest.<sup>10</sup> So, when we are confronting people with the truth of the Gospel (John 8:32), we must be mindful of what our goal is, for we could certainly win the initial battle but lose the war and damage our testimony if we are not careful in how we speak to people about Christ (2 Timothy 2:24-25).

Unfortunately, as Christians we sometimes have the opposite problem. Sometimes we do not use apologetics in witnessing situations, even when it is appropriate. This may seem pretty harmless.

---

<sup>10</sup> W.E Vine, *Vines An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Iowa Falls, Iowa: World Bible Publishers, 1981), 56.



However, what would you think of an army on a battlefield which is taking heavy artillery fire, and yet its best weapons, like its tanks, lay wrapped in tarp behind the front. As Christians, we need to be more adequately equipped so that when we get out on the battlefield of life, we will not get slaughtered by the prevailing philosophies and beliefs of our time.

I think it is also helpful to remember that one of the basic goals in using apologetics in evangelism is to help answer a basic question that your non-Christian friends may be asking, such as, "How can my heart accept what my mind rejects?" or "What if belief in God and Christianity is irrational?" We must provide the intellectual bridge so that they may be able to safely deal with matters of the heart. That is why we believe that, when witnessing to friends and acquaintances, one should not only aim for the head, but also the heart. Apologetics, then, should be used as a pinprick to help awaken people from the delusion of their own distorted worldview!

Objective apologetic information is not all that is necessary to reach others for Christ. Our lives can also be a powerful apologetic to the truth of Christianity. You have probably heard the expression, "You may be the only Bible that someone ever reads." Joe Aldrich says that evangelism is like music. The words of the Gospel are like the lyrics, but your lifestyle is like the melody of the song. The melody enhances the words just as our lives enhance the message of the gospel.<sup>11</sup> In the same way, apologetics enhances the testimony of our lives, which is most likely what non-Christians will see first.

#### **4. What is involved in using apologetics?**

One of the primary tasks of a Christian Apologist is to refute those who make truth claims that are contradictory (2 Corinthians 10:5). For example, one of the qualifications for an elder in the New Testament is that he be able to refute those who contradict themselves (Titus 1:9). And yet, some Christians would feel uncomfortable with the notion of confronting those with belief systems different from their own. There can be a negative connotation associated with doing apologetics. For example, some people tend to associate apologetics with those who like to argue or those with type A-driven personality traits. And even worse, others may see those who do apologetics as rude, overly outspoken, arrogant, and insensitive. This is not the picture that the Bible paints for us in how to do apologetics. Paul reminds us that our lives reflect the Gospel by how we live and not just by what we say (1 Thessalonians. 2:8). As Christian apologist, Peter Kreeft says, "What you are speaks so loud, I can hardly hear what you say."<sup>12</sup>

Paul was not insensitive to the Jews and Gentiles even though he pointed out the contradictions in their thinking (Acts 17:23 -29). He acted from great compassion for those who lived in ignorance. This compassion for others led the apostle Paul to point out on Mars Hill that if we are the offspring of God, it could not be possible that God could be formed by instruments and materials of man" (Acts 17:23-29). In other words, if God is the cause of our being, then we cannot be the cause of God's being. That would be a contradiction. Paul confronted their flawed thinking and yet did it in a respectful manner (1 Peter 3:15). Therefore, one of our responsibilities in doing apologetics is to point out the contradictions and inconsistencies in other's worldview perspectives in a Christ-like manner. When our non-Christian friends insist

---

<sup>11</sup> Joe Aldrich, *Lifestyle Evangelism* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1981), 35-36.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Kreeft, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: IV Press, 1994), 23.

that there are no absolutes or that everything is relative, we need to deal with these issues in the same manner as the apostle Paul did.

The apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:5 that “We are destroying speculation and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” He teaches here that we are to destroy speculation. The word for “speculation,” according to Vines Expository Dictionary, can be translated as “imagination.”<sup>13</sup> It means that we are to refute anything that is not true that concerns our faith. For example, some people think that the New Testament is a collection of myths and that Jesus is not even a historical figure who actually existed.<sup>14</sup> Also, contrary to the evidence of history, some people even believe that Jesus was never crucified on the cross.<sup>15</sup> Contrary to Scripture, some people believe that Jesus taught one of many ways to get to heaven (John 14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5; Acts 4:12).

However, let me share a word of caution when confronting people with the truth. People generally do not like to lose face when we confront them with Christ’s true claims. As a result, we have to be very careful with how we point out the problems in their thinking process. We really need to come across like one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.

## **5. What are the limitations of apologetics?**

We need to remember that sin plays a part on obscuring the recognition of God's truth. For example, the Bible teaches us that non-believers are ignorant about God because they naturally do not want to see or believe in God. In Ephesians 4:18, Paul says that non-believing Gentiles are, “darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them. This ignorance, the apostle Paul says, has come about not because they don’t have enough evidence to make an intelligent decision, but because of their “hardness of their heart.”

Furthermore, we know that the Bible teaches that evidence alone is not sufficient for one to believe in God. In Acts 28:23-24, Paul tried to persuade his listeners concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the prophets testifying from morning until evening. Yet, as Luke points out in verse 24, “Some were being persuaded but others would not believe.” They were all hearing the same argument but responded in different ways.

We also know that God needs to strengthen our resolve to accept what He says. For example, the Bible teaches us that the Holy Spirit must work in a person’s life if he is to accept Christ. John records Jesus’ words, “...that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father” (John 6:65).

---

<sup>13</sup> Vine, 248

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Paine claims it is doubtful whether Jesus actually existed

<sup>15</sup> Muslims do not believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross. Some Muslims do believe that Judas took his place instead. See Dean C. Halverson, *Compact Guide to World Religions* (Minneapolis, MN.: Bethany House Pub., 1996).

Additionally, Satan works very hard to suppress the truth and keep others from seeing it. For example, I remember witnessing to a student who believed that God did not exist because he believed that matter was eternal and could therefore be neither created nor destroyed. Clearly, we can see that Satan uses these false beliefs to keep people from finding the truth. The Bible teaches us that “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they may not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is in the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Non-believers also need to see a changed life. Paul said in Philippians 1:14 that most of the brethren were trusting in the Lord because of his imprisonment. So in Paul’s life, we not only see someone who proclaimed the truth and backed it up with objective evidence, but we also see someone who demonstrated the truth of Christianity by how he lived. As seen in Paul’s example, both objective evidence and subjective experience complement each other. The apostle Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2:8 that, “having thus a fond affection for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.” (N.A.S.B.) I think it is important to remember that sometimes as Christians, we can know how to communicate some of the objective evidence for Christianity, but if we do not experience God’s power and grace in our lives, it is doubtful whether we will make any real impact for Christ.

Therefore, to effectively reach the skeptics of this new generation, I believe that we will need to use a combined approach in doing evangelism. We need to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to live godly lives (Philippians 2:13) and also to draw others to Christ (John 6:65). We also need to give people objective evidence for our faith as we proclaim the gospel as well as demonstrate the truth of what we proclaim by how we live (1Thessalonians 2:8). Furthermore, we will also need a total commitment to fervent prayer (James 5:16). These are all essential ingredients that are necessary to do successful evangelism in this new millennium.

Now that we have talked about the need for an apologetic approach to evangelism and some of the misconceptions about apologetics that may keep people from using it in witnessing situations, I would like to suggest a framework for how one might actually use apologetics in witnessing to in a post-modern world.

## **6. Conversational Evangelism - A methodology for better reaching a post-modern world**

Our ministry has developed a new evangelism model to reach post-modern students on college campuses around the country in order to counter the dangers of post-modern thinking. The fact is, we live in a world that is increasingly buying into a more post-modern perspective everyday. We often find that non-believers hold a post-modern perspective because it allows them to hide from the demands of a righteous God who commands us to live according to the truth. The Bible says that nonbelievers are ignorant of God not because they can’t know the truth, but “because of their hardness of heart” (Ephesians 4:18).

Now we can cry out as apologists that the post-modern view is unaffirmable and therefore self-defeating. Yet post-modern people have difficulty seeing what is wrong with their belief system;

their view has never been challenged and they have lived comfortably with it for so long. As a result, they may feel no compulsion to change, while at the same time they must use categories of logic and reason, which are very modern ideas, on a day-to-day basis. Many Post-Modernists believe that reason and logic do not apply to religious beliefs and morals. They have been adamant about this for so long that many Christians have concluded objective apologetics does not “work” any more. As a result, many Christians have discarded any talk about the objective evidence for our faith and have replaced it with subjective experiences of God as the primary evidence in witnessing to others. But, is this wise? We must remember that non-believers cannot suppress the truth forever. Sooner or later the truth will come to the surface again. Many post-modern non-believers personally confessed to me after Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> that, “It really does matter what we believe.” As a result, we should not so easily discard objective apologetics in our witness to skeptics.

The Holy Spirit gives us an inner assurance of our relationship with God (Romans 8:16), but that may do nothing to help us reach our post-modern friends for Christ. Our personal experience with God can stimulate non-believers to search for the reason why we are different, but if experience is our only apologetic, then the unbeliever can say his experience is just as satisfactory as our own. Subjective experience doesn’t allow for any objective test of truth. Instead, it leads to mutually exclusive, relative “truths.”

We face problems today in evangelism, especially on college campuses, because we have bought into the lie that we can no longer use reason or objective evidence when talking to a Post-Modernist about the claims of Christ. Now if we have given away our best weapons, where can we turn to next? What would we think of a bank robber who points a gun at the bank clerk who responds to him, “I am sorry, I do not believe in guns anymore.” Should the bank robber put away the gun because he was told that others do not believe in the power of guns anymore? Obviously a bank robber would see this suggestion as silly.<sup>16</sup> Yet, this is what many Christians are doing these days to confront the problem of Post-Modernism. Many Post-Modernists are crying out that our categories of reason and logic do not have an effect on them any more. They challenge us to try something else! So we accede to their wishes, and then wonder why we are being slaughtered on the battlefield! The fact is the law of non-contradiction is still an essential weapon in our arsenal to destroy speculation (2 Cor. 10:5). As a result, we should not so easily give up using it even though others may protest it doesn’t work any more! Christian philosopher and apologist, Rob Koons, says, “Apologetics is offering each person evidence and reasons for the truth of Christianity that turns the gears of his/her mental machinery... It’s how their mind works whether they want to recognize it or not.”<sup>17</sup> Yet we must realize that some will still refuse to believe and others will be indifferent to the truth. Luke records in Acts 14:1 that although Paul spoke in such a way, many believed, while some did not.

On the other hand, it may be true that some people may not care about logic and reason until they first see the apologetic of our lives, observing how Christ has made a practical difference in us (Philippians 1:14). As a result, one of the implications of Post-Modernism for evangelism today is that we need to be more sensitive in finding the right balance in using objective evidence and subjective evidence in our witness to others.

---

<sup>16</sup> This illustration was originally developed by Norm Geisler.

<sup>17</sup> Koons

Many Post-Modernist reject a strong evidence based approach. Hence, a more Socratic, or what I call “Francis Schaeffer/Detective Columbo style,” approach may yield a more fruitful outcome with today’s Post-Modernists. With a Post-Modernist, we want to start by asking questions about their belief system in such a way that it reveals the cracks in their worldview foundation. Once they see these cracks, they may be more willing to look for answers and take steps towards exploring Christianity. Actually, this is not really different from what the apostle Paul did in Acts 17 when he spoke to the polytheists at Mars Hill. His point was this: “You are telling me that you created these wooden gods, and yet at the same time you are telling me that these wooden gods created you. How is it possible for both of these things to be true?” He presented them with their contradictory beliefs and asked for an explanation. This approach is more fruitful because we live in a world that does not like to be *told* what is right or wrong. They may, however, be willing to see the inconsistencies of their own belief system when presented with them as in a mirror.

We want to do more than deconstruct a persons post-modern beliefs.<sup>18</sup> We also want to discover the real barriers that keep them from embracing Christianity. I find that intellectual questions are often a smoke screen to keep Christians at bay. This is why I always want to find out the answer to two important questions. First, I want to know what their biggest barrier to belief in God or Christianity is. This helps me to know where I can surgically apply the apologetic knife. Second, I want to know what would motivate them to seek answers in these areas.

Once we can help someone see their inconsistencies and uncover their real barriers, we can then help them build a bridge towards the Gospel. Sometimes I will even ask someone I am trying to witness to, “If you could know the truth about religious issues, would you want to know it?” I may occasionally follow this question by explaining that the truth may have consequences they might not like. This gives me an opportunity to find out if they are sincere in their search for truth, given that they have discovered some cracks in their own worldview foundation.

Once they show interest in learning more about the person of Christ, I explain in more detail how unique Jesus really is compared to the other religious leaders. In this way, I use questions to challenge them and peak their interest in further discussions. This is similar to Jesus’ approach with the woman at the well (John 4:14). At this point I can also help them to understand the difference between “belief that” and “belief in.” This will help them clearly understand what it really means to embrace Christ and to resolve any tensions in their own mind between faith and reason.

To summarize this model of dealing with a Post-Modernist, the best approach is to first, *hear* their discrepancies concerning their own beliefs. There are four types of discrepancies that I listen for. First, there is the discrepancy between what they say they believe and their heart longing. Second, there is a discrepancy between what they say they believe and how they live (Galatians 2:14-16). Third, there is the discrepancy between two things they believe that are mutually contradictory (Acts 17:22-30). Fourth, there is also the discrepancy or contradiction in

---

<sup>18</sup> See Nick Pollard, *Evangelism Made Slightly Less Difficult* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 43 for a further explanation of positive deconstructionism.

the statement itself<sup>19</sup>. People say contradictory things all the time. For instance, statements such as, “God is so far beyond us that we really can’t know anything about him,” are not uncommon. I typically respond to statements like these by asking how they know that statement to be true unless they know something about God.

Once we have heard the non-believer’s discrepancies/contradictions, we want to shine a light on them so they can be clearly seen by our post-modern friends. We can do this practically by asking them two kinds of questions. First, we can ask for definitions of the terms used. For example, when people say that they believe that Christianity is just a crutch, I ask them what they mean by “crutch.” This helps me know if we are on the same page. It also has the effect of putting the onus of responsibility back on the non-believer to explain what he believes. Next, we want to ask questions that expose the cracks in their overall foundation. For example, some non-Christian college students I talk to say they believe in heaven or that they are getting to heaven by doing good things. At that point, I typically ask them if they think Hitler will get into heaven. They usually say no, unless they are Mormons. Then I ask, “If Hitler will not get into heaven, then what is the standard that Hitler does not measure up to, but others may?” This once again puts the obligation on them to determine what that standard really is. If we explain to them what the biblical standard is (Matthew 5:48; James 2:10), this helps them to see the problem with their own perspective.

After I carefully illuminate the discrepancies in their belief system and deconstruct their perspective, I then want to *uncover* the supposed barriers to get to the real barriers that are keeping them from seriously considering Christianity. While doing this, I must be mindful that Post-Modernists care little how much we know until they know how much we care! The apostle Paul rightly said that, “though I know all mysteries and all knowledge... but do not have love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:2 N.A.S.B.). Once we have uncovered the real barriers to the gospel, we want to help build a bridge to the gospel for Post-Modernists.

Finally, we need to remember the goal, which is to remove the obstacles so that we can help them take one step closer to Christ each day. Once they are convinced that there is good reason to believe that Christ is who He said He is, and they see their need for Him, I would then invite them to trust “in” Christ.

In a nutshell, our model to reaching a Post-Modernist is that we want to *hear* them and their discrepancies. Then we want to *illuminate* the discrepancies by asking questions that will *clarify* their religious terminology and *expose* the weaknesses of their perspective. Next, we want to find non-believer’s real barriers to Christ, find common ground, and build a bridge to help them take one step closer to Jesus Christ each day (1 Cor. 3:6). I have found this approach helpful in my efforts to put new wine into new wine skins (Matt. 9:17) in this new millennium, especially in reaching post-modern people.

---

<sup>19</sup> See the “Conversational Evangelism” Methodology on our web-site ([www.meeknessandtruth.org](http://www.meeknessandtruth.org)) for more details.