

20th & 21st Feb 2013 Feb 2013

Apologetics – Being the Apologist

Last week we introduced and consider the topic of 'Apologetics' – and tonight we build on that further and think about what that might look like for each of us.

Authority

In order to engage in any Christian apologetics it is important to acknowledge the foundation from which we draw our arguments.

Exercise:

- Imagine you are an elite sportsperson. You are offered a form of undetectable performance enhancing drugs.
- You have used them in the past and they have helped you compete [*Experience*]
- – in fact without using them there is strong doubt that you would be able to compete to win against other who you also know are using the same drug. [*Reason*]
- Further you are a member of a team and everyone else on the team wants you to use the drug – it is the thing the team does. [*Tradition*]
- You have become a Christian [*Bible*]

What core motivators are present in making this decision – either way?

DEBRIEF

[Alternative Scenario]

- You are standing at the lights needing to cross and you are running late.
- The lights say 'Don't Walk'
- You know it is safe – you have crossed before without harm. [*Experience*]
- There are others with you who cross without harm. [*Tradition*]
- You are with a five year old child – asking to cross. [*Reason*]
- You are Christian [*Bible*]

What core motivators are present in making this decision – either way?

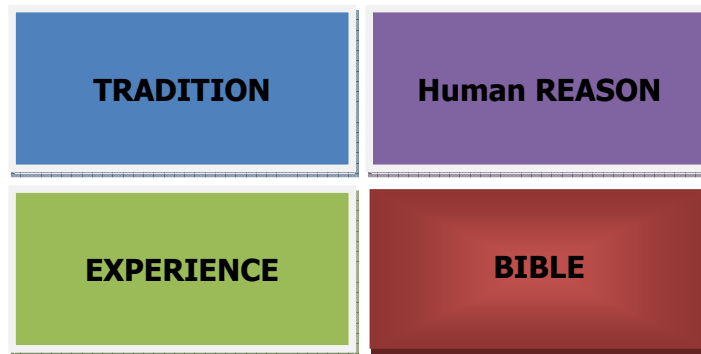
DEBRIEF

- What is it that you ultimately turn to in making the decisions that you do?

Apologetics – Being an Apologist

- If you striped everything back – what would you rely on to make the decisions which shape your life, how you spend money, how to vote, what to do with your time, who live with, or go out with, or marry, or listen too?

This may sound obvious, but said because there are several foundations (four generally) which motivate a person (including a Christian) in argument.



This is often called the ‘authority quadrilateral’. Let me explain it a little further...

- **Tradition** – what is meant here is that the person makes their decisions most dominantly influenced by their traditions – it could be their culture, there religious background, their upbringing.
- A moments thought here should allow us to see that this is often a very good thing. Our history is full of good achievements and we would not want to reject many of the things that we have grown up with as part of our tradition.
- I know for me, I would like my children to hold onto the traditions I have established for them.
- So tradition can be a very good thing.
- **Experience** – what is meant here is that the person makes their decisions most dominantly influenced by their life experiences – the life lessons, the events planned or unplanned which have occurred and are now held onto as part of the persons make-up.
- Through trial or error, the person comes to accept some things and reject others.
- When learning to drive in the rain, you go around a corner and the back of the car slides out. First time it happens you assume it must be the road not you. The second

Apologetics – Being an Apologist

time you go around the corner in the rain and the back of the car slides out again, you think maybe it is the speed – in the rain I should slow down. The third time you go around the corner in the rain you slow down and the back of the car doesn't slide out – brilliant, your experience has helped you develop a new theory of life.

- Experience can be very helpful, very personal and is hard to deny and in many cases we wouldn't want to deny.
- **Human Reason** – what is meant here is that the person makes their decisions most dominantly influenced by their own intellectual schema.
- With the intellectual powers that each person can muster, with the 'evidence' which you have or you are willing to consider you make the decisions you want to make – accepting some things and rejecting others.
- There is a lot of strength in this position – it says that a person can rationally weight up options, that they can individually determine what seems most plausible and what doesn't.
- **Bible** – what is meant here is that the person makes their decisions on the basis of what the Bible says. As each decision is presented, the Bible is allowed to be the authority.
- If the issue is directly addressed then it is quite clear that the answer should be in line with what the Bible says. So for example, if I don't have enough money to pay some bill an option could be to steal from someone, but the Bible clearly says not to steal and so I don't and instead find another way to pay the bill.
- If the issue is not directly addressed then the principle behind the decision should be considered to ensure that what is decided does not deny an aspect of what the Bible says is good and right. So for example, you find yourself in a job that you may love but for whatever reason is making it harder for you to live a godly life – maybe it's too life consuming, or the workplace ethos is unhelpful – then the biblical principle governing your decisions might be to make a change because it is more important to be godly than it is to be wealthy or happy.

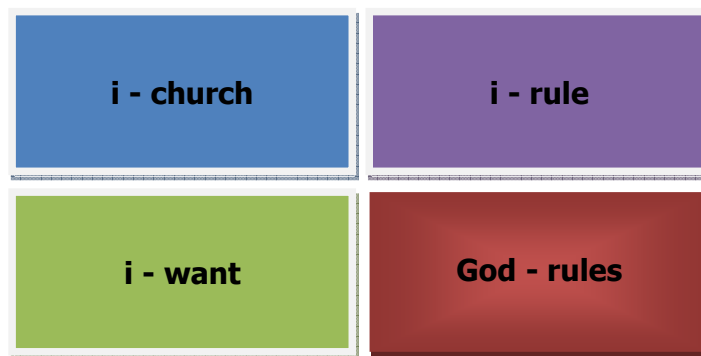
In reality, we (and by that I meant Christians) draw on all four of these areas whenever we make decisions. We draw on all four in the decisions which govern our life. In fact, I think it

Apologetics – Being an Apologist

would be impossible to live and only ever considering one area in making the decisions we do.

What is important is not to establish a *sole* authority – but to establish a *prime* authority.

- Now here is an obvious statement – the Bible today, in the world we live in, is definitely not considered a prime authority. It might be referred to if it says something that the world likes to hear, but generally it is not high on the list.
- What is the top of the authority list?
- Well it is not quite that easy either - that depends on who you are talking to, where the person comes from, and what has most affected them in life. It may be different from person to person.
- But let me make this observation – whether it is *tradition*, *experience* or *human reason* – those three ultimately come back to the person. They each look into the person and allow that person to make their own call.
- What is different about the *Bible* – is that of the four authorities, it is the only one that allows God to be the authority. And that is quite significant



- i-church - 'always-been-like-this' argument
- i-want - 'i-pod, i-phone, i-pad, i-anything' argument
- i-rule - 'I know better' argument
- God-rules – 'the Bible tells me so' argument (c.f. 2 Tim 3:16)

COMMENT/QUESTION

So let's consider the theological basis for Christian apologetics.

The Theological Basis for Apologetics

a) What would you say are the major themes or truths (doctrines) of the Bible?

b) Which are most important?

c) Which would be most important for the activity of apologetics?

Creation, Redemption, Revelation, Incarnation

Doctrine of Creation (How God created)

The Bible tells us that God created. From nothing came something by the Word of God. And so the creator's footprint is all over his creation effectively testifying to him.

a. *Order and design* point to God

- Romans 1:19-20*
- Psalm 19:1
- Acts 14:17

b. Humans are *created in the image of God*

- Genesis 1:27*

As such, they reflect the nature of God.

We should note that the existence of rationality, personality, truth, goodness, conscience all help testify to God as a moral being (where else does a human standard come from?)

Question: Are there limits to this 'proof'?

Apologetics – Being an Apologist

There are limits to this line of argument. Creation may well be a 'general' signpost to God, but it is far from conclusive or unambiguous in explaining the character of God and the nature and scope of his work in the world. So...

Doctrine of Redemption (How God saves us)

The Biblical doctrine of redemption tells us why human nature as we see it now is not as God intended it to be. There is a difference between how humans were intended and how we are.

Are humans meeting their potential? Are we functioning as all we were meant to be? Even our non-Christian world would say the best is yet to come! What they would not say, is that our benchmark of potential is God.

So redemption:

- a. Operates as a *signpost to God* in that it tells us why things are not the way you would think they ought to be in the World created by a perfect and good God.
- b. Warns us that sin has affected our whole being including our *ability to think rightly* about creation. In other words, we have a predisposition to suppress what is evident and true about God and invent a god of our own making (Romans 1:21-23*).
- c. Tells us that because God has acted in Christ to redeem us from our fallen-ness we can, through Jesus *begin to see rightly again* (Luke 1:68ff*, Romans 3:10bff c.f. 3:21-26).

Doctrine of Revelation (How God speaks to us)

There is something special about the way God relates to his world. Rather than leave us with a 'general' picture (that which we can draw from looking around us), he has given us his Word – the Bible, his 'special' revelation. From the first page it is clear that God is a God who communicates.

- a. Through the created order (see point 1)
- b. Acts in history (e.g. his salvation of Israel in the Exodus)
- c. Through scripture as he interprets for us those acts of history (Ps 19:2-4; 119)
- d. And most clearly through Jesus (Heb 1:1-3*) – God's word in human form (Jn 1:1-18*).

Apologetics – Being an Apologist

Question: How does Christian conversion happen?

By the spirit of God who takes the Word about Christ and turns it into an encounter with Christ. – so the Word of God about Christ is fundamentally linked with the role of the Spirit (c.f. Acts 4:31;10:44; 1 Thess 1:5)*

Question: How does this help us in our exercise of apologetics?

It tells us that a) It is only the word about Christ that will eventually bring faith (where there is unbelief), and b) it is only through the work of God through his Spirit that there will be faith (where there has been unbelief).

Doctrine of Incarnation (How God became man)

Last doctrine to undergird of apologetics is the doctrine of the incarnation that is, God becoming man. This doctrine builds upon the doctrine of redemption and revelation.

The incarnation tells us:

- a. that humans are fallen creatures and *need salvation in order to relate to God*. We are helpless to help ourselves in this regard (Phil 2:1-13*, Hebrews 2:14-18, Eph 2:1-10).
- b. that *God intensely desires to make himself known to us* so that we might relate to him – as such, to see Jesus is to see God, to hear Jesus is to hear God (John 8:19*; 10:30-39; 14:8-11*).

Question: How does this doctrine help us in our evangelism and apologetics?

In order to reach us and bring us back to God, Jesus becomes like us and dies for us. We cannot die in order to accomplish forgiveness for others, but we can imitate Jesus by giving up our rights and privileges so that others might hear the good news about Jesus and come to relate to God.

Being an Apologist

Now for those who like to get into the practical. Some tips on being an apologist:

➤ **Be there.**

Sad fact – many Christians are simply not available to have the conversations that need to happen with unbelievers because we have shut ourselves into Christian ghettos.

Apologetics – Being an Apologist

We need to boldly go to where people need to hear the gospel – speak it and defend it so that others can obey it.

➤ **Be Honest.**

Do not fear being honest about the gospel – it needs not a champion in us!

When we speak the gospel and defend it...

- be honest about the difficulties,
- honest when we don't have the answers,
- honest about the ramifications of accepting or rejecting the gospel.

➤ **Be Enthusiastic.**

Stop for a moment and consider how magnificent it is that as Christians we know how to relate to the God of all the universe, who created and structured all things and wants his people to dwell with him!

The most important part of our communication about God will be our words about Jesus, but our non-verbal communication will speak volumes to support those words.

- Godly lifestyle
- Infectious enthusiasm
- Joy – both in the good and the through the bad.

➤ **'God talk'**

Our society is secular – it has long lost the desire to talk about God. We need to get back into the unashamed habit of talking about him.

This kind of talks treats God as a person who matters rather than as an abstract idea or philosophy. How we talk about a close friend or loved one should be how we talk about God.

Which sounds more personal and real:

'The Christian position on this is...' or 'The Bible states...'

Compared with:

'I think God would think...' or 'God says...'

'God talk' happens in the first person. 'What would Jesus/God think/say/do about that?' Make it part of your daily conversation.

➤ **Be interested and informed**

Apologetics – Being an Apologist

As mentioned above, Christians are at risk of being insular. If we don't mix much with others (non-believers), then it is harder to know what they are doing and enjoying. Know what they are interested in. Gain a broad and informed perspective on life, both faith and culture.

Be a spectator of the world (which doesn't mean you get lost in the world) – what John Stott calls 'double listening'¹. It is the art of knowing the truth and knowing the world and all so we are better able to defend the truth.

Suggestions:

- Know the top 10 popular books, movies, TV shows, fads, computer games.
- Eve-drop on society – listen to the important voices in society (TV, Newspaper, Radio, plays, politics, opinion pieces).
- Read Christianly – so that our understanding of ourselves and the world is constantly being shaped Christianly.
- Examine assumptions – both of ourselves and of our world – critically yet charitably.

➤ **Be ready to listen.**

We must be willing to listen if you expect those we evangelise to listen to us.

Four quick, basic but important principles for listening well:

- *Listen!* – be more interested in what they say than what you want to say!
- *Eye contact* – shows concern, interest and engagement.
- *Positive listening* – being concerned about the truth doesn't necessarily mean forcing the truth down people's throats! We need to affirm what is good and right in what is said as well as gently questioning or denying that which is wrong.
- *Right Questions* - It's about asking the right questions and the right times. Open questions (e.g. why, what, when, where, who) draw out discussion. Closed questions (e.g. did, do, are, have, isn't it) shut down discussion and prevent rambling.

➤ **Be ready to speak.**

¹ John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian* (Leicester: IVP, 1992).

Apologetics – Being an Apologist

Paul says to 'be ready in season and out of season' (2 Tim 4:1-5) to preach the (gospel) word and as we have already discussed (last session) Peter urges people to 'be prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you' (1 Peter 3:15). There are two essentials for the apologist – to *know the gospel* and to know some *ways to defend* it.

➤ **Pray.**

If we are going to be talking to people about God – then we should do as God asks and talk to him about people first!!

Pray