

# Understanding Christian Apologetics

## Lesson 8: Dealing with Resistance

### I. Understand the Different Reasons Why People Are Resistant to Arguments for Christianity<sup>1</sup>

- A. Rational objections: it does not make sense to them, or it raises questions that present barriers to considering Christianity
- B. Emotional factors: bad experiences with Christians in the past; the recognition that accepting Christianity would mean admitting that deceased non-Christian relatives are lost; the potential rejection or losses they would experience if they became Christians
- C. Prejudice: they have already made up their minds and are not interested in considering Christianity
- D. Rebellion against God: they don't care; they only want to be able to live however they please; ultimately, all resistance to God stems from this

### II. Dealing with People with Controlling Personalities and Bad Manners

- A. Some people try to win arguments by overwhelming others with the force of their personalities
  - 1. They present challenge after challenge, without giving the other person a chance to respond
  - 2. They never really listen to the other person
  - 3. They constantly interrupt
  - 4. They are not usually interested in answers
- B. Step 1: Stop the person

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<sup>1</sup> This lesson is drawn from chapters 11-12 of Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*.

1. Put the discussion on pause and ask for permission to make your point without being interrupted
  2. Don't show impatience, but speak calmly and with confidence
  3. Examples
    - a) Hold up your hand and say, "I'm not quite finished"
    - b) "This will take a moment to explain. Is that okay?"
    - c) "I'd like to respond to your first challenge before moving on to another point. Is that okay with you?"
  4. When you are done, give him the courtesy of offering an uninterrupted response
- C. Step 2: Shame the person
1. If the person breaks his agreement by continuing to interrupt, confront his rudeness by asking for courtesy
  2. Ignore new challenges; realize that they are rabbit trails
  3. Confront the problem directly, but do so with civility
  4. Use the person's name to soften the exchange ("Steve, you agreed to give me a chance to answer without interrupting. Can I continue?")
- D. Step 3: Leave the person
1. If the person continues to be rude, walk away from the conversation as graciously as you can
  2. Let the person have the last word; doing so in such situations conveys the confidence you have in your own view

3. Remember that not everyone deserves an answer (Mt. 7:6; 21:27; Jn. 19:9)
4. If the person is treating the truth with utter contempt, don't waste your efforts

### III. Handling Appeals to Scholarly or Scientific Authority

- A. Those with scholarly credentials are often cited as experts in support of a particular position
  1. It is sometimes the case that such people have expert knowledge that informs the counsel they give; there is a legitimate use of arguments based on authority
  2. At the same time, "expert testimony" should never be accepted without being evaluated
  3. "Scholars can be wrong, and often are. Their reasoning can be weak, their facts can be mistaken, and bias can distort their judgment." [168]
- B. Scrutinize the credentials of purported "experts"
  1. Those with scholarly credentials are sometimes cited as authorities in areas outside their field of expertise (e.g. a professor of biology does not have expert credentials to give advice on ethical matters)
  2. Famous people are sometimes presented as experts in a particular field even though they don't have professional credentials in that field (e.g. Bill Nye "the Science Guy" does not have credentials as a scientist; David Barton does not have credentials as a historian)
- C. Even when a person has legitimate scholarly credentials to speak in a given area, he still has to provide sound reasons to support his position
  1. Never accept an argument simply on the basis of a scholar's credentials

2. Ask for reasons that support the scholar's view
  3. Realize that scholarly experts can hold presuppositions that determine the conclusions they make
- D. Example 1: Responding to the claim that belief in creation is unscientific, or that intelligent design is religion disguised as science
1. Point out the difference between the methodology of science (which is observation and experimentation) and the philosophy of naturalistic materialism (which says that everything must be materially explained)
  2. When it comes to Darwinism, "When there is a conflict between methodology and materialism, the philosophy always trumps the facts. Modern science does not conclude from the evidence that design is not tenable. It assumes it prior to the evidence." [171]
  3. A Harvard Genetics professor wrote the following in the *New York Review of Books*: "It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our *a priori* adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counterintuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door." [cited on 172]
  4. Ask the person making the claim to give the scientific reasons (not philosophical assumptions) that support his claim
- E. Example 2: Responding to the claim that the Jesus of history should be distinguished from the miracle-working Jesus in whom orthodox Christians believe
1. Robert Funk, a scholar involved in the Jesus Seminar, claims, "The Gospels are now assumed to be narratives in which the memory of Jesus is embellished by mythic elements that express the church's faith in him, and by plausible fictions that enhance the telling of the

gospel-story for first-century listeners." [173]

2. The basic claim: because the Gospels relate events that are inconsistent with a materialistic view of the world, these portions must be fabrications
3. In this argument, the person is simply starting with his conclusion; nothing has been proved, only assumed
4. Ask the person making such a claim to support it with evidence instead of basing it on his prior assumptions