

Understanding Christian Apologetics

Lesson 9: Checking and Knowing the Facts

I. Evaluate People's Claims¹

- A. People sometimes base their arguments against Christianity on bad information
- B. Example — “More blood has been shed in the name of religion than any other cause.”
 - 1. Fact — “In the twentieth century alone, more innocent people have been murdered, tortured, and enslaved by secular ideologies — Nazism and communism — than by all religions in history.”
 - 2. ___ million Jews killed under Hitler
 - 3. 66 million killed under Lenin, Stalin, and Khrushchev
 - 4. 32-61 million Chinese killed under communist regimes since 1949
- C. Be as specific as you can be with numbers and other details; shows that you know what you are talking about
 - 1. Instead of, “Thousands died in the terrorist attacks of 9/11.”
 - 2. Say, “2,973 human beings were buried beneath the rubble of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a field in Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001.”
- D. A plan for checking a person's facts
 - 1. Ask, “What is the claim?” or “What is the precise point that this person is making?”
 - a) Take the time to put it into words yourself

¹ This lesson is drawn from chapters 13-14 of Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*.

- b) Oftentimes, the claim that a person is making is implicit or hidden under a layer of rhetoric

2. Ask, "Is the claim accurate?"

- a) Use the internet or other resources to check the facts
- b) Point out to the person that their claim lacks a factual basis by citing the specific facts that testify against it

E. Example: *The DaVinci Code*

1. The claims

- a) The fighting between Christians and pagans in the first three centuries threatened to rend the Roman Empire in two
- b) The doctrine of the deity of Christ was fabricated for political reasons at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 and affirmed by a close vote
- c) Constantine arranged to have all the Gospels that described Jesus as a mere mortal gathered up and destroyed
- d) The Dead Sea Scrolls confirm that our Bible is a fabrication
- e) Thousands of Jesus' followers wrote accounts of his life; history has never had a definitive version of the life of Christ

2. Assessing the claims

- a) There was no fighting between Christians and pagans in the first three centuries because the Christians had no armies and were willing to be martyred
- b) No one at the Council of Nicaea considered Jesus to be a mere mortal; the final vote was a landslide, with 316 of 318 voting in favor of what was formulated in the Nicene Creed

- c) How would it have been possible for Constantine to gather up and destroy every single copy of these supposed alternate accounts of Jesus' life?
- d) The Dead Sea Scrolls say absolutely nothing about Jesus; they contain portions of the Hebrew Bible (OT), Aramaic translations of some OT books, commentaries on OT books, and some non-canonical legal, poetic, liturgical, and eschatological texts
- e) If these accounts of Jesus' life were destroyed, how does Brown even know that they existed in the first place? Furthermore, if Brown's claim is true, then how can he be so confident in his own assertions about Jesus?

II. Prepare Yourself

A. Some basic principles

1. Be on the alert for opportunities
2. Try to avoid getting tangled up in controversial issues that are not central to the gospel (the rapture, tongues-speaking, etc.)
3. Be careful about using religious clichés
4. Keep the focus on the truth of Christianity rather than its personal benefits
5. Give reasons to support your claims
6. Keep your cool
7. Don't force the conversation
8. Point people to resources to research the matter further

B. Encourage critique by hostile witnesses

1. Don't give in to the temptation to avoid challenges to your beliefs
2. Be willing to test the merits of the Christian faith by seeing how it measures up against opposing views
3. "If our ideas are easily destroyed by those acquainted with the facts, they ought to be discarded. But if our ideas are good, they will not be upended so easily. In the process, we will learn what the other side knows. We may even be surprised at how weak their resistance really is." [194]
4. "Don't retreat in the face of opposition. Too much is at stake. Be the kind of soldier who instills respect in other because of your courage under fire. Make your case in the presence of hostile witnesses." [197]
5. Remember that this is a learning process and that your responsibility is to be faithful, trusting the results to God

C. Key traits of an ambassador for Christ

1. Ready
2. Patient
3. Reasonable
4. Tactical
5. Clear
6. Fair
7. Honest
8. Humble
9. Attractive manner

10. Dependent upon Christ

D. Learn the basic logical fallacies²

1. *Ad hominem* ("to the man"): when the person of an authority is attacked rather than his qualifications ("What does he know? He is just an old white male.")
2. Appeal to ignorance: basing an argument upon the fact that there is no evidence to disprove it (Sen. Joseph McCarthy once responded to a request for evidence to back up his accusation that a certain person was a Communist by saying, "there is nothing in the files to disprove his Communist connections")
3. Appeal to pity: asking for special treatment on the basis of pity (a Christian who argues that his church should go along with his desire to get a divorce because he is in an unhappy marriage)
4. *Ad populum* ("to the people"): appealing to the emotions of a crowd, or appealing to someone to go along with a crowd
5. Affirming the consequent: a deductive fallacy that overlooks other explanations ("When the roads are icy, the mail is late. The mail is late. Therefore, the roads are icy.")
6. Denying the antecedent: another deductive fallacy that overlooks alternative explanations ("When the roads are icy, the mail is late. The roads are not icy. Therefore the mail is not late.")
7. Begging the question / Circular argument: assuming the point that you are trying to prove
8. Complex question: posing a question in a manner that traps the other person into agreeing with an assertion that is implied by the question ("Are you still as self-centered as you used to be?", or "Have you stopped beating your wife yet?")

² Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, 73-78.

9. Equivocation: changing the meaning of a term into order to make your case (“Since men and women are obviously not equal (*i.e.* ‘*identical*’), the law should not treat them as equal (*i.e.* ‘*entitled to the same rights and opportunities*’).”
 10. False dilemma: reducing the options to just two when there may be other options
 11. *Non sequitur* (“does not follow”): drawing a conclusion that is not a reasonable inference from the evidence
 12. Persuasive definition: defining a term in a way that is obviously biased (“Faith is belief without evidence in what is told by one who speaks without knowledge, of things without parallel.”)
 13. Poisoning the well: using loaded language to disparage an argument before it can even be considered (“I’m sure that you won’t go along with those who are so naive to think that...”)
 14. Red herring: introducing an irrelevant or secondary subject to divert attention away from the main subject
 15. Straw man: caricaturing an opposing view so it is easy to refute
- E. Do your homework on the kinds of subjects that are likely to come up (we’ll be doing this in the upcoming lessons)