

Problems, Pitfalls and Perplexities

Inevitably in our Christian walk we are faced with problems. Theological and doctrinal issues arise either by our own lack of understanding, or others challenging our faith. Still yet, we can become arrogant in our knowledge and lose sight of our purposes; to bring honor to God and seek to preach the gospel to all who would listen.

Problems from within; Christian objections to apologetics

Many Christians believe that Apologetics is a vain practice while some even view it as sinful. I believe much of this is due to a misunderstanding of what apologetics is. I do agree that apologists often can lose sight of the gospel and behave in an ungracious and arrogant way, which could lead to a bad view of apologetics. Some objections and questions that are raised are...

❖ If you have evidence, what room is there for Faith?

- This question assumes that the more evidence you have the less of a blind leap your faith would be to believe the claims of the Bible. For many people faith is something that is entirely spiritual and therefore separate from reasoning and evidence. The idea is based on a definition of faith that says faith is believing in something without reason to do so. But what does the Bible actually teach about faith and evidence?
 - John 20.29 – If evidence ruled out faith how could any bible character believe?
 - Acts 1.3 – Christ gave many “infallible proofs”
 - 2 Tim 4.7 – Paul had faith even though he had evidence
 - Heb 11.1 – Faith is substance and evidence
- I believe this view is based upon a false dichotomy that Faith and reason are mutually exclusive and somehow cancel each other. Nowhere in the Bible will it tell you or teach you that if you have evidence or proof, you cannot have faith. Rather that proof is confirmation of faith already held, in face of opposition.
- This view that faith and reason are exclusive still ends up using apologetics but very poorly without realizing they're doing it. This would often manifest in personal experience stories. All of which are non-verifiable. Even if the stories are verifiably true how would we know God's intent in the situation?
 - Stories of people dying and visiting heaven.
 - Like miners hearing screams and an increase in heat proves the Bible is true and that Hell is in the center of the earth.

- God speaking to you in dreams and visions.
- Trying to read situations or circumstances to determine God's will or intent.

❖ Doesn't the Bible tell us to avoid science and philosophy?

- (I Tim 6:20) This verse says to avoid oppositions of science falsely so called: the problem here is that people assume the wrong definition of the word science and how it's being used in this verse.
- Science = If you look up the word Science in the Table Alphabeticall (an early 17th century dictionary of the English language) you will see that the definition reads – Knowledge or skill.
 - This was the understanding of the word at the time that it was translated. So as you can see the definition is not of the physical sciences that we typically think of like Anatomy or Biology, but of wisdom or skill. So what this verse is saying is that this science is a false wisdom that opposes the truth found in Christ, not that we shouldn't study the sciences.
- (Col. 2:8) like the last one the proper understanding of the word will shed light on what the verse is talking about.
- Philosophy = love of wisdom, study of wisdom
 - According to Blue Letter Bible and Strong's : "used either of zeal for or skill in any art or science, any branch of knowledge. Used once in the NT of the theology, or rather theosophy, of certain Jewish Christian ascetics, which busied itself with refined and speculative enquires into the nature and classes of angels, into the ritual of the Mosaic law and the regulations of Jewish tradition respecting practical life."
 - Col. 2.18
 - Titus 1.13-16
 - I Cor. 3.19-21
 - Rom. 3.4
- I agree with C.S. Lewis when he said "If all the world were Christian, it might not matter if all the world were educated. But, as it is, a cultural life will exist outside the Church whether it exists inside or not. To be ignorant and simple now—not to be able to meet

the enemies on their own ground—would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defense but us against the intellectual attacks of the Heathen. Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered.”

- All of these examples talk about man’s wisdom that is not of God and is contrary to him. The warnings to beware of science and philosophy in scripture are not warnings or commands not to study the sciences or philosophy as we understand the words to mean today. Not all Christians have the time or ability to study the ins and outs of the sciences. Most have all their time and energy wrapped up in career, family and daily living. It falls to a few to answer the critics, which often will make matters worse. This is because we put all our trust in a few persons who may be exceptional but each has their own doctrinal understanding. Ultimately these men and women end up speaking for all Christians regardless of denomination or doctrinal lines. They may push a line of argumentation that ends up being theologically flawed, but because of who proposed the argument it is picked up on and spread not realizing the harm it does in the end. It shouldn’t be this way, recall from lesson one that I believe all Christians should be able and ready to answer the critics.

❖ Doesn’t the Bible tell us to be ignorant of evil? (Rom. 16:19)

- I Cor. 10.1-14 The Holy Spirit by the pen of the Apostle Paul tells us to remember events and people that were evil in order to not make the same mistakes. Clearly this doesn’t mean to not be aware of or know about sin.
- The word simple means- unmixed, pure as in wines or metals of the mind, without a mixture of evil, free from guile, innocent, simple
 - This idea of not being mixed is like the one used in II Cor. 6.14-15. To be unequally yoked means that there is a power struggle of two different views. These two work against each other and make getting a task done almost impossible.
 - This would also be like trying to weld two dissimilar metals together in a machine; this may hold for a time, but will break causing damage to the rest of the machine. This is the essence of the verse. To live in sin as the world while claiming Christ will eventually lead to irreparable damages. Think of all the great men and women who have had their ministries destroyed by a single moment of poor judgment.
 - I believe what Paul is talking about is not an ignorance of what is evil or what evil people do but that the Saint should be innocent of evil in an experiential way. That we are not experienced or that we should be novices in committing evil. It is inconsistent to claim Christianity while living like the world. Our lives are in a sense the Gospel on display, and how we act tells others if we believe what we preach. If we show no remorse for sin why would they?

❖ Isn't Apologetics ineffective to winning people to Christ?

- Matt. 7.14 – Yes because all preaching is in a sense ineffective. No matter what method you use only a minority will accept Christ.
 - I Cor. 1.21 – “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”
 - I Cor. 1.18 – “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”
 - I Cor. 1.23 – “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;”
 - I Cor. 2.14 – “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”
- In I Corinthians the context is that preaching is foolishness to those who trust in man's wisdom. The majority of the world will not see Christianity as true and viable. Subsequently, they will see it as foolishness. If a minority is going to find salvation then Apologetics is the minority of the minority. This should surprise no one who is paying attention.
- Please do not fall into the trap that just because it isn't seemingly the most effective way to win souls; that it is therefore unimportant and should be abandoned. All persons are precious to God and if I can win just one though apologetics then I should learn apologetics. We often do not see the results of our actions and only God knows how one choice or another will turn out. Not to mention Apologetics has other uses besides witnessing. It can edify or build up. This is because it gives testimony to the truth contained in God's word. It can also strengthen ones faith, in showing that you have more reason to believe. This edifying and strengthening can lead one to boldly share his/her faith knowing not only that it is true but that you can prove it if needed.
- Another point to this would be to examine Christ's and the apostles' approach.
 - In the Gospels Christ often put his deity on full display for audiences. He performed miracles to give authority to his preaching. He didn't ask people to simply trust him or take a leap of faith when he claimed to be the messiah.
 - In Acts 1.3 we see that even after he arose from the dead he gave many infallible proofs to show that he was in fact God.

- All throughout Acts the apostles dispute and argue that Jesus was the Christ and sight everything from miracles to eye witnesses.
- Paul's practice was to dispute and prove who Christ was and he did it wherever he went. He even quoted pop. culture (Mars' hill) to prove that God existed and desired people to be saved. (Acts 17.22-34)
- The idea that apologetics is useless or in opposition to faith is a mystery I cannot explain. I have not found any verse that would teach that faith means I cannot have evidence. Clearly this was not Jesus' nor the apostles' attitude when approaching witnessing.

❖ Who's wisdom?

- The word of caution in this would be to not exalt man's wisdom above God's revelation. We should hold all things up to the authority of scripture. Whatever seems to disagree with scripture, get rid of. This idea is consistent with the presuppositions we hold. We believe that God has spoken by his word and his word is true, even if something "appears" to be wrong.
- God's wisdom is perfect; we just poke about blindly in the universe, sometimes stumbling upon truth.
 - Rom. 3.4
 - Psalm 2.1-4
 - I Cor. 3.18-20
- ❖ Upon further thinking on this issue I have come to believe that not only are faith and reason not mutually exclusive they are never actually separate; a distinction can be made between them but apologetics always accompanies the gospel. What I mean is that whenever someone preaches, teaches, or evangelizes they undoubtedly and eventually will always employ apologetics in the event. This is because the nature of apologetics is to give reasons or defense of your beliefs. Usually we do not realize this is happening because we take many of the arguments for granted.
 - Some examples could be....
 - Preaching – Any pastor I have ever heard does essentially the same thing with different styles and to different degrees of success. All preachers give a passage, and their view of it. Then other verses, illustrations, experiences and arguments are given to help the audience see that the pastor's view is the correct one. Even if it is a poor presentation with little evidence or reasons, it is apologetic none the less.

The Almighty God or the Almighty Dot

Problems, Pitfalls and Perplexities Part 1

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Just because they may do a poor job doesn't mean they are not trying to be convincing. An example would be a pastor who states "the Bible says such and such, so you need to do this or that." This pastor preaches without supporting his claims at all, but he has still done apologetics, as he has assumed the Bible is true and trustworthy and stated, that on this basic assumption along with his authority as a pastor that you should believe him and do what he/Bible says.

- Teaching – Similarly the teaching event would be the same, as a teacher explains each subject he will make claims and seek to show them to be true even if he only ever appeals to scripture or his/her own authority.
- Evangelism - This is the one many might disagree, they will usually cite I Cor. 2.1-5 many will say "see he did not use persuasive speech or arguments, he just preached Christ and him crucified" but I do not believe this means Paul gave no reasons for them to believe what he is saying. Acts 18.1-11 we see Paul in Corinth and low and behold he is reasoning and persuading and teaching that Jesus was the Christ. Clearly Paul while teaching there for a year and a half would have used apologetics and gave them reasons and persuaded them that he was teaching the truth. His main appeal to them, was that there was power in the Gospel and that Christ was the answer. He may not have given formal apologetics but he still gave a defense or answer to believe him.
- I believe that nothing is believed without reason. Claims are not spoken into a vacuum. The Bible never demands that we believe without a reason. In Rom. 15.18-19, Paul talks about giving signs and wonders to make gentiles obedient to the gospel so why the signs? Because in I Cor. 1.22 "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom". Christ says in John 20.29 that those who believe without seeing him are blessed. We are in a place of disadvantage because we are some 2000 years removed from the events of scripture. We do not have the advantage of seeing the miracles of Christ and his ministry, but we can see the effects of him and many other proofs.

Next week we will continue this idea with some of the pit falls and perplexities of apologetics.