

Loving God with Heart and Mind: Apologetics in the New Post-Modern Age

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Introduction

Doing evangelistic apologetics with people raised in this new, post-modern age is much like going fishing. I know what I want to catch: the souls and minds of men and women. The hook is the same: the gospel. The pole and line are the forms of communication; they can vary greatly and still accomplish the job. The bait is what changes most often, as the times and currents of what looks attractive to the fish eddy and vary.

However, in the 1990s the spiritual water is polluted with the great, failed philosophies of the 20th century: pragmatism, materialism, relativism, and post-modernism. A *New York Times* poll (April 30, 1998) found that teens believe in God (94%), and get along well or fairly well with parents (97%), but 60% think distributing condoms in school is a good idea and the top three goals of teens are a good job (28%), money (11%), and success in life (9%). 51% think you can trust the government to do what is right almost all the time! Only 26% of adults agreed. Barna (1997) found that 84% of Americans call themselves Christians (76% say 'born again'), but that the church is losing influence. Christianity is having a minimal effect on non-Christians, especially those under 40.

A similar ethical effect is found among Christian teens. Beal (1988), in a study of 5000 Christian teens and 5000 Christian parents, found that the teens held social and behavioral convictions as conservative as their parents, but had a 50% greater rate of failure to live up to these standards. Donald Miller (1997) believes that the new directions of church growth will lead to massive changes.

In this paper I suggest that Peter told us what the common elements of the bait should be which will be used of God to bring men and women to Himself, throughout the centuries. Our task in this age should be to cast the appropriate line with a specific, relevant form of the bait, and which takes into account the pollution factors.

I. Apologetic Methods in a New Post-Modern Age Context

The new age is characterized by scepticism that there is any one way: post-modernists affirm multi-cultural pluralism and an intolerant toleration; new age spiritists affirm spiritual realities, but only non-Christian spirits (Curtis, 1997); Generation X affirms personal relevance, but in the absence of absolutes. Craig Miller (1998) says that today's teens are children of disposable families, believe there are many truths, but are looking for something to be real in their lives.

We will examine scripture to find the common elements for: 1) the method for doing apologetics, 2) the content to present, and 3) the test of accurate presentations.

1. The classical passage on doing apologetics is I Peter 3:15

Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.

There are three parts to Peter's command.

A. First, those who are called to represent the King are told to *set Christ as Lord in their hearts*. To Peter, as to any Jew who knew scripture or any believer who had listened to the Lord, the heart is the center of attention and direction for us humans. Where your heart is your treasure will be. The issues of life flow from the heart. The heart of unregenerate man is desperately wicked. This word, heart, specifically recalls the Great Commandment.

In Mark 12:29-31 Jesus says,

The foremost (commandment) is 'Hear O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.

Jesus' concluding statement in this text is very strong: 'There is no other commandment greater than these.' This has to be taken into careful consideration by every Christian. A deeper look at this Great Commandment is in order.

If we chart the three gospel references and the Old Testament source verses it may be put as follows:

- Mark 12:30 *kardia* 9; *psyche* *dianoia* *ischuos*
- Matt. 22:37 " 9; " " "
- Luke 10:27 #9; " 9; " " "
- Deut. 6:5 *lebab* *nephesh* *me'od*

The first element (*kardia* in Greek, *lebab* in Hebrew) is the heart, or the seat of mankind's affections and direction. This corresponds to our core values, which are activated by our will. In technical educational terms it is the affective center of man's being. We are to set Christ as Lord in our hearts: as the central focus of our life.

The second element (second in Hebrew [*nephesh*], the same as soul [*psyche*] and mind [*dianoia*] in Greek) includes what Walter Kaiser (Harris, 1980) calls the "whole self," that is, the personality or the

integrated whole of the spiritual, social and psychological makeup of the individual.

Often, this is summarized as the mind, will and emotions, or as the mind and spirit. But these summary phrases are too abbreviated to be much good in a discipleship discussion. The emotions are far too complex to be adequately captured by a single term. The mind is so complex, for example, that some educators and psychologists have subdivided it into 120 elements and developed tests for 26 of these elements (Meeker, 1980). Thus, 'soul and mind' are shorthand for the whole of the non-physical makeup of human beings.

The third element, strength (*ischuos* in Greek, *me'od* in Hebrew), refers to the intensity which we are to bring to the love of God. This is the most common word for 'power' in the Bible. In our present context then, strength connotes the actual intensity with which we love God. By way of summary we may say that our total being is to be intensely devoted to the active love of God.

The second part of the Great Commandment is that we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. The Bible assumes that a person loves himself. In fact, this almost universally is human experience and certainly would be termed 'normal.'

This Great Commandment summarize all that God requires of us. Jesus says that on these commands depend all the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:40). In the Mark passage Jesus adds, "There is no other commandment greater than these." As far as Jesus' teaching from the Old Testament is concerned, these are the foremost commands and are the summary of the whole. Therefore, this passage should weigh significantly in determination of a central focus or conviction.

The Great Commandment and the Great Commission are not exclusive of each other. As an expression of our love for the Lord and in obedience to Him, we love the brethren and we reach out in love to the unbeliever.

These two commandments stand at the peak of the life and convictions of the Church. This is so because of the scriptural and historical contexts of the teachings and because of the theological importance which Jesus gave them.

Therefore, we must give these commands proper emphasis in our teaching and preaching and mold our own convictions as well as the convictions of our disciples in light of these central aspects of Jesus' teaching. As we live out these convictions a number of changes will take place.

The New Testament emphasis on worship, often a minor point in a theology of the Christian Life, takes on new meaning with the Great Commandment as a central theme. Prayer, meditation, public worship, and ceremonial life in general become primary means of expressing the centrality of our faith and our relationship with God. Private devotions, another means of expressing our love for God with heart, mind, and intensity, becomes a daily focal point of life, not an occasional afterthought. We commune with the Lord and are refreshed and prepared by Him for service. Public and private worship become

both means of personal growth and steps of obedience. They serve as a claim on our lives and as testimony to others of our relation to God and our new life in Him.

Study, of any truth, takes on new meaning as well. If we love God with our minds, then study of the Bible, doctrine, devotional literature, philosophy, science, and sociology all become means of worship as well as new launching pads of faith. The point of integration of all truth is the experiential knowledge of God and the expression of faith toward Him in every aspect of life.

All phases of life, both ministry and `secular' work, become means of expressing our love to our fellow man, through providing physical and spiritual means of life to them. No calling is seen apart from its source in God or apart from its end in love to God and to others. This is very much like the message of Ecclesiastes:

There is nothing better than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor--it is the gift of God. (3:12-13)

All of life becomes holy and is a calling before God for which we will be judged.

We must give these commands proper emphasis in our teaching and preaching and mold our own lives as well as the lives of our disciples in light of these central aspects of Jesus' teaching. They will also be central to our church values. These values should be worked out in our daily life and in our activities, both personal and corporate.

B. The second element of Peter's command is to *be ready to give reasons (apologia) for the hope that we have*. Doing this kind of apologetics often occurs in three situations.

First, when there is honest inquiry about the truth or application of the gospel, when someone wants to know why Christians believe, apologetics is a very personal presentation of the reasons for the truth of our hope. In this case the apologetic content will often include our personal testimony of why and how we made a commitment to Jesus Christ. For a generation committed to relevance, the specific content of what drew us to Christ, how we came to trust in Him, and what change has come about as a result of trusting Christ is both very intimate and very powerful. To open up and share the needs and hurts of life and the way Jesus met our need is a powerful apologetic for the truth of the gospel, that Jesus is God and Savior and is ready to open a relationship with us by faith.

Second, when in a more public debate or presentation scene, a more formal approach to the reasons for faith is appropriate. In this context, these reasons should still include the personal elements of conversion. These elements are the personal, existential realities which lead to a total change of direction in our lives. In addition, we include elements relevant to the audience. Formal apologetics is not direct evangelism, but every opportunity to present and defend the gospel should have a personal aspect. In philosophy or in theology we present and defend the truth abstractly. In apologetics we present and defend the truth with the goal of persuasion and drawing to Christ. This is why Peter adds the third

element to his command.

A third use of apologetics is to present a formal case for Christianity in a logically systematic way. This philosophically formal presentation will reveal one's choice of starting point, methodology and central values.

C. The third element is to make our presentation *with gentleness and reverence*. Gentleness is a quality of a good presentation which orients us to the person or people to whom we are speaking. We present truth and reasons in such a way as to gently lead people to see the truth and to show them the love of Christ. This does not always mean we are soft. But in the realities of confronting people with truth we need to bring in the reality of God's love. As the scripture says, in God's name we ask you to turn from sin and toward Christ.

Reverence, the second element in this part of the command, is always toward God. Thus to bring in the aspect of reverence is to call us to always remember that our work of apologetics is done in the presence of God and to persons created in His image who therefore have worth and dignity. Apologetics is not man against man or a confrontational situation. Apologetics is always done before God and for His sake.

Faculty and pastors bear a clear and strong responsibility to teach people the truth (James 3:1). Peter's command is to all Christians. Do we, as mature leaders of the church, teach them these truths? Or do we focus on apologetics as presenting the truth to Christians to help them know the truth? Having the capacity to know the Lord and to know the reasons for our faith is a great gift. Having the capacity to disciple and train people as they follow Christ is a great calling. To honor the Lord, His word and His calling means that we must take Peter seriously and declare the whole counsel of God to people. These go far beyond doctrinal truths into life principles for transforming relationships and values.

The common elements of the presentation of reasons for the hope that is in us include: putting Christ first in our own hearts, preparing before hand to give reasons for our hope in evangelistic and formal presentations, and making our presentations with gentleness and reverence. These elements should be part of every presentation of the reason for our faith.

II. Content of a Gospel Presentation in a New Post-Modern Age Context

If I Peter is the classical passage on method of casting our bait, I Corinthians 15: 3-8 is the classical passage on the key ingredients of the bait:

I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that He appeared

In this passage we see three elements which Paul emphasizes.

- A. focus on Jesus; his person, deity, atoning death, historical resurrection
- B. present historical facts, based on eyewitness accounts
- C. give a scriptural/godly interpretation of the historical facts using a consistent rational approach

These three elements have been consistently used throughout the history of the church in its evangelism and missions. The second factor, facticity, is of particular relevance for the three audiences mentioned above.

III. Test of Accuracy of a Presentation

Because of an earlier over-emphasis on rationalism (which means more than basic rationality), the test of a correct gospel is often thought to be doctrine. Certainly correct doctrine is a part of a biblical gospel presentation. However, the test of correct presentations is given to us in Galatians 1 - the fruit (reality) of spiritual life. When God is at work using the message to bring people to himself then we know that the presentation is sufficiently correct to be used by God. The first century had a great variety in the actual content provided by various evangelists; from Philip in Egypt, to Roman visitors in England, to Thomas and Bartholomew in India.

The common elements in response to proclamation in the New Testament include:

- A. God confirms the message by the work of His Spirit creating spiritual life.
- B. The reality of spiritual life calls for church acceptance (Acts 11 & 15)
- C. The cultural and interpersonal realities of life allows for theological diversity, within important but minimal theological parameters (cf. Scholes and Clinton, "Levels of Belief").

Conclusion

In the present post-modern context, the bait is the traditional elements of the gospel, presented with the emphasis on the historical facts of Christ's life, death and resurrection (Brown, 1998). This can be supplemented with the historical facts of changed lives (personal testimonies) and the historical facts of the value and influence of the church. While much has been done in the name of the church that is tragic (the crusades, torture over doctrinal differences, martyrdom for believing or living differently), there is much that is good in the spiritual application of Christianity: healing of families and nations, revivals leading to reformation of life, social reform led by Christians, educational reform and innovation.

Finally, the pole and line represent the methods of getting the hook to the fish. At the beginning of the 21st century we need to use any and all relevant means to spread the gospel. In China the message is

going out in video format (in various dialects) with over two million indicated decisions for Christ in 1994-95 alone (Koh, 1995). The Internet allows us to place text, video, live discussion, and study classes where anyone with electricity can download them. The director (Balraj, 1997) for one mission in India said of one presentation, "If I can access that on the Internet, our mission could put it in the hands of 1000 people a day instead of the 20-30 we reach now." The possibilities of delivery of the message are incredible.

One awesome implication of what God is doing today relates to the need for personal follow-up, discipleship, and leadership training. Between the years 1985 and 2000 it appears that approximately one billion people will indicate decisions for Christ. This equals the total number of people in the world who were Christians in 1980. In 1980 there were 140 graduate level seminaries in the world and about two million people a year were taking correspondence classes to become lay leaders. By the year 2000 we will need 5 million new pastors (the seminaries of the world will produce 150,000 new pastor in this 15 year period), 20 million new full-time workers, 40 million new lay leaders and disciplers. Part of this development will come as the men and women God raises up find the historic disciplines (St. John, 1998), but we, the present generation of leaders and disciplers, need to be accountable for discipleship as well as evangelism. After we pull the fish out of the polluted water we need to find a new healthy home for them to live and flourish and begin to reproduce.

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