

Building a Case

Lesson 8

Borrowing Christian Capital

- Our job as ambassadors is to show how the unbeliever's starting position (presupposition) cannot account for the conclusions he draws if he borrows God's capital.
- Peter Berger, a former sociologist and theologian, termed these points of contact as *Signals of Transcendence*.
- These common signals are God's particular ways of showing forth his divine attributes, and these signals are embraced by the unbeliever, not suppressed. This capital is the common ground for us to work as apologists. Your work is to locate these points of contact and show the unbeliever that they prove their unbelief: These signals they embrace cannot ultimately work in their spiritually dead worldview.



Paul's Approach in Romans 1:16-32

- Paul apologizes the gospel to a group he has not visited (1:13). He does not have relational rapport.
- He argues the preconditions that prove the necessity of the gospel. Paul's common ground is the problem of evil. Humans know that there is real evil in the world.
- Paul shows that the commonly known presence of evil is God's anger/wrath against humanity because of sin. Man is culpable for sin, not God. Paul focuses on man's suppression by highlighting this foolishness which results in depraved sins and societal chaos.

A Case Study¹

You take a new job at a thriving company. Most of your new coworkers are bright and motivated. After two weeks on the job, however, you notice that no one you have met has mentioned God or religion, except for the Hindu accountant in the finance department. You start to wonder if talk about God is unwelcome in the office. One day, a co-worker notices that you have a Bible verse on your phone's lock screen.

"Why do you have that on your phone? Are you religious? If so, that would surprise me, because you seem like such a normal person. We have had religious people before in this office and it created a problem, so be warned. We are a welcoming office and don't care for people who are narrow-minded and judgmental. Some of us believe in God but keep our faith to ourselves because we don't want to offend anyone. Religion is best left to your private life, anyway. You're not going to cause problems for this company, are you? Listen, just learn to fit in and express your faith on your own time."

Q: In such a scenario, what considerations would you take into account regarding the way you should respond to your coworker? What would you say to her, and why?

¹ Mark J. Farhnam, *Every Believer Confident: Apologetics for the Ordinary Christian* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2025), 31-32.

The Columbo Method

Step 1: Gathering Information

- Apologetic opportunities often entail small, open windows. Consider the following example from Greg Koukl's book, *Tactics*:

Example: You are hosting a dinner party at your home for some of your close friends from church. The conversation ranges naturally over a number of interesting spiritual topics. Suddenly, to your surprise and embarrassment, your fifteen-year-old son announces with some belligerence that he doesn't believe in God anymore. "It's simply not rational," he says. "There is no proof." You had no idea he'd been moving in this direction. There is a stunned silence. What would you say?

- Greg Koukl, "What if I told you there was an easy escape from the challenge that [this] situation above presents, a way to minimize the awkwardness and engage the other person productively and gracefully? What if you had a simple plan in place that would guide you in your next move?"²
- You do not begin by preaching your own view or by immediately disagreeing with their view. You begin by asking a question.

Asking Questions

- The key to the Columbo tactic is to go on the offensive in an inoffensive way, by using carefully selected questions to productively advance the conversation.

Example: "God is not rational." "There is no proof."

Response: What do you mean by "God," that is, what kind of God do you reject? What, specifically, is irrational about believing in God? Since you're concerned about proof for God's existence, what kind of evidence would you find acceptable?

The Benefits of Questions

1. It draws the person out.
2. It shows you care about them as a person.
3. It takes the pressure off of me.
4. It invites the person to talk more about what they are apparently passionate about.
5. It puts the ball back in their court.
6. It protects you from jumping to the wrong conclusions and distorting his/her view.
7. It provides an invitation to thoughtful dialogue.
8. It steers the conversation in the direction you want it to go in: One that will be most beneficial to share the biblical worldview with this person, or one that will end up "putting a stone in that person's shoe."

One rule to remember: Never make a statement, at least at first, when a question will do the job.

² Greg Koukl, *Tactics* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2009), 42-43.

Questions to Gather Information

- What is your religious background?
 - What is your spiritual heritage?
 - What made you lose your faith?
 - Why don't you believe in God?
 - Could you tell me more about that?
 - Tell me how that affected your beliefs?
 - What do you think about what's going on in the world and what would make it better?
 - Why do you believe that?
 - What do you base that on?
 - Where did you get that idea?
 - What makes you think that?
 - What led you to believe that?
 - How do you know that?
 - Can you give me an example of that?
- Jesus upheld this tactic of questioning. Consider the following:

And when [Jesus] entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. **The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?"** And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things." (Matthew 21:23-27)

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, **"What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?"** They said to him, "The son of David." He said to them, **"How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, "'The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet'?" If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?"** And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions. (Matthew 22:41-46)

- Your main effort is to really know the person by gathering enough information. Loving your neighbor means you really care to know them for what they believe. You know them not by talking *at* them but by talking *with* them.
- One of the best Columbo questions: **"What do you mean by that?"** It engages the person in an interactive way and makes an excellent conversation starter. It begins to uncover valuable information and helps you know what the person believes and thinks, thus helping you not to misunderstand or misrepresent him.
- "Don't be surprised when your question is met with a blank stare. People don't know what they mean much of the time. Often, they are repeating slogans. When you ask them to flesh out their concern, opinion, or point of view with more precision they're struck mute. They are forced to think, maybe for the first time, about exactly what they do mean."³

³ Koukl, 51.