

The Verdict

Lesson 11

THE COLUMBO METHOD CONTINUED

Step 3: Lead the Way

- The third step in the Columbo tactic is meant to go on the offensive in an inoffensive way. This is done by asking “leading questions.”
- The most powerful and persuasive questions are the ones that help people recall what they already know.
- Use questions to subtly expose a weakness or a flaw, or to uproot difficulties or problems you detect in his view. As Koukl says, “Every time you ask a question and get a favorable response, the person is telling you he *understands* the point you’re making and *agrees* with it, at least provisionally. He takes another step forward with you in the thinking process.”¹



Disclosure

- Now we need to helpfully and artfully lead the way in what theologians call *disclosure*.
- We push people towards their own inconsistency until they see how dark it is. We want people to take their beliefs so seriously that they must reckon with how dangerous their own belief system really is if taken to its logical end.
- We want to disclose what their worldview suggests we *must* believe and do. And because their claims are not the truth, we can eventually say with confidence: “Your claims cannot pan out in the real world. It can’t work to be an unbeliever.”
- Remember: *They are sinners in need of the gospel*
- Disclosure reveals the impossibility of the contrary. On the merits of their own worldview, it can’t hold up, and in so doing, essentially, you have reduced their worldview to the absurd (*reductio ad absurdum*)
- Through disclosure you now deliver the verdict that their belief proves they are guilty of sin.

Common points of disclosure:

1. The Hidden Idol: Some provide no logical or rationale objection to Christianity, but they refuse to repent and believe because they have a sin (idol) that they love too much.
2. False Representation: Some object to Christianity on the grounds of incorrect data (false doctrine, statistics, etc....). They believe lies about Christianity as though they were true.
3. Sunk Cost Fallacy: “If I believe in Christianity, I will have to give up too much. They are biased against Christianity when in fact they don’t want to admit how much they would have to lose.
4. Unreasonable Assertions: An assertion is a statement (premise), but an argument is a premise with reasons to support the premise. Assertions lack reasons and thus need to be called out.
5. Authoritative Appeal: Not all appeals to authority are wrong (we appeal to the Bible and natural law), but some use authoritative figures or statistics to explain away the burden.
6. Intolerably tolerant: An opponent may attack you, claiming that you’re intolerant in your worldview.

¹ Ibid, 72-73.

Remember that there is no neutrality on the tolerance question. “Everybody has a point of view he or she thinks is right, and everybody passes judgment at some point or another. The Christian gets pigeonholed as the judgmental one, but everyone else is judging too, even people who consider themselves relativists.”²

7. Ad Hominem Attack: To reject Christianity because of a Christian’s performance or a church’s performance does not mean Christianity is false. To not believe your testimony to Christ based on your limited credentials or limited knowledge is to attack you, not Christianity. Redirect them toward the person of Christ through his word.
- You do not have to be burdened with logically destroying their entire worldview piece by piece, although this can be done in some settings. Ultimately, you aim at the heart of the unbeliever.
 - Remember, they are sinners in need of the gospel. Lest hell is their ultimate punishment, they need to hear the gospel. Aim for simplicity in your argument and prove their sin and guilt.

Step 2 | External Critique

Homecoming - Delivering the Verdict

- The external critique invites the unbeliever to the Christian point of view to make sense of “the facts.”
- You show them how Christianity applies to the questions they are asking. We looked in on their worldview and found it wanting. Now, we call them home to Christ.
- Proper apologetics appeals to their conscience and to what they already know to be true because it’s found *at home* in Christianity.
- You show them they are borrowing God’s capital, and it only has its consistency in Christianity. And because its consistency is only in Christianity, their sin is on display, and the cross of Christ is necessary.
- Sometimes, because of their background, they don’t need much disclosure. You can go right to homecoming.
- In your effort to establish the absurdity of unbelief, do not disclose their false belief as to leave them hopeless. The verdict is that they *are* guilty. And for those who will believe, they will cry out, “Mercy!”
- The gospel provides all the mercy they need.
- “Repent and believe. You are guilty, and Christ has paid for it.”

Pitfalls to Avoid

1. Do not deny common grace to the unbeliever.
 2. Do not minimize sin. It is that bad.
 3. Do not turn Christ into a good moral teacher.
 4. Do not avoid delivering the gospel.
- During homecoming, center on Christ and his work of atonement for sinners.
 - The conversation becomes less about *you* and more about *us*. You need the gospel every day, just as much as they do.
 - Discipleship is not “did she pray the sinner’s prayer,” but rather, “will she live a confessing life of who Christ is and what he has done for her”. Discipleship is the lifelong death of self in the death of Christ.

² Ibid, 78.

THE APOLOGETIC TAPESTRY

- While you have received three steps in the apologetic effort, conversations are not always that linear.
- See your effort more as a tapestry than a linear process.
- Your aim is for *homecoming* (evangelism). All the aspects of the apologetic effort are handmaidens to the gospel.

