

**Core Seminar**

**Evangelism**

**Class 8: Answering Objections**

Welcome to week 8 of the Evangelism Core Seminar.

My name is Blake Rushing and I’m co-teaching this class with Jonathan Morgan this summer.

Did everyone grab a handout?

Let’s pray.

So, last week, we discussed the fear of man and we said that it is a barrier to evangelism we all face *before* we share the Gospel.

Well, today, we are going to talk about questions about and objections to the Gospel. In other words, the barriers we face *after* we share the Gospel.

And if you’ve done much evangelism, you know people have both questions and objections. Questions about what we believe and objections to the things we believe. The truth is, in my experience, most people object and reject the gospel. In my personal evangelism experiences, I have never witnessed someone fall to their knees in repentance and cry out to Christ in faith upon their initial hearing of the gospel, but hey – it happens. But when people repent and believe, it usually takes time, deep long conversations, multiple follow-up meetings, and lots of patience.

So what do we do when someone says “no, thanks” or when they have a question? Well, that is exactly what we’re talking about today and we will talk about it in two ways.

1. First, we will look at HOW the Bible tells us to handle questions and objections, and
2. We will look at WHAT to say to the most common questions and objections.

One final thing before we get started: two resources you may find very helpful in this arena are “Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry” (carm.org) and gotquestions.org. But, please remember, the Bible is the only inerrant infallible resource in the world, so be like the Berean Jews in Acts 17 and test everything you read on any website or in any book, against the Holy Bible.

***Sound good? Any questions?***

1. **Topic 1: HOW should we answer Objections to the Gospel**

The Bible tells us at least 6 things about how to do it.

1. **We should EXPECT objections and questions when sharing our faith.**

When we share, people will often disagree with us. In fact, some of them won’t even understand us. The Bible says we should expect this. And it is fundamentally not about us, or our explanation. It is about them.

**1 Corinthians 1:18** explains this with a contrast. It says “…*for the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*.”

In **2:14** Paul continues; “ *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*”

Said differently, it is unnatural for people to understand and receive the truth of God’s message because they are spiritually deaf. And they are spiritually deaf because they are spiritually dead. Five times in the gospel accounts, Jesus says, “*he who has ears to hear, let him hear.*”

This was the reality for Jesus, Paul, Peter and every evangelist who has ever lived. People rejected what they said then and they will object and question what we say now. But, this reality should not lead us to fear or despair. It should galvanize us. It should motivate us to prepare for people’s questions.

**1 Peter 3:15** says it best, “*but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,*”

So, the Bible tells us to EXPECT objections and questions and to be ready to answer questions about what we believe and why we believe it. But that’s not all.

Look at what Paul says in **1 Peter 3:15** about *how* we are called to answer questions… “*with gentleness and respect.*”And that leads us to our second point…

1. **We should handle objections with gentleness and respect.**

*How* we answer can be just as important as *what* we say.

**Colossians 4:6** drives this point home, “*Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*”

We should be gracious and loving toward people with questions and objections. I’m always shocked at Paul’s love and passion for the lost in **Romans 9:3**. We must have that same love for unbelievers.

***Any questions on those first two points before we move on?***

As important as our preparation and approach are, they cannot save people…

1. **Remember, God’s saving power is in the Gospel, not our apologetics.**

Even if we could answer every objection, people will not believe without God’s spirit. It is dangerous to think that if we were just a little better at apologetics and answering questions, then we’d be more fruitful evangelists. No. The Gospel is what saves people, not the answer to their questions. Remember **Romans 1:16**; “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*”

Now God does use us – specifically, our words – to help tear down barriers that might be set up in people’s hearts and minds, but in the end, our hope must be in God’s power and His saving message.

Josh McDowell, is a famous Christian apologist. He wrote the book *More than a Carpenter*. In his book, McDowell writes, “*when it comes to apologetics, we should seek to answer people’s questions as honestly as possible and then point them to the cross.*”

But what if people ask ridiculous questions? Should we really give every question the same consideration and time? I remember running into a coworker, Eoin, in Chinatown one Saturday night while I was evangelizing…

This leads us to our next point…

1. **Sometimes you should not immediately answer a question.**

Randy Newman from Cru did a study on how Jesus answered questions and he found that over half the time, Jesus didn’t immediately answer. Most of the time, Jesus responded with a question of his own.

When Jesus is asked about taxes in **Matthew 22:20**, he asks them “*whose likeness and inscription is this*?”

When Jesus is asked about marriage and divorce in **Mark 10:3**, he responds by asking them, “*what did Moses command you?*’

And again in **Mark 10:18** when the rich young ruler asks how to get eternal life in, Jesus responds with a question, “*why do you call me good?*”

***I’m curious, why do you think Jesus so often responded to questions with questions?***

I think because sometimes, people ask questions, but don’t genuinely care about the answer. By asking them a question back, it engages them in the conversation. It makes them think.

We should be discerning when answering objections and questions because sometimes they are smokescreens, drawing attention away from the real needs of the people we are evangelizing. When people start asking questions about whether Adam and Eve had belly buttons or where dinosaurs are in the Bible, you can probably tell their questions aren’t that serious. Don’t get bogged down with these questions. Jesus didn’t, and we shouldn’t either.We see this when Jesus talked to the woman at the well in **John 4**, starting in v. 16.

When he started to move the conversation close to her heart, she started talking about long-standing debates between Jews and Samaritans. Jesus kindly addressed her question, but moved past them to the matter at hand.

Friends, we should ask God for wisdom on when to focus on a possible rabbit trail and when to briefly address it and move the conversation forward. Have you ever been asked a question about the Gospel that seemed more like an easy out than an actual question? **Proverbs 26:4-5** says the following:

*Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.*

*Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.*

1. **We should always be ready to play both offense and defense in evangelism.**

What I mean is that sometimes we play defense and field questions from folks. And when we do, we should do it wisely, honestly, humbly and graciously.

We should make a defense for the hope we have in Christ. We should point people to the answers we have in the Scriptures and testify to God’s faithfulness from your own experiences. But we should also be ready to play offense as well. By that, I mean we should challenge them by asking them questions as well. Ask them about the big questions of life we all wrestle with. Questions about origin, meaning, morality and destiny such as…

* Where did we come from?
* Why are we here?
* Where do good and bad come from?
* What happens when we die?

Life naturally presses these questions on people through their experiences and as evangelists, we should press into these questions. We should help them consider what things are of ultimate importance.

1. **If someone asks you a question you don’t know how to answer, it is OK to say “I don’t know.”**

It is normal to not like saying, “I don’t know.” And it is normal to do everything you can to help someone come to know Christ. So when someone asks a question that we don’t know the answer to, we can feel ill-equipped, ignorant or even feel like a failure.

If someone asks you something, and you don’t know the answer, it is OK to say you don’t know. Don’t feel like a failure if you don’t know. Don’t feel tempted to make up an answer to sound like you know what you’re talking about. If someone asks you something you don’t know, here is what I recommend doing:

* write it down,
* research it, and
* get back to them.

I’ve heard someone say before that when it came to getting stumped with a question in evangelism, they might get him once, but not twice. For this person, evangelism was a way to strengthen his own faith. It was a way for him to understand more of *why* he believed *what* he believed.

**Any questions?**

**Would anyone like to share any helpful tips for how to handle questions and objections?**

**II. A Few Specific Objections and their Responses**

In this section, we won’t address every objection that you’ll ever face. Instead, we’ll address a few of the most common objections you’ll face. The point of going through these isn’t to give you answers to each question. It is more to illustrate of *how to answer* each question. I’m not sure you will ever feel completely prepared to handle every possible question – even with an M.Div, Th.M or PhD, you may still have to answer, “I don’t know.” But feeling completely ready and comfortable isn’t the goal.

The goal is to help folks overcome hurdles that hinder their faith. The goal is to help others grow in their faith, and to grow in yours. Also, this is not an apologetics course, but there is a 7-week Apologetics Core Seminar that digs deeper into each one of these questions and objections.

**Common objection 1: How can you believe the Bible is true? Wasn’t the Bible just a book written by men?**

One way to answer this kind of objection is to point people to scriptures. Yes, the Bible was written by men, but men who were used by God and inspired by the Spirit. Just like we use pens to write, God carefully used those men to write his Word. And the Bible says just that – that God spoke to us through people.

* **2 Tim 3:16** “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness*”
* **2 Peter 1:20-21** “*knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*”

The Bible isn’t a book that a person could write if he wanted to! It is 66 books written by 40 different human authors over 1,500 years crossing 10 periods of civilization spanning 3 continents – all written in perfect harmony!

Explaining all or some of that would be one way to answer the question. But there is also another way to answer the question and that is by asking a question.

* I’d ask, “Isn’t it possible the Bible could be true?”

I’d do this to get them to acknowledge the possibility I could be right. I’d do this try to get them to “Maybe.” I’d want them to entertain the idea before trying to convince them. To get them to go in their minds from, “that’s ridiculous” to “that’s possible.”

It’s important to gauge where people are. Different questions are right for different people at different times. Sometimes, people have a life-changing experience like Paul on the Damascus Road.

I think a helpful way to think of it is as a long spectrum from A to Z. Imagine every unbeliever you know on that spectrum. Some seem painfully close to becoming a Christian while others are like the crusty and hardened Atheist Richard Dawkins. Some people seem close to becoming Christians, some seem ridiculously far.

Our job in answering objections and questions isn’t necessarily to lead people to Jesus in one conversation. It is to slowly move them across the spectrum over a series of conversations. Maybe over a series of weeks, months, years or even decades. And maybe God will use a series of people. Sometimes you’re the one who helps them to get from D to E when you get them to consider that it’s possible God exists. And sometimes you move them from W to X, when you get them to see that salvation is worth more than their family’s approval or social standing.

Some quick facts about the Bible…

* There are over 5,000 New Testament Greek manuscripts existing today (that is more than the writings of Aristotle, Caesar and Homer combined) and the internal consistency is over 99% - most scholars agree that they were written within the first century AD, which is important because that means many folks were alive during Jesus’ life and could have refuted the writings.
* The historicity of the names and places in the Bible – archaeological excavations continue to prove the historical accounts of Biblical things.

Well those are two ways to respond to that question. Another question you may face is…

**Question 2: What about the problem of evil? How could a good God allow evil?**

First, humbly acknowledge that there is a ton of pain, suffering and evil in this world. It may also be helpful to ask them to explain a bit more about the evil they have in mind. Listen carefully to them in order to determine what exactly it is that is bothering them so much. Is there a specific experience they have personally endured? Maybe they have dealt with abuse, addiction or violence with family members; or maybe they’ve been to too many funerals of loved ones who died younger than expected from terminal illness. In those situations, we should remind them that God – our God, the God of the Bible – is in complete control, completely sovereign and omnipotent at all times, even in tragic situations.

You may point to examples in the Bible. I think that **Genesis 50:20** is a great example. Joseph, whose elder brothers sold him into slavery, encounters them years later. Joseph has endured all kinds of hardships in Egypt, but by God’s providence, he ended up as one of the members of Pharoah’s cabinet – maybe the Secretary of State or something similar.

So he meets his brothers and after some initial awkwardness between them, everything is hunky dory, so they take Joseph to see their father, Jacob (Israel), who is very old and on his deathbed. And after Jacob dies, the brothers panic and think that Joseph may be vengeful toward them. Listen to this passage from **Genesis 50:15-21**:

*When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.” So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, “Your father gave this command before he died: ‘Say to Joseph, “Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.”’ And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.” But Joseph said to them, “****Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today****. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.* **Genesis 50:15-21**

Can you believe that? God not only allowed the evil to happen to Joseph, but He used it for the good of many people! In the book of Job, we also see God allowing Satan to inflict pain and suffering on Job – God gave Satan permission to harm Job.

This should give us comfort that anything we go through, God is allowing to happen, and remember, it is for our good – **Romans 8:28**.

I would also ask them how much evil they’d like God to get rid of. And ask them if they’ve ever done anything evil. All sin is evil and if we just take a quick walk through the 10 commandments, we will see that we are all evil – we are liars, thieves, covetous, adulterers, idolaters and murderers – if not publicly, certainly privately in our hearts and minds.

They may not have been as bad as Hitler or Stalin, but in the end we won’t be compared to him. We’ll be judged according to God’s perfect standard – Jesus. I would also explain to them that God ***does*** care about evil, He hates evil.

The first way we see this is at the Cross on Calvary 2,000 years ago. God poured out His punishment and wrath for our evil sins on His Son Jesus – He hates evil so much that He sent His one and only Son to die as a substitute for all the sinners like me who have repented of their evil deeds and trusted in Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

But, there is another way that we will see how much God hates evil. We read about it in the Bible and it’s the final day of judgment. Sadly, for those who have not repented of their sin, they will experience firsthand how much God hates sin.

Jesus speaks of it in **John 12:47-48**, “*If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.*” And we read the awesome account of it in **Revelation 20**. It is awesome for us, those who are His, but terrible for those who are not.

***Any questions?***

So, for the final objection, I’d like to work through this together as a class…

What would you say if someone asked you, **“*How do you know God exists? Can you prove to me that God exists?*”**

No. I cannot prove it. But guess what, no one can prove that God does *NOT* exist. Believing in God is an act of faith. In **2 Cor. 5:7**, Paul writes “*for we walk by faith, not by sight.*” But this is not a blind faith, friends – the evidence of a creator God is overwhelming! Three evidences that are blatant and obvious to every human are…

1. **Creation (Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:18-32)**
   * Creation itself points to a creator! Other than an eternal, omnipotent, creator God, who could have created the sun and the moon and the earth and the oceans and the stars?
   * Well, what about “The Big Bang”? Who created the things that banged together? And who caused them to bang together?
   * Philosophy 101 – “Something cannot come from nothing. Nothing cannot create something.”
2. **Conscience (Romans 2)**
   * Our conscience shows that a good creator God made us to know right from wrong and good from evil. How many of you get angry when you hear the news of terrorist attacks? How many of you get angry when you hear the news of child molesters? How many of you got angry over the shooting in the Charleston church by an evil murderer or by this shooting in Chattanooga this week?
3. **Always bring it back to Jesus Christ**
   * Jesus was a real historical person who walked the earth – there is no question about that.
   * Jesus really died on a cross at the hands of Pontius Pilate 2,000 years ago – again, there is no question about that.
   * So what about Jesus’ claims and miracles?
   * What about the fact that over 500 eyewitnesses saw Jesus in his resurrected state?
   * What about the Christian religion that immediately followed and continues today?

**Conclusion:**

Don’t be afraid of questions or objections – that is exactly what Satan wants. Be gentle. Be honest. Be humble. Be respectful. If you don’t know, don’t be embarrassed to say so.

Another verse that is very comforting to me is **Isaiah 55:8-9**…

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

**Homework:**

1. Keep praying
2. Keep pursuing evangelism opportunities
3. Share the Gospel.