

# Reasons to Believe

## Apologetics 101

### Small Group Discussion:

- How does the fact that Christianity hinges on a singular event in history (Jesus' resurrection) distinguish it from any other religion in the world?
  
- How would you respond to someone who told you they didn't like Christianity because of ...
  - Christians who thought they were better than other people?
  
  - Difficult parts of the Bible that seem to advocate slavery, bigotry, and chauvinism?
  
  - Hell: how could a loving God send people to eternal suffering?

## The Resurrection of Jesus

### ➤ What's at stake?

↳ \_\_\_\_\_ !

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas (Peter), and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them — yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Paul – 1 Corinthians 15:1–19

**Six Historical Facts That Need to Be Explained:**

1) The \_\_\_\_\_ of Jesus by \_\_\_\_\_

2) The \_\_\_\_\_

3) The \_\_\_\_\_ of the first disciples

4) The \_\_\_\_\_ in the lives of the first disciples

5) The conversion of \_\_\_\_\_

6) The conversion of \_\_\_\_\_

## Nine Other Theories of What Happened:

1) The disciples \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus' body

While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

Matthew 28:11–15

2) The authorities \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus' body

3) Everyone went to the \_\_\_\_\_

As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

Matthew 27:57–61

4) It was simply a case of \_\_\_\_\_

5) Jesus had a \_\_\_\_\_

6) Jesus only \_\_\_\_\_ on the cross

7) The disciples only had \_\_\_\_\_

8) Jesus' resurrection was only \_\_\_\_\_

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.

Luke 24:36-42

9) Jesus was an \_\_\_\_\_

## What Does the Resurrection Mean?

➡ The resurrection confirms the \_\_\_\_\_ of what Jesus \_\_\_\_\_

➡ The resurrection confirms the \_\_\_\_\_ of our \_\_\_\_\_

➡ Because of Jesus' resurrection we can have confidence in experiencing ...

↳ \_\_\_\_\_ with God

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Paul – Romans 5:1–11

↳ The \_\_\_\_\_ of God in our lives

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Paul – Philippians 4:4–7

↳ The \_\_\_\_\_ of God in our lives

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

Peter – 1 Peter 1:2–3

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Hebrews 4:14–16

↳ The guarantee of our own \_\_\_\_\_

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Paul – Philippians 3:20–21



**HOMEWORK:**

➡ Read Handout: "Tactics" Chapter 5 by Gregory Koukl

➡ Read Chapter 11 in "Know Why You Believe" by Paul Little

**Week 6**  
**Homework reading Assignment**  
**for Reasons to Believe Essentials**

**Chapter 5**  
**of the book "Tactics"**  
**by Gregory Koukl**

## CHAPTER FIVE

# STEP THREE: USING COLUMBO TO LEAD THE WAY

Up until now, we have talked about using the Columbo tactic in a very particular way. We have used friendly questions to gather two types of information: a person's view and his reasons for it. One of the advantages of this approach, we noted, was that it is largely a passive enterprise. We put nothing on the line. Since there is nothing for us to defend, there is no pressure.

By contrast, the third use of Columbo takes us more on the offensive, yet in an inoffensive way. We ask a different kind of question, sometimes called a "leading question." As the name suggests, leading questions take the other person in the direction we want them to go. Think of yourself as an archer shooting at a target. Questions are your arrows. Your target will be different in different situations. Sometimes your goal will be to defeat what you think is a bad argument or a flawed point of view. Your questions will be "aimed" at that purpose. Or you may want to use questions to indirectly explain or advance your own ideas. Sometimes you will set up the terms of the conversation using questions to put you in a more beneficial position for your next move.

In each of these cases, questions accomplish two things that mere statements cannot. Every time you ask a question and get a favorable response, the person is telling you he *understands*

## STEP THREE: USING COLUMBO TO LEAD THE WAY

the point you're making and *agrees* with it, at least provisionally. He takes another step forward with you in the thinking process.

Ultimately, we want to win someone over to our point of view. But we don't want to force our opinions. Instead, we want to persuade. When the steps to a conclusion are both clear and reasonable, it is much easier to convince someone because he can see the route clearly. He can even retrace it on his own if he wants to. With each question, we lead him closer toward our destination. In this way, we bring him along on the journey.

When you get approvals for each successive link in the process of reasoning, you move the conversation in the direction you have in mind. In that way, you carefully guide the other person to your conclusion.

There are a handful of ways that this third use of Columbo can work. Generally, your leading questions will be used to inform, persuade, set up the terms, or refute. Let me show you how this tactic plays out in specific examples.

### THE QUESTION

As you step out as an ambassador for Christ, inevitably you will be asked what I call "the question." It's one of the most important questions anyone can ask, but it's also one of the most difficult because the correct answer—a simple "yes"—would be wildly misleading.

The leading New Age author Deepak Chopra put the question to me this way in a national TV debate: "You're saying that people who don't believe just like you are going to Hell?" Someone once said if you word the question right, you can win any debate. Dr. Chopra's was a classic case in point. A simple "yes" would be the correct answer, but it actually would distort the truth.

Dr. Chopra's question was not meant to clarify a theological point. Instead, in the gamesmanship of the moment, his challenge was intended to discredit me with the audience. If I answered directly—"Yes, people who do not believe in Jesus are going to Hell"—the debate would be over. Chopra's query would have succeeded in painting me with an ugly stereotype. Viewers would not hear Jesus offering reprieve and rescue from a judgment they each will face. Instead, they would hear conceit and condescension from a "fundamentalist" wishing Hell on anyone who doesn't see things his way.

The third use of the Columbo tactic helps us out of this dilemma, but there's a hitch. Remember from chapter 1 that the first responsibility of an ambassador is knowledge—an accurately informed mind. Knowing that people need to trust in Jesus or face judgment, though, is not enough. Since this truth does not give an accurate sense of *why* Jesus matters, God seems petty, pitching people into Hell because of some inconsequential detail of Christian theology.

The hitch is this: You have to know *why* Jesus is the only way before it is helpful to tell people *that* he is the only way. Without that knowledge, the third step of Columbo will not help you on this issue.

In Chopra's case, I decided to sidestep his challenge rather than try to resolve such a delicate issue with a sound byte. Instead, I used his question as a springboard to make a different point, one I thought was strategic to my own purposes.<sup>1</sup>

I addressed the issue of why Jesus is the only way again when the question came up during a book promotion at a local Barnes & Noble store. I met an attorney there who didn't understand why he, a Jew, needed Jesus. He believed in God, and he was doing his best to live a moral life. It seemed to him that those were the important things—how he lived, not what he believed. Here is how I used Columbo questions to lead him to a proper understanding of the cross.

"Let me ask you a question," I began. "Do you think people who commit moral crimes ought to be punished?"

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"Well, since I'm a prosecuting attorney," he chuckled, "I guess I do."

"Good. So do I. Now, a second question: Have you ever committed any moral crimes?"

He paused for a moment. This was getting personal. "Yes," he nodded, "I guess I have."

"So have I," I offered candidly, agreeing with him again. "But that puts us both in a tight spot, doesn't it? We both believe people who do bad things should be punished, and we both believe we're guilty on that score." I waited a moment for the significance to sink in. "Do you know what I call that?" I asked. "I call that bad news."

In less than 60 seconds I had accomplished a remarkable thing with my two questions. I didn't have to convince this man he was a sinner. *He was telling me.* I didn't have to convince him he deserved to be punished. *He was telling me.*

I was tapping into a deep intuition every person shares: knowledge of his own guilt and a realization that his guilt should be punished. And I didn't do it arrogantly or in an obnoxious, condescending way. I freely admitted I was in the same trouble he was.

Now that we agreed on the problem, it was time to give the solution. (This is where the "knowledge" part of the ambassador equation is so vital.)

"This is where Jesus comes in," I explained. "We both know we're guilty. That's the problem. So God offers a solution: a pardon, free of charge. But clemency is on his terms, not ours. Jesus is God's means of pardon. He personally paid the penalty in our place. He took the rap for our crimes. No one else did that. Only Jesus. Now we have a choice to make. Either we take the pardon and go free, or we turn it down and pay for our crimes ourselves."

In this conversation I handled an awkward question by combining two things: my knowledge of what Jesus accomplished on the cross and the Columbo tactic. My questions led the attorney, step-by-step, to an answer to his question.

## TELL THEM SOMETHING THEY KNOW

The most powerful questions—and the most persuasive—are the ones that help people recall what they already know. In the case of the attorney, I asked key questions to cause his own intuitions about guilt and punishment to rise to the surface. The approach was powerful because I didn't have to persuade him of some foreign idea. I merely connected the dots.

This was true of Shannon, an American college student living in Germany whom I met on a train from Normandy to Paris. Shannon had been raised in a Christian home. She'd been educated at a Christian college and had what she described as a "strong relationship with the Lord." Still, like the attorney, she was perplexed by the idea that others were lost apart from trust in Christ.

"What about someone who believes in God?" she asked. "What about the person who is sincerely following his own religion and trying to be the best person he can be?" I hear these kinds of questions from non-Christians all the time. But I also hear them with surprising frequency from believers. I suspected Shannon already knew enough to answer her own question. She simply had not pieced it together.

"Why should anyone become a Christian in the first place?" I asked. "You and I are Christians. What benefit does putting our trust in Jesus give us?"

"Jesus saves us," she answered.

"From what?"

"He saves us from our sins."

"Right. You might say we have a spiritual disease called sin, and Jesus did something on the cross that healed the disease."

She nodded.

"Can simply believing in God heal that disease?"

"No," she said after thinking a moment.

"Can trying our best to be a good person heal it, or being really religious, or even being completely sincere? Can any of those things forgive our sin?" She shook her head. No, none of those

things in themselves could take away our guilt. "We'd still be dying from our spiritual disease, wouldn't we?" I said. She agreed.

Then I simply connected the dots for her. "If religion, or sincerity, or 'doing our best' cannot save you and me, then how can any of those things save someone else? Either Jesus rescues us by taking the punishment for our sin on himself, or we are not saved and we have to pay for our own crimes. It's no more complicated than that."

Notice two things about this conversation. First, I gave Shannon no new information. I just reminded her of things she already knew, but had not related to her own concern. Second, I did it almost entirely with questions.

## TURNING THE TABLES

The third use of Columbo can help you get out of a different kind of tough situation. Sometimes you may need to use questions to set up the conversation in a way that is most favorable to you.

I have a friend who is a deeply committed Christian woman and whose boss is a lesbian. That in itself isn't the problem. My friend has the maturity to know that you can't expect non-Christians to live like Christians. The difficulty is that her boss wanted to know what my friend thought about homosexuality.

If you are placed in a situation where you suspect your convictions will be labeled intolerant, bigoted, narrow-minded, or judgmental, use Columbo to turn the tables.

When someone asks for your personal views about a controversial issue, preface your remarks with a question that sets the stage—in your favor—for your response. Say, "You know, this is actually a very personal question you're asking. I don't mind answering, but before I do, I want to know if it's safe to offer my views. So let me ask you a question: Do you consider yourself

a tolerant person or an intolerant person on issues like this? Is it safe to give my opinion, or are you going to judge me for my point of view? Do you respect diverse points of view, or do you condemn others for convictions that differ from your own?" Now when you give your point of view, it's going to be very difficult for anyone to call you intolerant or judgmental without looking guilty, too.

This line of questioning trades on an important bit of knowledge: There is no neutral ground when it comes to the tolerance question. Everybody has a point of view 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.

I call this the passive-aggressive tolerance trick.<sup>2</sup> The key to understanding this trick is knowing that everyone thinks his own beliefs are correct. If people didn't think their beliefs were true, they wouldn't believe them. They'd believe something else and think *that* was true.

If you have already been labeled intolerant by someone, ask, "What do you mean by that?" This, of course, is an example of the first Columbo question. Though I already have a pretty good idea of what the person means when she says "I'm intolerant, asking this question flushes out her definition of "intolerant" and sets the stage—in my favor—for the next two questions. Here's how it looks:

"You're intolerant."

"Can you tell me what you mean by that? Why would you consider me an intolerant person?"

"Well, it's clear you think you're right and everyone who disagrees with you is wrong."

"I guess I do think my views are correct. It's always possible I could be mistaken, but in this case I don't think I am. But

what about you? You seem to be disagreeing with me. Do you think your own views are right?"<sup>3</sup>

"Yes, I think I'm right, too. But I'm not intolerant. You are."

"That's the part that confuses me. Why is it when I think I'm right, I'm intolerant, but when you think you're right, you're just right? What am I missing?"

Of course, you are not missing anything; she is. Her move is simple name-calling. Labeling you as intolerant is no different than calling you ugly. One is an attack on your looks. The other is an attack on your character. Neither is useful in helping you understand the merits of any idea you may be discussing.<sup>4</sup>

The quickest way to deal with a personal attack is to simply point it out with a question. When someone goes after you rather than your argument, ask, "I'm a little confused about your response. Even if you were right about my character, could you explain to me exactly what that has to do with this issue?"

## EXPLOITING A WEAKNESS OR A FLAW

You might have noticed something unique about how I dealt with the tolerance trick. My questions went beyond positioning myself in a more favorable way in our conversation. This time I also used Columbo questions to challenge the other person's ideas. Once you have a clear understanding of what a person thinks and why he thinks it, you can move on to this step: using questions to subtly expose a weakness or a flaw, or to uproot difficulties or problems you detect in his view.

I stumbled upon a wonderful example of this while reading *Icons of Evolution*, the fine critique of Darwinism by Jonathan Wells.

The following dialogue is an example of one student's gentle use of the third step in the Columbo tactic:

Teacher: Okay, let's start today's lesson with a quick review. Yesterday I talked about homology [how different organisms show remarkable similarity in the structure of some of their body parts]. Homologous features, such as the vertebrate limbs shown in your textbook, provide us with some of our best evidence that living things have evolved from common ancestors.

Student (raising hand): I know you went over this yesterday, but I'm still confused. How do we know whether features are homologous?

Teacher: Well, if you look at vertebrate limbs, you can see that even though they're adapted to perform different functions, their bone patterns are structurally similar.

Student: But you told us yesterday that even though an octopus eye is structurally similar to a human eye, the two are not homologous.

Teacher: That's correct. Octopus and human eyes are not homologous because their common ancestor did not have such an eye.

Student: So regardless of similarity, features are not homologous unless they are inherited from a common ancestor?

Teacher: Yes, now you're catching on.

Student (looking puzzled): Well, actually, I'm still confused. You say homologous features provide some of our best evidence for common ancestry. But before we can tell whether features are homologous, we have to know whether they came from a common ancestor.

Teacher: That's right.

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Student (scratching head): I must be missing something. It sounds as though you're saying that we know features are derived from a common ancestor because they're derived from a common ancestor. Isn't that circular reasoning?<sup>5</sup>

Here's another example of how to use Columbo to expose a weakness or a flaw. Let's revisit the conversation with our professor from chapter 4. In that section, we learned to avoid being taken in by what I called the "professor's ploy" by asking for reasons for his own view, in this case that the Bible was just a bunch of myths.

He might answer, "I know the Bible is a myth because it has miracles in it." This bit of valuable information sets up the next series of questions:

"And why does that mean the Bible is myth or fable?"

"Because miracles don't happen."

"How do you know that?"

"Because science has proven that miracles don't happen."

Now, I happen to know that science has proven nothing of the sort, nor can it. Since science only measures the natural world, it is not capable of ruling out anything, even in principle, in the supernatural realm.<sup>6</sup> Armed with this information, I can now ask the decisive question: "Professor, would you please explain to me exactly how the methods of science have disproved the possibility of supernatural events?"

The professor has no place to go at this point because no such scientific proof exists. Science has never *advanced* any empirical evidence to show that supernatural events cannot happen. Instead, science (and the professor) has *assumed*, prior to the evidence (i.e., *a priori*), according to naturalistic philosophy, that miracles are impossible.<sup>7</sup> Thus, any "historical" reference to supernatural signs is either a myth or a fable. Your simple question—and the long silence that follows it—does all the work necessary to make your point.

One of the advantages of the Columbo tactic is not having to assert something you want someone else to believe. You aren't taking the burden of proof on yourself. Instead, you accomplish your goal in an entirely different — and more powerful — way: You use questions to make the point for you.

This last step is more demanding because you have to be able to see some weakness in the person's argument before you can work with it. How do you find the flaw? There is no special formula for making this discovery. The key is to pay close attention to the answer to the question, "How did you come to that conclusion?" Then, ask yourself if the person's conclusion is justified by the evidence he gives.

Remember, an argument is like a house whose roof is supported by walls. In this step of Columbo you want to find out if the walls (the reasons or evidence) are strong enough to hold up the roof (the person's point of view).

Look, observe, reflect. Maybe your friend's comments have tipped you off to some problem with his view. Is there a misstep, a non sequitur,<sup>8</sup> a fallacy, or a failing of some sort? Can you challenge any underlying assumptions that might be faulty? Whatever you discover, be sure to address the problem with a question, not a statement.

## STUMPED OR STALLED OUT?

Getting to the third use of Columbo requires insight that the first two Columbo questions do not. You need to know the specific direction you want the conversation to go, the precise purpose you want to accomplish with your leading questions. Do you want to use your questions to clarify a point? To convey new information? To expose a weakness? You have to know which target to aim at before you can continue.

This skill takes time to develop, so don't be surprised — or discouraged — if you find yourself stalled out at first. It's not always easy to flush out the error in someone's thinking or to maneuver in conversation using questions instead of statements. This takes a little practice, but in time, you'll improve. In the second half of this book, "Part Two: Finding the Flaws," I give you a handful of tactics to make this easier.

If you find you don't have the resources to go further in a discussion or if you sense the person is losing interest, *don't feel compelled to force the conversation*. Let the encounter die a natural death and move on. Consider it a fruitful, interactive learning experience nonetheless.

Remember, as an ambassador for Christ, you don't have to hit a home run in every conversation. You don't even have to get on base, in my opinion. As I mentioned in chapter 2, sometimes just getting up to bat will do. Your first two Columbo questions — "What do you mean by that?" and "How did you come to that conclusion?" — will help you get in the game. The rest will come in time.

We may spend hours helping someone carefully work through an issue without ever mentioning God, Jesus, or the Bible. This does not mean we aren't advancing the kingdom. It is always a step in the right direction when we help others think more carefully. If nothing else, it gives them tools to assess the bigger questions that eventually come up.

## INNOCENT AS DOVES

I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter that the third use of Columbo takes us on the offensive. The danger, of course, is that we become offensive when we go on the offensive. These are two



different things. Yes, we want to be able to point out weaknesses in a view (go on the offensive). But we don't want to seem pushy, condescending, or smug (*being* offensive). How do we maintain balance?

Jesus offered this advice: "Be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16). I think one of the things he had in mind was that we should be clever in our approach, yet remain innocent in our appearance.

Here's how Jesus' insight might apply. Sometimes the best way to disagree with someone is not to face the issue head-on, but to soften the challenge by using an indirect approach. You can cushion your third use of Columbo a couple of ways.

For one, think about using the phrase "Have you considered" to introduce your concern, then offering a different view that gently questions the person's beliefs or confronts a weakness with his argument. Here are some examples:

- "Have you ever considered ... that if the Bible were 'merely written by men' it would be very hard to account for fulfilled prophecy? How would you explain that?"
- "Have you ever considered ... the difficulty involved with removing something like the teaching on reincarnation from every existing handwritten copy of the New Testament in circulation in the Roman world by the fourth century? How is this physically possible?"
- "Have you ever considered ... that the existence of evil is actually evidence for the existence of God, not against it?"<sup>9</sup>
- "Have you ever considered ... that if partial-birth abortion is okay, it's going to be hard to condemn infanticide, since the baby's location — partially out of the womb (partial-birth abortion) or completely out (infanticide) — is the only difference between the two? Doesn't location seem irrelevant to the baby's value?"
- "Have you ever considered ... that if Jesus was wrong about being the only way of salvation, it is difficult to call him a good

man, a prophet, or a wise religious teacher? What do you think about that problem?"

Another way to soften your challenge is to phrase your concern as a request for clarification. Begin by asking, "Can you clear this up for me?" or "Can you help me understand this?" Then offer your objection in a way that gently challenges the belief or confronts the weakness you think you see in the argument. Consider the gentle approach of the following questions:

- Can you clear this up for me? If Jesus' divinity was an invention of the church in the early fourth century, how do you explain all the references to a divine Christ in literature written before that time?
- Can you help me understand this? If there is no evidence that life came from non-life (abiogenesis) — that life spontaneously arose from inanimate matter to kick off the sequence of evolution — and there is much evidence against it, how can we say that Darwinian evolution is fact?
- Can you help me with something that confuses me? How does having a 'burning in the bosom' about the Book of Mormon give adequate evidence that this book is from God when people have similar reasons — a strong conviction from God in response to prayer — for rejecting it?
- Can you clear this up for me? If homosexuality is truly natural, then why did nature give homosexual men bodies designed for reproductive sex with women and then give them desires for sex with men? Why would nature give desires for one type of sex, but a body for another?

One of the reasons this approach is so attractive is that it emphasizes respect for the person you disagree with. First, you have made an effort (with your first two Columbo questions) to understand her viewpoint. Next, you ask, "Do you mind if I ask a couple of questions about what you've told me?" or "Would you

consider an alternative, or be willing to look at another angle?” By soliciting permission to disagree, you make the encounter more amicable. You also stay in the driver’s seat.

There is one more way to soften your approach that, strictly speaking, may not involve Columbo (because it doesn’t always use a question). Even so, it may serve a valuable tactical purpose. You may find yourself in a situation where either you can’t think of a question or where it would seem awkward or contrived to use a question rather than simply stating your view.

In these circumstances, you need a genial way to introduce your point. Here are some recommendations you might want to consider:

- Let me suggest an alternative, and tell me if you think it’s an improvement. If not, you can tell me why you think your option is better.
- I wouldn’t characterize it that way. Here’s what I think may be a better or more accurate way to look at it. Tell me what you think.
- I don’t think that’s going to work, and I’d like to suggest why. Is that okay with you?
- I’m not sure I agree with the way you put it. Think about this ...

These statements protect you in an additional way. When you say something like, “It’s my understanding that ...” or “This is the way it seems to me,” then explain your position and invite a response, you indicate you are provisional in your claims. Yes, you have convictions, but they are open to discussion.

This is not only an implicit act of humility, but it also gives you a margin of safety. It may turn out that you have missed something that your friend uncovers in the process of conversation. If you discover that your own ideas are compromised in some way, this could be embarrassing if you expressed them in a dogmatic, uncompromising way to begin with. Furthermore, you have little psychological liberty to adjust your views.<sup>10</sup>

## NARRATING THE DEBATE

Many people you talk to will struggle when you turn the tables by asking them to give evidence for the claims they make. When a person has not thought much about his own assertions, dodging your questions may be his only recourse. He may try to change the subject or reassert his point in other ways.

When this happens, it may be helpful for you to “narrate the debate.” Take a moment to step outside of the conversation, in a sense, and describe to your friend the turn the discussion has taken. This will help him (and others listening in) see how he’s gotten off course.

You can say something like, “I want you to notice what has just happened. First you made a fairly controversial statement, and I asked you a couple of questions about it. So far, you haven’t answered them. Instead, you have taken off in another direction. Before we move on to a new topic, would it be okay with you if we finish the old one? I really am interested in your response.”

Don’t let your friend get off the hook by dodging the issues. This approach keeps the burden on him while keeping the conversation cordial. Encourage the other person to clarify himself. Forcing him to face the music may be the first step toward a change of mind.

When a cherished view is at stake, it’s not unusual for people to raise empty objections — objections that initially sound worthwhile, but simply can’t be defended once examined. Questions aimed at undermining the view often reveal a lack of substance behind the bluster.

## WHAT WE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

In this chapter we learned how to employ Columbo to take us in an entirely new direction. Instead of using questions to gather information, we discovered that questions can be very effective

to lead someone in the direction we want the conversation to go. Such "leading questions" often work better than statements to explain our view, to set up the discussion in a way that makes it easier for us to make our point, to soften our challenge to another's view, or to indirectly expose a flaw in the other's thinking.

Unlike the first two uses of Columbo, this one requires knowledge of some kind. When we know what we want to accomplish (e.g., to inform, to persuade, to set up the terms, or to refute), we can use leading questions to achieve our purpose. This is a skill that develops over time, so if you stall out at first, don't be discouraged. Instead of trying to force a conversation you don't have the resources to pursue, you can simply move on, knowing you have done the best that you could for the moment.

If someone's thinking is flawed, the key to finding the error is to listen carefully to the reasons and then ask if the conclusions follow from the evidence. Point out errors with questions rather than statements. You might soften your challenge by phrasing your concern as a request for clarification or by suggesting an alternative with the words "Have you considered . . ." before offering your own ideas.