

Responding To Debating Techniques

Responding To The Standard Techniques

Chapter-1

Analyzing Debates

In situations of debate, the Apologist has to keep analysing the arguments of his opponents. The apologist has to keep several things in mind if such an analysis has to be successful and powerful. The first of these is to understand the purpose of conducting debates.

Every debate has at least two purposes, the general and the specific. The **GENERAL PURPOSE** in any debate and discussion is to arrive at truth. Winning or losing is not the concern of sincere debaters. Within the sphere of the general purpose, every debater has a **SPECIFIC PURPOSE**. In any given debate the specific purpose is to establish that one's viewpoint is true. This is fine as long as it is done in the spirit of the General Purpose, which is to arrive at truth. However, biased debaters often forget that their purpose is to arrive at truth. Rather, their sole purpose of indulging in debate becomes winning.

When their attitude becomes "winning at any cost", they fail to observe the canons of fair debating. Instead, they concentrate all their energies to twist the arguments in their favour. Fair and free debate is not possible in this kind of an atmosphere. Every Christian Apologist should see to it that he does not waste his time and energy with people of this kind. At the same time, if there is no way for him to avoid these people, he should try his best to bring the debater and the audience back to truth by repeated Leading Questions, and also by repeated affirmation of what the main issues are. Such repeated affirmations often look foolish both to the Apologist and also to many in the audience, but when the opponent is not sincere, this is the only way to keep the debate focused on the main subject.

Classification Of Debaters

As is evident to any inquirer, debaters are of many types. It is helpful to conduct a dialogue with some of them, while it is a waste of time or an invitation to frustration to conduct a dialogue with others. To decide if a debate is going to be helpful, it would be good to look at the two basic kinds of debaters. They are the Sincere and the Insincere types of debaters.

SINCERE DEBATERS: These are inquiring people who launch into debates solely for the purpose of knowing something. They know what they are talking about, and are willing to look at all aspects of the issues involved. If they find anything wrong in their stand or in their deductions, they are willing to change their beliefs.

However, not all sincere believers are knowledgeable people. There are plenty who are sincere but who at the same time are ignorant. They are attracted to the subject, but their knowledge of it all is very superficial. No sooner the Apologist launches into a debate with them, most of them realize their own inadequacy and then try to cover it up with fanciful talk.

The debate with such people can prolong considerably without ever arriving at anything meaningful. Thus when a Christian Apologist spots a person who is fanciful, full of pretending, unsure of his stand, or unstable during the discussion, it is time to bring the discussion to a halt. The respondent is sincere, but ignorant. No meaningful debate can take place with him. What that person needs is instruction, not discussion. Unfortunately, sincere but ignorant debaters are often an obstacle to conducting serious

debates. Thus in this matter their presence is as harmful as the presence of insincere debaters, whom we discuss next.

INSINCERE DEBATERS: All those people for whom debating is a means solely for the purpose of winning come in this category. There are a lot of people of this kind everywhere. They are not interested in arriving at truth.

UNINTERESTED DEBATERS: Within the insincere category there are two kinds of people. The first group is made up of the uninterested people. They pretend to take keen interest in the subject, but deep in their heart they are least interested in the subject. Thus their involvement in the debate is only superficial, and the discussion cannot take place in depth. There are other insincere debaters who indulge in debate just for the fun of it or because they are in the habit of challenging whatever others say. Truth is not their concern, and they are in love with their ability to argue. There is no use arguing with this kind of insincere debaters. The other category is made up of biased people.

INSINCERE DEBATERS: The biased debater has already made up his mind on the issue. He is often aware of the consequences of taking a stand on either side. He is more interested in the consequences favourable to him, and thus takes an appropriate side even if that happens to be the erroneous side. Such debaters are biased, cunning, and calculating. They do not believe in free exchange and evaluation of ideas. Rather, they are the people who indulge in the most cunning and calculated debate with the sole aim of winning at any cost.

Debating with the insincere debaters is practically useless, and can prove even damaging. A calculating and cunning debater can inflict much damage to the truth-loving Apologist. Thus it is better to avoid such people, except perhaps in private debates where no third person is present. When they are alone, much of their enthusiasm is sapped because these manipulative people thrive upon manipulation of mob-mentality. Since no mob is present, they have to directly face the Apologist, and this often makes them weaker than what they would be in front of a crowd.

Chapter 2

Types Of Debates/Approaches

Debates these days can be compared with Free-Style wrestling. This means that while you might be a principled analyst, your opponent is not bound by any principles of conduct or speech. He is free to hit below the belt, and he would surely do so at every opportunity available to him.

What is more, many approaches have been developed to defeat sound and systematic analysis. Thus in situations of debates you would have to face many surprising strategies. Some of the frequently used strategies are mentioned below. Each one has a definite advantage for the dishonest debater, and the advantage multiplies when your opponent combines more than one trick at the same time. As a skilled debater you should be quick to recognize the tricks and counter them immediately and effectively. (Of course "leading questions" are the best weapon in the hands of a Christian Apologist !). Here are the most common approaches used in debates.

1-RAPID-FIRE (MACHINE GUN) APPROACH: Here the opponent comes prepared

and fires a series of questions. No sooner the Apologist begins to tackle these, he fires another burst of questions. Like the bullets sprayed from a machine-gun, they hit the opponent with force and try to kill him.

The basic aim of the Rapid Fire approach is not to get answers, but to overwhelm the Apologist with a flood of questions. Since none can effectively handle barrage after barrage of questions, in the end they can point out to many questions that remain unanswered. Even the most experienced Apologist is unable to at least some question of this person because he does not give time to think and answer those questions.

This approach is used quite frequently by Muslims who argue against the Christian faith. The best way to tackle the Rapid Fire or Machine Gun approach is to firmly ask the opponent to stop and ask the next series of questions only AFTER you have answered all the questions of the previous batch. Nobody can find fault with the Apologist who wants to answer ALL questions, and who insists that he wants to answer them all.

2-BANYAN TREE (JUMPING SQUIRREL) APPROACH: The Banyan tree is known for its dense leaves, branches, and also for the dense look. An argument where the opponent tries to drown the apologist in the dense branches of the tree of argument is called the Banyan Tree approach.

This approach is compared with the Jumping Squirrel, because in some places in our country squirrels do not flee from humans. They allow people to get quite close to them, but no sooner this person is close enough to catch it, the squirrel jumps to the next branch. The squirrel keeps on repeating this till the person chasing it is tired and retires.

The opponent in this case never allows the Apologist to finish his point. No sooner the Apologist seems to solve the problem, he moves on to another point, and so on. This approach is used most often by Hindus who argue with Christians. The Hindu theology and philosophy is like a vast Banyan tree, with numerous branches and sub branches. Practically no Christian is knowledgeable in all the intricacies of the Hindu philosophies. Thus a well-prepared Hindu debater can use this approach successfully against Christian Apologists.

The best defence against the Banyan Tree or the Jumping Squirrel approach is to ask the opponent not to ask the next question till you have finished answering the first one. Also, if he is a Hindu, then some knowledge of the Hindu philosophy would be helpful to anticipate his questions.

3-BLOCKING (GOALKEEPER) APPROACH: This approach is used often by those insincere debaters who do not want the debate to proceed in any useful way. Like a goalkeeper, their only desire is to block your progress at any costs.

You can recognize such debaters by they way they proceed in the discussion with you. Instead of inquiring, if all what they do is to block your presentation by raising objections, pointing to exceptions, or by using any other ways of creating barriers, then they are trying to block.

Of course almost all debaters try to block their opponents, but at the same time they try to advance their own points. But during an extended discussion if a person does nothing except blocking your arguments by using unfair tactics, he is not interested in debating. The best approach would be to expose that person by asking aptly chosen Leading Questions.

Consider the example of a Father asking his teenager son to get involved in Church

activities, and the uninterested teenager blocking all his arguments by producing silly reasons. Often the father can expose his insincerity by asking a single Leading Question: you are raising a lot of objections. Suppose if I solve all those objections, would you then be willing to get involved ? Most often the shock, unwillingness, and defiance with which they respond to the Father would indicate that the objections are merely pretexts to block the suggestions given by the Father. The objections were not produced because he wanted them to be removed.

Once the insincerity of the debater is exposed through Leading Questions, the Christian Apologist can proceed to win the case.

4-SEMANTIC ACROBATICS (JUGGLING) APPROACH: Some debaters are clever at using language. They can juggle words and meanings in such a way that the discussion seems to be proceeding well, but actually the debaters arrive nowhere. This is because these people use words with multiple meanings, and therefore they are not saying what they seem to say.

Neo Orthodox theologians, the Post Modernist thinkers, and the Emotionalists and Mystics of our generation are a good example. These people use vocabulary which is used by others, but attribute totally different meanings to them. For example, the Neo Orthodox people try to portray themselves as theologically conservative by using theological vocabulary used by Conservatives. However, the deception lies in the way they define these words.

Thus when the Neo Orthodox debater talks about Sin, Salvation, Heaven, Hell, Justification, Revelation, Jesus Christ, Word Of God, Eternal Life, etc. he means things totally different from the way the Conservatives use these words. Unless the Apologists understand this juggling of words and meanings, he would never win his case.

The best approach would be to pick up key words (say Jesus), give the correct definition (the historical Jesus of Nazareth), and ask the opponent if he is using the word with that meaning in mind. This is one kind of Leading Question which can quickly expose the Semantic Acrobatics of the opponent. (Note: when the Neo Orthodox theologian uses the word Jesus, he is not talking about the historical Jesus, but rather about some abstract experience in the hearts of the hearers).

5-SLIPPERY-STAND (SLIPPERY FROG) APPROACH: This kind of a debater participates with great enthusiasm in the debate, and tries to present his arguments forcefully. However, like a slippery frog, he does not allow the Apologist to nail down the point (or points) made by him. He never himself makes, and never allows the Apologist to make, a precisely worded statement of his points.

Whenever a person's arguments can be stated in precise and non ambiguous terms, it becomes possible to evaluate the merits as well as demerits of those arguments. This the opponent avoids by never stating his points precisely. Even if the Apologist tries to nail down his points, he jumps to alternate explanations.

Slippery-stand approach is a good example of verbal deception. Debating with this kind of opponents can be very tough and trying, but is not impossible if the Apologist has patience. The best approach would be to tirelessly face the debater, ask Leading Questions at each of his statement, and force him to admit precisely what he is saying. The Apologist might have to rephrase the opponent's statements in many ways and ask whether that is what he means. Finally a point will come when he would not be able to escape.

Slippery Stand approach is very common among the Jesus Only Cultists. They would say

a lot of things to prove that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one and the same person. However, initially they would never directly admit that they believe in this heresy (known as Modalism). Every time that the Apologist tries to represent their doctrinal position, they would slip away. However, consistent questioning would expose even the most experienced Slippery-Stand Debater.

6-PHILOSOPHICAL EDIFICE (SMOKESCREEN) APPROACH: Debaters who have a good background in philosophy (specially the Eastern Mystic Philosophies) can often build up such an edifice of philosophical words that everybody is fooled into thinking that they are making some valid arguments. What they are actually doing is to trap the listener, confuse him with philosophical speculation, and evade the issues being debated.

Philosophical Edifice works like a smokescreen, which obscures the view and hides the enemy behind it. This approach is used by two kinds of people. First, those whom themselves are confused by their own position due to philosophical speculation. Second, those who know their position clearly, but who use the philosophical approach so that others might never guess their actual position on these issues.

The Neo Orthodox writers are the best example of people who use the Philosophical Edifice approach among Christians. They do so to hide the fact that they DO NOT accept any of the orthodox doctrines, but want to give the impression that they do accept. Cutting across the smokescreen using Leading Questions is the best method for fighting this kind of deception. The Apologist should not be afraid to keep asking questions to this kind of debaters.

7-SPECULATIVE (FOG) APPROACH: Some people are experts at weaving a web of speculative thinking about any subject whatsoever. Since it costs them only a couple of words, they fearlessly build speculation upon speculation till it all becomes voluminous. The deception lies in the fact that they never separate their speculations from facts.

Once a few initial speculations are made, they construct the rest of the case by using speculations but they never mention that these are speculations. Rather, once the initial speculations are over, they speak confidently about the rest of the speculations, giving the impression to everyone that they are speaking established facts. Like a fog, speculation can be quite voluminous, though ultimately it contains very little substance.

Evolutionists, rationalists, theistic evolutionists, gap theorists, day-age theorists, revelatory-day supporters, etc. are some people who use this approach. The speculative nature of their arguments can be exposed only if the Apologist goes to their foundational claims and expose their speculative nature. Once this is done, the rest of the fog clears fast, the way the rising sun destroys fog.

8-PRESUPPOSITIONAL (SWINGING BIRD) APPROACH: When two people discuss a subject, they should both have the same presupposition. Else no meaningful discussion is possible. However, some people begin with peculiar presuppositions of their own, and then just assumed that everyone else accepts these suppositions. Unfortunately, others often do not even know about these peculiar presupposition.

There is a proverb that when the Swinging Bird sits on an electric wire and swings, it begins to think that it is at rest and that it is the Universe which is oscillating. The same is the approach of these people. It is quite difficult for any meaningful discussion to take place without first exposing these presuppositions.

Muslims who approach Christians for arguing about the reliability of the Christian faith often exhibit this attitude. They often talk with respect about the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospels. Christians assume that they are talking about the Bible, but they are wrong. Most of the times the Muslim is talking about that hypothetical copy of Law, Prophets, and the Gospels that conforms to the Muslim expectations. This is why they often dispute the quotations taken from the Bible. Only appropriate Leading Questions would make them to confess that when they use these words they are not referring to the Bible which Christians possess.

9-CONFUSION-CREATION (LIZARD'S TAIL) APPROACH: Scientists say that on facing a predator the lizard breaks away its tail and flees the scene. Meanwhile, the writhing tail diverts the attention of the predator, making it all the more easy for the lizard to escape with its life. The same approach is used by many debaters.

Once they know that their side is weak, these debaters ask numerous irrelevant questions and raises numerous unrelated issues, and shake the audience. Not having discernment, the mob thinks that these are the important issues. Thus attention is diverted from the main issue.

This approach is often used by the Prajapati Cult and its sympathizers. During any discussion, they raise so many peripheral questions and issues that the attention of the general public is diverted to side-issues and the main subject remains untouched. The only solution for this Confusion-Creation and Diversion is to ask appropriate Leading Question to bring them back to the main issue.

10-MOCKERY/PEJORATIVE TALK (SKUNK) APPROACH: In a crowd there will always be some people who are hostile to truth. The nasty debtor can always count upon their sympathies. Thus on losing the argument these debaters get into mockery, pejorative talk, and character assassination. Instead of countering ideas with ideas, they counter ideas with mockery.

While many mature people in the audience would immediately recognize this travesty, most people just flow with the current. This is a very dishonest trick, and it is very difficult for an honest Apologist to face these people. There is often a temptation to counter mockery with mockery, but there are no long-term gains in this approach. On the contrary, the Apologist would lose the sympathy of the common folk as well as of the more discerning listeners.

The best approach is to stick to facts, and draw the attention repeatedly to the original issues. It might also be helpful to point out to the crowd that ideas should be opposed with the help of ideas, and not with mockery. This approach might not seem to win immediately, but in the long run the more mature people would side with the thoughtful presentation of the Christian Apologist.

Summary

Analyzing the opponent's argument and exposing his weakness is an important part in presenting the truth. This becomes quite difficult in a public debate, but a prepared Christian Apologist can do much. Keep the fundamentals of debating techniques in mind, keep analyzing, and keep presenting the truth in an appropriate manner.

Chapter 3

Responding To Debates

Responding to debates is not easy because most of the time a debate is not a normal conversation. Further, some of the debaters are not honest or sincere inquirers. They use everything in their verbal arsenal to distort the discussion and win. Thus responding to debates requires much preparation, especially if it takes place in front of a large crowd (which can mindlessly side with error).

The first few stages of preparation involved an analysis of Twisted Arguments. For this the Apologist would have to go through several stages of analysis and preparation, as explained below:

Anatomy Of A Twisted Argument

When twisted arguments are suddenly thrown upon an Apologist, and that also during a tense debate, it is often very difficult to analyze the constituents of the argument. However, going to a debate after doing sufficient homework would help the debater to recognize at least the major constituents of the twisted arguments of his opponent.

Actually almost all crooked arguments have only four parts. They are:

Human Limitations + Fallacies Of Logic + Propaganda Techniques + Debater's Techniques (Crooked Speech)

HUMAN LIMITATIONS: Even the most learned humans are quite finite and limited in the knowledge they possess, specially outside their areas of interest or specialization. Thus every person is ignorant about many things, and debaters know how to exploit this ignorance.

FALLACIES OF LOGIC: Though the rules of deductions are well defined, applying them is often very difficult. Clever debaters thus exploit fallacies of logic to fool people into believing them.

PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES: Human intelligence must sift through all the evidence and arguments presented in any debate. Such sifting often separates valid from the invalid arguments. However, using propaganda techniques it is possible to bypass human intelligence and appeal directly to human emotions. Clever debaters exploit this weakness by employing Propaganda Techniques.

DEBATERS TECHNIQUES: We have already seen the six basic techniques and the scores of variations upon them. Crooked debaters use these techniques freely.

Every Christian apologist must make it a point to read debates and writings directed against the Christian faith. The he should mentally analyze their anatomy and identify the four components mentioned above. The he should formulate the way he would defend himself if challenged in the same manner. Repeated mental exercise in this way would make him skilled at detecting these components even in a live debate. This would in turn greatly increase his ability to face hostile situations during defence of Christian faith.

How To Counter Twisted Arguments

It is easy to discuss a subject with a sincere inquirer, but very difficult to continue exchange with a person inclined to twisted thinking and speaking. The situation becomes more complex when a large audience is involved.

Large groups of people behave with what is known as the Mob Mentality. Once the audience gets into this mentality, further discussion becomes impossible. Unfortunately, many people given to crooked arguments know the value of Mob Mentality for their cause. Somehow or other they would manipulate the audience, and then further discussion becomes impossible.

The best method is to discuss only person-to-person, without a large crowd. If this is not possible, then systematic analysis of the opponent's position and debunking his arguments are the only alternatives left. This is easier said than done, specially due to the Mob Mentality factor and the crookedness of the opponent. However, the following things would help the Christian Apologist to analyze and debunk the opponent:

1-The Basic Approach: In the heat of the moment, and due to insults piled upon the Apologist by the opposing camp, there is always a tendency to lose sight of what one is doing. This should not be allowed to happen, and one should always keep the Basic Approach in mind. These are:

FOCUS ON BIBLE: In all discussions involving Doctrines, keep the focus on Bible. Bible alone (Sola Scriptura) is the foundation upon which every Bible-believing Apologist stands. All theories, interpretations, assumptions, and opinion of the experts are to be examined in the light of the Bible, and Bible alone. Bible alone provides the framework for examining doctrinal subjects.

FOCUS ON FACTS: In all discussions involving non-doctrinal subjects, keep the focus on FACTS. Ignore assumptions, theories, opinions, and fads. Demand facts, and use only facts.

ASK LEADING QUESTIONS: As said many times, debates should always go in a specific direction -- the direction closer to truth. This can be done by affirming the truth, but affirmation is the weakest form of statement in a debate. The best approach is to ask Leading Questions.

Leading Questions force the opponent to make statements and then justify those statements. In this way he is forced make a reasonable conclusion. Since the deduction as well as justification come from the opponent, he cannot cheat easily. Nor can he disown the deductions made by him. This is the strongest method for argument. Fuller details on formulating and asking Leading Questions are given in another section of this series.

2-The Basic Attitude: Victory in debate does not depend upon words alone, but also upon one's attitude. Though the rough, brash, and scorching speakers are able to attract a lot of attention, people forget them in the long run. Only the debater with the right attitude would leave a lasting impression upon people. The Basic Attitude has two parts:

BE FIRM IN YOUR CONVICTIONS: Do not go for debates on subjects about which you have no conviction. Enemies of truth are relentless and many and thus in the long run you will tire and withdraw if you had no firm convictions to begin with. Study a subject till your conviction is firm, and then only debate with people.

BE HUMBLE: Humility is not seen as a virtue in our generation. When the debate takes place in front of a crowd, people often prefer the brash and mocking speaker over the self-controlled and the humble one. However, such speakers never leave a lasting impression. Thus the Apologist should blend a humble attitude with a firm stand.

3-Use The Power Of Repetition: Repetition is a very strong friend of truth. The Christian Apologist should keep exposing error and keep repeating the truth, because ultimately all debate and discussion is meant to defend truth. Thus contradicting error alone is not sufficient.

DRAW ABSURD CONCLUSIONS USING THE SAME ARGUMENTS: Debaters often manipulate the emotions of the audience by making emotionally touching appeals. For example, there is this popular justification produced by people who have developed a love affair: We have not stolen anything, only fallen in love. The statement is so powerful that a lot of young people are trapped by it.

Here the thrust of the argument is this: we have not stolen anything, thus what we have done is not wrong. To counter statements like the one above, the same sentence should be recast to show the absurdities. The Leading Question would be: does an act become justified if it does not involve stealing ? For example, suppose someone says: We have not stolen anything, but committed only a murder. Is the murder justified because no stealing is involved ?

Many emotionally coloured statements look totally different when the same arguments are used in other contexts, and this is often a helpful strategy.

PRESENT A STEP BY STEP EXPOSITION OF TRUTH: No amount of dismantling of error is sufficient in itself. Truth to replace the demolished error should always be presented. A step-by-step presentation might be necessary because people influenced by error might not always be able to grasp the full truth.

Thus dismantling evolution is not sufficient in itself. The doctrinal and scientific aspects of Creation should be taught to people in gradual steps so that they might gain fuller insights into truth and also into the issues involved.

How To Present Arguments Concretely

After a person becomes good at analyzing twisted arguments, and after he gets a feel of how the opponents put together a good number of factors to create an atmosphere favourable for them (not favourable to discover truth), the Apologist is ready for debates. He should begin his debates with individuals, and gradually progress to larger groups. Do not take shortcuts because debating against infidels, perverts, and heretics is no joke. Most of them have no ethics to bind them, and they are ruthless once they get a chance to attack Truth.

The Christian Apologist ready to debate those who are opposed to truth must remember:

KNOW YOUR STAND: In the middle of a debate it often dawns upon Christian Apologists that while they feel attached to a subject, they do not have any idea about the details of the subject. Such an apologist cannot project Truth or win the argument. Rather than being attached outwardly to a nice-sounding spiritual stand, the Apologist must know his stand in and out. Else he would lose the spiritual battle. Thus a person defending Creationism should know what brand of Creationism he is defending --

whether it is young-earth creationism, old-earth creationism, or progressive creationism.

KNOW THE PREMISES OF YOUR STAND: Every doctrinal stand depends upon several premises. These premises might include other doctrines, your brand of hermeneutics, or the way you understand certain passages in the Bible. Such knowledge is essential because in all meaningful debates the opponents ultimately analyze every aspect of the other party's belief and premises. Thus unless one is quite knowledgeable about the premises upon which one stands, he might have to face some very embarrassing moments. For example, one should know whether one stands upon the premises of Bible Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone, and Christ Alone.

KNOW THE STRENGTH OF YOUR PREMISES: Not all premises in a debate have equal strength. Some might be so strong that neither of the sides can question them, while others might be so weak that none might want even to mention them. Thus one must clearly know the relative strength of the premises upon which the parties debate. Thus, as mentioned elsewhere, when discussing the Tongues issue, basing the discussion upon whether Tongues have ceased is weaker than basing the discussion upon the nature, function, and regulatory principles governing tongues. The former can be disputed more easily than the latter three.

PRESENT ONLY STRONGEST ARGUMENTS: All subjects have both strong as well as weak arguments in their favour. The Apologist would always be tempted to pile up all the arguments upon the listeners, specially when the debate proves to be tough. However, this is a foolish strategy.

Points in a debate are not like weak thread which, when collected together, become strong. Rather, these points are like links in a chain. Since under stress a chain breaks at the weakest link, no weak links should be allowed in the debate. The opponent would simply overlook the strong point, discuss the weaker point, win the appreciation of people, and conclude. You might not even get a chance to remind them that the stronger points have been left untouched.

Weaker and peripheral arguments should be reserved for the stage when the debate has been won, and someone approach the Apologist for further instruction. Once a person has left the debating mentality to become a seeker for truth, the arguments work not like the links of a chain but like the threads which spun together to make a strong rope.

Precautions To Be Observed

Every debate is a war. A war often between forces defending error and Apologists defending Truth. The enemy uses plenty of tactics, and often moves about in the debate very strategically. Further, the sinful man has a greater inclination toward falsehood than to Truth. Thus sufficient precautions have to be taken, lest there is a surprise defeat. Some of the precautions to take are:

1-Beware Of Causes That Work Against You: Not only are your opponents working against you, but there are many extraneous factors also that work against you. You must be aware of these.

AUDIENCE IS OFTEN SYMPATHETIC TO FALSE CONCLUSIONS: Because of the continued presence of old sin nature, and also because of non-renewed minds, the majority of people would not be sympathetic to Truth. Their natural inclination would be towards error. Thus the Apologist should never assume that the audience would favour him if he simply presented the facts. Rather, in addition to presenting facts, he would

have to appeal to them by quoting appropriate Scriptures. The Word of God is alive and powerful, and it would do its work when used repeatedly.

AUDIENCE IS OFTEN UNABLE TO OR UNWILLING TO STRAIN THEIR BRAINS:

Right thinking often demands much sifting and analysis of complex data. This is a mentally taxing job for which the audience might be unprepared or unwilling. Since error needs no such hard work, that is easier to their brains. Thus the speaker should always be conscious of the mental limitations and willingness of the audience, and should always go down to their level to present facts and arguments.

AUDIENCE IS OFTEN NOT EQUIPPED FOR COMPREHENDING THE SUBJECT: The implication of simple truth can often be very complex. The audience might have enough capacity to understand the simple truth, but not to comprehend the often tricky and difficult implications. Thus instead of taking their capacity for granted, the Apologist should be prepared to go down to their level and educate them.

AUDIENCE IS OFTEN INTERESTED MORE IN AMUSEMENT: Reasoning is a tough mental affair. In our anti-intellectual and anti-doctrine generation, the audience often tends to be more interested in humour and amusement than in a mentally demanding argument. Thus the opponent might be able to exploit their mentality by cracking jokes, using sarcastic language, and by doing anything to lull them. Thus a touch of humour, or an ability to present the subject suitably for such an audience is very essential in such a situation.

AUDIENCE IS OFTEN LOST THROUGH THE OPPONENT'S SARCASM, MOCKERY, AND RIDICULE: The decreasing affection for doctrine, philosophy, and mental activity means that many people are not easily attracted to truth. Nor are they committed to objective and deep analysis of issues involved. When such people populate the audience, the opponent's sarcasm, mockery, and ridicule can cause a lot of loss to the Apologist; more so, if he does not deliver his part with conviction, forcefully, and in a manner that the audience can appreciate.

2-Keep Analyzing The Receptiveness Of The Opponent: The opponent might have chosen a subject which he is incompetent to handle. Alternatively, he might not be willing to listen to the Apologist because of a number of reasons.

If the opponent is not receptive and responsive to what the Apologist says, no meaningful dialogue is possible with him. Instead, the Apologist might have to consider the audience as his main target and would have to address them instead of addressing the opponent. A continuous analysis of the receptiveness of the opponent as well as of the audience is essential if meaningful communication has to take place.

3-Keep Bringing The Audience And The Debaters Back To Point: Straying from the main and important points is a common malady of all debates and committee meetings. This might be due to carelessness, lack of understanding of the way things move in a debate, or even due to the deliberate attempts of some people opposed to Truth. Whatever, the cause, it is essential to bring everyone repeatedly back to the main points being discussed.

4-Stick To The Major Argument: As said before, do not try to dish out major arguments, minor arguments, and peripheral issues, all into a public debate. Whether it is public or private, in a situation of debate only the major and strongest arguments must be presented. The Apologist should reserve the minor arguments and related issues for sincere seekers.

5-Handle In Manageable Segments: Nobody can easily handle a subject and win in one hour that actually requires five. Thus the debater should never take up a general and all-encompassing subject. The breadth of subject chosen and the time available should match each other. Also, when the arguments are presented, that should also be done only in manageable steps.

6-Learn To Present With Seriousness As Well As With Humour: All debate must be conducted with all seriousness and in all solemnity. However, this does not mean that the lighter side of speech is taboo. On the contrary, every successful debater should learn to mingle conviction, seriousness, solemnity, and humour in a balanced manner. This would make the debate more attractive, and would invite people to be more attentive.

Summary

Public debate is not the best method for discovering Truth these days. Every Apologist should try to confine discussions and debate to a one-to-one basis. If not possible, he should debate in front of as small a group as possible. He should also ensure that the listeners are all interested in the subject.

Whether private or public, debates often bring out the worst in people who hate Truth. They might use all kinds of approaches to defeat Truth. The Apologist should do his preparation thoroughly and scientifically so that unscrupulous people do not take advantage of the debating situation.

About The Authors

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