

Session 6: Tactics: Handling Objections with Grace and Truth

- I. **Intro:** Ever been on the hot seat? It's not fun getting grilled by a professor or so-called "expert," is it?
- II. **Topic:** Handling objections with grace and truth.
- III. **Significant,** because too many Christians assume the burden of proof when they shouldn't. If I claim there's a pink elephant hanging from the exit sign (some of you just looked), it's not up to you to refute me; it's on me to prove my claim. I made the claim; I bear the burden of proof.
- IV. **Thesis:** When you are under fire, you can get back in the driver's seat by asking 3 key questions. Greg Koukl calls them "Colombo" questions, named after the famous television detective played by Peter Falk. The goal is not dominance, but clarity. You want to convey Christian truth with an artful method. Ask:

What **do you mean** by that?

How **did you come to** that conclusion?

Have you **considered the implications** of your view?

A. Colombo Question #1: "What do you mean by that?"

1. Purpose: to gather information so you can accurately understand your critic's view. This question alone often disarms the challenge.
 - (a) The Bible's been changed many times. (Oh? How so?)
 - (b) You're a religious, political extremist! (What do you mean by "extremist?")
 - (c) Christians involved in politics violate the separation of church and state." (Do you mean that only non-religious people should be allowed to participate in their own government?)
 - (d) Science and faith exclude each other. (What do you mean by "science" and what do you mean by "faith?")
2. Asking "What do you mean by that?" disarms many challenges to pro-life view:
 - (a) Embryonic stem cell research is more promising. (How so? In what ways?)
 - (b) Pro-lifers force their views on others. (Really? How so?)
 - (c) Embryos are just a mass of cells. (What do you mean by that?)
 - (d) I have a right to choose! (Choose what, exactly?)
 - (e) Women have a fundamental right to abortion. (What do you mean by "fundamental?" And where does this "fundamental" right come from?)

B. Colombo Question #2: “How did you come to that conclusion?”

1. Purpose: to reverse the burden of proof and get you out of the hot seat. It forces critics to give reasons for their claims:
 - (a) The Bible is full of fairy tales. (Why would you believe a thing like that?)
 - (b) No one can say which beliefs are right or wrong. (Then why believe you?)
 - (c) No one religion or person sees the whole truth. (How would you know that each sees only a part unless you can see the whole, something you just claimed was impossible?)
2. Asking, “Why do you believe that?” forces abortion-choice advocates to provide evidence (justification) for their claims. It puts you in the driver’s seat:
 - (a) Thousands died from illegal abortion before 1967. (How do you know that?)
 - (b) Fetuses are not self-aware. (Why is self-awareness value-giving?)
 - (c) Pro-lifers just want to prosecute women who have abortions. (What’s wrong with a law that says you can’t kill innocent human beings and if you do, there will be consequences? If the consequences fit the crime, why are they unfair?)

C. Colombo Question #3: “Have you considered the implications of your view?”

1. Purpose: to show that your critic must pay too high a price to hold his view. Examples:
 - (a) Everything is just an illusion. (If so, how could we know it?)
 - (b) You shouldn’t judge! (Have you considered that you just did?)
 - (c) You Christians shouldn’t tell people how to live. (Isn’t telling someone not to do something telling him how to live?)
2. Examples from pro-life discussions:
 - (a) Fetuses have no right to life because they’re not self-aware. (Have you considered that newborns aren’t self-aware either?)
 - (b) Fetuses have no desire to go on living. (Have you considered what follows from that? The capacity to desire anything doesn’t occur until several weeks after birth.)
 - (c) Moral concerns should not get in the way of scientific progress. (Have you considered that you just justified the Tuskegee Experiments?)

D. Putting it all together—Using all three “Colombo” questions to graciously reply to critics:

1. Objection: Laws can’t stop all abortions.

- (a) Do you mean all or most?
 - (b) How do you know most women won't obey the law?
 - (c) Have you considered laws against rape don't stop all rape but they do stop most? Why should it be any different with abortion?
2. Objection: Your abortion pictures are fake!
- (a) Which ones? Given you think my pictures are fake, what do real abortion pictures look like? That is, how do they differ from these?
 - (b) So, if you aren't sure what real abortion pictures look like, how do you know these are fake?
 - (c) Have you considered that if abortion is okay, there pictures shouldn't bother us?
3. Objection: Embryos have no desire to go on living and thus have no right to life.
- (a) When you speak of "desire," do you mean one that I'm consciously aware of?
 - (b) Why must I have a conscious desire for something before I can justly lay claim to it? That is, why is having conscious desires value-giving in the first place?
 - (c) Have you considered that a slave can be conditioned not to desire his freedom, yet he's still entitled to it in virtue of his humanity? And what if my desire to live is greater than yours? Does that mean I have a greater right to life than you?
4. Objection: The Bible is silent on abortion; therefore, abortion is okay.
- (a) What do you mean by "silent?" Do you mean the word is not mentioned or that we can't draw any conclusions from what's written? Are you saying that whatever the Bible doesn't expressly condemn it condones? If not, what's your point?
 - (b) Tell me why you think the biblical authors don't mention abortion by name? What are your reasons for thinking their alleged silence justifies abortion?
 - (c) Have you considered that the Bible doesn't condemn many things by name including female infanticide and drive-by-shootings? Does that make them okay?
- E. Other questions to ask:
1. Are you deeply interested in doing what is right or are you committed to your view?
 2. When confronted with a good argument against a position you hold, what is your obligation?
 3. Here's a brief case for my view. Where does it go wrong? (syllogism)
 4. If abortion intentionally kills an innocent human being, what's wrong with passing laws against it?
 5. If there is no objective right and wrong, why tolerate other views?
 6. If nobody has the truth, why listen to other viewpoints?
 7. If it's wrong to hurt people because of their skin color or gender, why is it okay to hurt them based on size, development, or dependency?