



Conversational Apologetics

Michael Ramsden

We live in cultures that are filled with unanswered questions. To many, there is so much confusion that they stop looking for answers. What can we learn from Jesus' interaction with other people, and how can that help us in sharing the Gospel today?

The following transcript of 'Conversational Apologetics' has been kindly produced by a bethinking listener. Because of the nature of unscripted talks of this type, a few sections have been 'tidied up' slightly but every effort has been made to ensure that the transcript is as accurate as possible.

Now, the one thing you have to know about me before I start is that I'm basically an evangelist-apologist. My natural tendency is to slip into preaching and then to ask you to give your lives to Christ. That's my basic expository style – normally to take any passage of Scripture and start making a line for the cross, which I normally find isn't such a bad idea. Within those limitations, please bear with me. Part of what I want to do this afternoon is to make you think, and very deliberately I see that as part of what we even do as an organization – to try to get people to think. As I do that, if I start to speak so quickly that the time disappears to the point whereby there is no time for you to actually think anymore, just wave at me, I'll know you're not saying "Hello!" and I'll remember to breathe. I might happen to get very excited when I talk about the gospel and my speed increases. And since we'll be looking at how we might begin to share the gospel in a culturally relevant way in a conversational context, which I have a huge passion for, I get so excited that you may feel you need translation into English. And so,

please do wave and I'll remember to breathe. My mother is in Cyprus, I was raised in the Middle East and passion is just part of my general makeup and I apologize for that right up front.

Now let me try to introduce what I would like to share with you, and then we're going to spend a lot of time in Scripture, and having done that I'm going to try asking you to give me some questions so we can begin to practically apply some of the things we've been talking about.

Let me start with a personal recollection. About six and a half to seven years ago, I was already involved in travelling and preaching as part of the Zacharias Trust, which is the European arm of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries. I was going to speak somewhere, and I was in desperate need of a haircut. I happened to walk to the end of the road I lived in, in a small town in North Nottinghamshire called Worksop. I came to the end of the street and there was a hairdresser's there, and I walked in and said, "Help, I need a haircut."

The lady who was running this shop, called Belinda's, pulled out an appointment book and said, "Well, when do you want a haircut?"

"Well, today..."

She looked at me blankly and said, "Well..." then she looked at her watch and said, "Okay, I think I might just be able to fit you in, but I'll have to be quick."

I said, "That's no problem, I just need a haircut."

So I sit down in the chair and she comes up and she puts one of those aprons and a towel around me. She goes off; she picks up a pair of scissors and a comb; she starts walking back to where I'm sitting. She stands behind me, then she turns to the lady cutting hair next to her, and she says, "My business is doing so well, but there must be more to life than this."

That's a dangerous thing to say in front of someone who considers himself to be an evangelist. I caught her eye in the mirror and said, "What you say is very true. In life, we're not made happy by what we acquire but by what we

appreciate."

She just stopped and stared at me and said, "What did you just say?"

I said, "In life, you're not made happy by what you acquire but by what you appreciate."

She walked off, came back with a pad of paper and a pen, and said, "Could you say that one more time?"

And so she wrote it down, put down the pad of paper, put down the pen, picked up the comb and scissors, and said, "I think that is very true." So she seemed to be interested.

So then I just said, "But if you ask me, the problem we have today is not that people feel they have nothing to be grateful for, it's that they feel they have no one to be grateful to."

And at this point, she put down the comb and the scissors, picked up the pad of paper and the pen, and said, "Could you say that again?"

Now it took her an hour and fifteen minutes to cut my hair. I do not have a one-hour-and-fifteen-minute-hairstyle. As a matter of fact, I don't even have style; as you can see, all I have is hair.

She went on to say that she was pregnant and said, "We're living in a world in which there is so much evil. I'm worried about bringing a baby into such a world."

Borrowing a line I'd heard from one of my colleagues, Ravi Zacharias, I said, "I know there is a lot of evil out there, but what about the evil in here?"

She said, "That would be incredible if there was a way to overcome the evil in here."

And I said, "It's interesting you should say that."

We started talking about sin – what sin was, and how we're taken prisoner and captive to it. She said, "This makes so much sense. I know what you mean. I feel trapped; I can't change myself."

She said, "I need a rescuer. We need someone to rescue us."

I said, "What you're telling me is you need a saviour."

And I'm not joking, she said, "That is a very good word."

She had no church background, but she said, "That's the word." And I said, "It's interesting you should say that..." We got talking about Jesus, who is the Saviour. And then she said, "Are you telling me that God can actually change people's lives?"

I told her a story about a guy I'd heard Chuck Colson talking about, just before I'd been there. The guy was in death row in America, and then he was converted to Christ. Now that he'd been converted to Christ, he called together his legal team because he'd been convicted for something like 13 rapes and murders. He said to them, "I've become a Christian. I've been appealing against my death sentence on the basis that I am mad. But I am not mad, I knew what I was doing. I pre-planned the whole thing. I am withdrawing my defense; I can't lie anymore." He stood in front of the Supreme Court of Justice and he said that. Do you know what the Supreme Court of Justice in America ruled? Only an insane person would do such a thing. And so, he is still alive today, and he's sharing his testimony there.

She said, "That's really amazing... has God changed your life?" So I shared my story with her.

And then she said, "What should I do about this?"

I said, "Well, you can't sit on the fence forever. One day we'll all be called to account. The question is what will you have done with your sin? Will you have asked for this forgiveness, received this forgiveness, and this provision of the cross?"

Eventually, I left, and she thanked me very much, and I went home and told my wife what had happened, and we prayed for this lady. I thought, "How do I follow her up?" So two weeks later, I go back for a second haircut. I have never had such short hair in my whole life.

I walk in, and she says, "Michael! I will cut your hair."

She didn't even ask me; she just walked me across and sat me in a chair. She said, "*Do you remember the conversation we had 2 weeks ago?*" And I said, "*I can sort of remember what we said.*" And she said, "*I went home and I told my husband everything you told me.*"

"*That's interesting.*" We'd talked about bankruptcy of life without God, and we had a fairly lengthy talk about worship. We'd talked about the fact that there's not only evil out there but there's also evil in here, and that is sin. We talked about the whole idea that we were in created in God's image, but we're now in captivity and bondage to sin – we can't save ourselves; we need a Saviour. That's why Christ comes and he goes to the cross, and he pays the price, takes the penalty for that to set us free. And does he still set people free today? Yes he does! And finally, "*What am I going to do about this?*" So I said "*When you told your husband all these things, what did he say?*"

A funny expression came over her face, and she said, "*He said I was preaching at him.*"

Well of course she was preaching at him – they both got home from work, they sit down over dinner, and out comes the notebook: "*Do you know in life you're not made happy by what you acquire but by what you appreciate? It's not that you've got nothing to be grateful for, it's that you have no one to be grateful to. There is evil out there but what about evil in here? You can't do anything about that, you know, you're a prisoner to sin.*" – of course she was preaching to him. Yet she was so open, and he is so closed – why? The answer is that *she* was asking questions. For the statement, "*There must be more to life than this,*" is not a statement, but a cry of the heart. It is a question: "*Is there more to life than this?*"

After this, I suddenly realized that not only could I share the gospel by *preaching* to people, I could *talk* to people. I really have nothing more profound to say today than that. The question is, is it just a special gift that one or two people have, or is this something that is expected of all Christians?

I don't know if anyone has ever asked you, "*Why are you a Christian?*" If you find yourself in the context where someone else has asked that question, listen very carefully to what they say.

What you'll find is that when we are asked *why* we are Christians, we often explain to someone *how* we became a Christian. But *why* you are a Christian is not the same as *how* you became one. Those are two different questions – *why* and *how*. If you answer the question "*Why are you a Christian?*" by telling someone *how* you became a Christian, what do you think you're communicating to them? Put yourself in their shoes. What do you think they're going to hear? It's about *me*. And more than that, what about the process itself? "*Why are you a Christian?*" "*Well...*" And then you tell them *how*. "*I met a Christian guy, he seemed very nice, he invited me to his church. I was intrigued by what they said, I went along to their bible study group, I spent some time, and then I became a Christian.*" If you were a non-Christian, what's the next thing that you would then ask? They might say, "*But if you met a Buddhist that day, and he took you to his temple, and you joined his Zen group, you would now be sitting cross-legged on the floor going, 'Ommm...' Doesn't it sound a bit random? But is that why you are a Christian? Just a random chance process and it just happened to happen to you, or is there more to it than that?*"

Most of you are here because you're interested in apologetics, and if you're interested in apologetics, you'll already be familiar with the verse in 1 Peter 3 where it says, "*But in your heart set apart Christ Jesus as Lord, and always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us for the reason for the hope that we have.*" We'll look at that briefly, because I want to go somewhere else into the Gospel as well. Here's what is interesting with that command to be able to always give an answer: The word translated 'answer' is from the Greek word *apologia*, where we get apologetics from. For years, we've taught that apologetics is an inherently complex task. Apologetics is for a group of specialists. Apologetics, we said, is giving the philosophical branch of theology, or the theological branch of philosophy. But I don't think that's what it is at all. When Peter wrote 1 Peter to the church, he didn't write to an individual, and he wasn't writing to just a very narrow geographical region. He wrote 1 Peter 1:1-2 to the church that was being scattered as a result of persecution. He addresses himself to the *church*. He's addressing two *universal* commands in those two verses, 1 Peter 3:15-16. First, "*In your heart, set apart Christ as Lord.*" If you are a Christian, you must

live in obedience to that command, are we agreed? And number two, "*you must be prepared to give an answer, an apologia, an apologetic, for the reason for the hope that you have.*" Who is that command addressed to? To the church.

I would suggest that the vision and the meaning of what is in here is not about a complex specialist task for a group of highly trained, skilled individuals. What is in here is a command addressed to the *church*, to the ordinary members of the body of Christ, saying, "*You must be prepared and ready to give an answer – an apologia – to everybody who asks you for the reason for the hope that you have.*" In other words, apologetics is not about introducing a dose of confusion into the gospel in order to make it sound more profound. It is about communicating the profundity of the gospel so as to remove the confusion surrounding it.

There has been a very big divergence between the historical development and definition of apologetics and its biblical definition. I have no trouble admitting that at all, but that is a disastrous development – absolutely disastrous. Now there are going to be people out there with incredible philosophical minds who will take this to a very deep level. That's fine. But Peter can't be addressing himself at that level, can he? Because unless you are a master of philosophy, how will you ever be in a position to give that kind of apologetic? In other words, this idea of conversational apologetics – engaging with hairdressers, taxi drivers, your next-door neighbors, your friends, your family, meaningfully, with the gospel, I suggest to you from Scripture, is meant to be something which *every member* of the body of Christ should be able to do. It is not an optional extra. Two commands are given back to back: "*In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord,*" and "*always be prepared to give an answer, an apologetic, to everyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that you have.*" We don't have 1) Basic Christianity that's got like, the lordship issue settled out, and then 2) Christianity Deluxe, with advanced theology, apologetics and a couple of extra software modules plugged in. Apologetics is part of the basic package. Apologetics therefore must live or die within the life of the church. It died in Western Europe when it became an abstract intellectual discipline as opposed to a spiritual dynamic exercise that was right at the heart of the

church. Yes, there will be specialists, there will be people who have incredible ability, but that's not all there is to it. It's just as dangerous for apologetics to end up in a small group of specialists as it would be for theology to only exist amongst academic theologians. I know it sometimes feels like when we're in the church, that's what's happened, but we don't feel that's healthy. Part of the problem is that we've often made it so complicated, which is why someone complained, "*The trouble with theologians is they go down deeper, stay down longer, and come up murkier than anybody else.*" Now that's not always true, and so we thank God for people like Don Carson who come and take theology and make it accessible. Similarly, to me, this is what is happening here, so part of the vision I want to share is: What would it look like if we were sharing this in the church, if we are a church where this is happening, where the members of the congregation can answer the 'why' to people who ask them?

Here's a very brief summary of what we've done: We just talked about 1 Peter 3:15 – the general context of the book, that the book is addressed to the *church*.

The second thing to do is to give a very specific context of that command. If you read 1 Peter 3:8 and then all the way through down to the end of that section, you'll see that that section is basically talking about holiness. "*Be compassionate.*" "*Be humble-minded.*" "*Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult.*" You remember all those commands in 1 Peter 3. It's talking about *lifestyle*. It's saying we need to live a life worthy of the calling we have received. That's part of the lordship of Christ, it's summed up. "*So in your heart set apart Christ as Lord*", because as soon as it says that, it says "*and always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you.*" If you are an astute observer of Scripture, which I'm sure you are, you'll say, "*Yeah, but what do we do when people don't ask us?*" This command says we should be ready to give an answer when people *ask* us for the reason for them – what do we do when people aren't asking? The first reply must be... well, what is the context of this command? It's one of holiness, isn't it? The assumption seems to be that your life, the quality of your life, is prompting questions. Isn't that the assumption here? We have all these commands about how

we should live. The question is, are we living that life?

There are other reasons why people don't ask questions and we'll come to those when we do a session on Cultural Apologetics. But the first one must be, what does my life actually look like? Do people look at my life and say, "*There is something very different here. What is it?*"

So, the overall context is a command to the church, the specific context is one teaching holiness, how we live. There is just one other thing. "*In your heart set apart Christ as Lord,*" Apologetics is not an intellectual exercise only. It is a *spiritual discipline*. We're engulfed in a spiritual battle for the mind. 2 Corinthians 10 says, "*For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. On the contrary, we have divine power to demolish strongholds.*" It's really interesting, this battle, because it's talking about spiritual battle, "*we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does*". We don't go around killing people. You may have noticed that once you've killed someone, you can't convert them. But we are involved in a battle, though we don't wage war as the world does. On the contrary, we have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish the spiritual strongholds against which we are fighting; we go out there and take them. What is the next thing you would write after that point if you were writing Scripture? I think some of us might then like to talk about prayer, which would be very legitimate. You may talk about other spiritual giftings. What does Paul say? We demolish – *Arguments*, and every false pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every...? *Thought*. And we make it obedient to Christ. Isn't that a fascinating description of the spiritual battle?

Now I have to say something here which is very, very important. You cannot reduce the spiritual battle we are engaged in into an intellectual struggle. That would be entirely irresponsible of me. However, what is being assumed here in Peter, and what is clearly being taught in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, is that the spiritual battle involves the mind. Are we prepared for it? Are we ready? Can we engage at that level? Now just because it involves the mind, it's no less spiritual. This is why if we turn apologetics into pure philosophy, we've lost it even before we've started.

Apologetics is more than that. It has to come under the lordship of Christ itself.

So within these three parameters,

- 1) That this is a commandment that is addressed to the church,
- 2) It's also about how we are living and whether our lives themselves are prompting questions in the subcultures in which we live,
- 3) And then it's actually about a *spiritual* battle, but one that also involves the mind,

I'd like to try and share some other thoughts with you.

What I would like to do is try to illustrate from the Gospels, from the life of Jesus, two things. It says to "*give an answer*", an apologia, "*for the reason*", which is the word- in the text, *logos*, where we get the word 'logic' from. I'd like to look at what some of that might look like. And the reason why I want to go into the Gospels is this: It says, "*always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks for the reason for the hope...*" What is our reason for hope? ... Okay, one person thinks it's Jesus, and the rest of you obviously have got a better reason for hope than Jesus Christ ... in which case, you're wrong. What I'd like to do is try to illustrate that from the Gospel.

"*In your heart set apart Christ as Lord and always be prepared to give an answer to those who ask you for the reason for the hope that you have.*" Before we go into giving a reason, there's just one point I'd like to illustrate. I'm going to illustrate it from lots of different passages of Scripture so you know I'm not cheating and trying to tell you this is something which happens all the time when it doesn't happen all the time.

Doing this is more than just about giving answers to other people's questions. What is contained within this word *apologia* is more than just giving answers to other people questions, which is why I don't like the word "answer" in particular. It's very hard to translate this. This same word is used by Paul when he sends for King Agrippa and he says, "*King Agrippa, hear now my defense*" in Acts 26. It's the same word. Can anyone remember King Agrippa's response after Paul's "defense"? "*Do you think you can so quickly persuade me?*" Does that sound defensive to

you? You see, the trouble with 'answer' or 'defense' is it always implies a model whereby you are on the backfoot and someone is somehow plying you with something and you're basically just trying to throw out the answers as the balls come running in – in a sense you're batting them back. But there is more to giving an *apologia* than this. Giving an apologetic is not only about giving answers to other people's questions, it is also about asking questions of other people's answers, or even asking questions of the questions themselves. I will say it again – Apologetics is not just about giving answers to other people's questions, it is also about asking questions of other people's answers, or even asking questions of the questions themselves.

Someone once asked a rabbi, "*Rabbi, why do you always answer a question with a question?*" To which he replied, "*Why shouldn't I answer a question with a question?*"

The reason why I think this task is universally possible within the Church is because it is first and foremost about asking questions. Jesus asked over 150 questions in the New Testament, and they were all brilliant. We will look at some of those to try to illustrate this point. Let's start with Luke 20:20. "*Keeping a close watch on Jesus, they sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor. So the spies questioned him: 'Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.'*"

How do you like that as an introduction? If you read the version in Matthew, it gives you more detail. It says they brought the Herodians, the government officials, with them, and they give the same speech. "*Teacher, you teach the way of truth.*" You show no partiality, you aren't swayed or scared by people is what is implied in all of that, and that comes out more explicitly in Matthew. You do not compromise for anyone. We know that you are a teacher of integrity. You tell it out as it is. So tell us, teacher, should we pay our taxes or not?

Now let me ask you a question as Christians. Should you or should you not pay your taxes?

That was 3 "Yes"es and the rest of you were hoping to have a very good biblical reason as to why you shouldn't pay your taxes. How do you like this question? We'd just agreed, I think. If someone came to you and said, "*Should you pay taxes or not?*" We would say yes. So why doesn't Jesus just say yes?

You know, when I first became a Christian, I read through all the gospels. In the first few days I was a Christian I just read through the whole New Testament. When I got to the end, I thought, Jesus is a bit like a politician. Someone comes, they ask him a question, and then he answers a completely different question. It's not fair! Now, either that assessment is right and Jesus wasn't very bright, or actually, something else is going on. I'm going for option number 2 at the minute, let me try to justify.

This question is a cultural trap. We're told they came to trap him in his words. The text is explicit so we know it's a trap question. It's a trick and they want to hand him over to the authorities. So they come and they ask him this question and they say, "*Should we pay our taxes to Caesar or not?*" What is the cultural trap? You see, the first thing asking questions does is that it exposes these cultural traps. Let me illustrate it. Why is this a trap? Well, the Jews who were asking the question know that they are God's chosen people. God's chosen people is being oppressed by a Roman army. The Roman army is financed through the paying of taxes. If you pay your taxes, you are financing the oppression of God's people. You are compromising your holiness. But if you don't pay your taxes, and you refuse to pay your taxes, you will be killed. So they come to Jesus and they say, "*Teacher, you're a man of God. You show no partiality, you aren't scared or swayed by people. You tell the truth as it is. Should we pay our taxes?*" Now can you see the trap? They're thinking if Jesus says, "Yes, pay your taxes," they'll say, "*Ha! You too then are prepared to morally compromise in order to save your own skin.*" But if he says, "*No, don't pay your taxes,*" then he will be arrested, and if he refuses to pay, he will be executed. So it's a win-win situation, right? It's a cultural trap. But how does Jesus respond? Don't look at the text, do you remember? I'm trying to make you use your brains. How does he respond?

He asks a question. And what's the question?

"Bring me a denarius. Whose head this? Whose inscription?"

"Caesar's," they reply.

"Then render unto Caesar's that which is Caesar's, and unto God that which is God's."

Do you see how he has answered the question? You give to Caesar that which is Caesar's. Pay your taxes. But, you give to God that which is God's. You pay your taxes, but paying your taxes is not a compromise of holiness. And what is holiness? Jesus has just defined it for us. It's giving to God that which is God's.

Do you see why Jesus can't just say yes? To say yes is *not* to communicate. He has to get them to open up within their cultural assumptions. Let me throw one back to you. Yes or no – is abortion wrong? Imagine that you are in a café. You are with non-Christian friends. If you don't have any non-Christian friends, just imagine what it would be like if you did have friends. You're just having coffee, and then someone turns to you and says:

"You're a Christian, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Is abortion wrong?"

Now, what do you want to say? "Yes." If you say yes, what will that non-Christian probably deduce about you, or what would they think about you?

That you hate women. What else? That you're narrow-minded. If you say, *"Actually, it's God. God says no."* What would they think about God?

In the world's eyes, what is the issue of abortion about? *Choice*. It is a right to choose. What do you call people who eliminate other people's rights to choose? – Dictators. Terrorists. Murderers. Intolerant. Oppressors.

Would you be happy with using most of those words about God? When was the last time you sang a chorus that went, *"O most wonderful dictator, we marvel at your totalitarian tyranny, and we prostrate ourselves before your oppression"?*

You see, the thing with cultural assumption is that it asks the wrong question. Cultural assumptions

work like this: On the face of it, there is one question. *"Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"* But underneath it, there is an *assumed* question, which is, is it right to morally compromise in order to save your own skin? Here, is abortion right or wrong? The cultural assumption underneath it is, do you think it's okay to eliminate other people's choices by force if necessary? Now let me ask you another question. As Christians, what would we say the real question is in abortion? What's the real issue? The real issue is, *is this a human life?*

Supposing you were to go into the streets in a city where you live, and you were to stop people at random and say, *"I am just doing a one-question survey, could you please answer just one question for me – when is it right to kill an innocent person?"* What would most people say? *"Never."* So now let's go back to that question. If what is in the womb is a human life, what gives anyone the right to end it? But if what is in the womb is not a human life, then what's wrong with getting rid of it? There's no life to protect, is there?

Giving the right answer to the wrong question is always wrong. Cultural assumptions turn questions into things which actually they are not, which makes it a wrong question. Are you grasping this? It's very important. Jesus is not a politician. He is not playing games with people. He's not playing word games with people. With cultural assumptions, you have to *define* the issue. And what he's doing is he's saying *"No, wait a minute. The way you are defining this is wrong. We need to redefine the issue first, then I can answer."* Let's supposing you could get a non-Christian friend to understand. You ask your friend, *"Look, supposing I believe that life starts at conception and I thought abortion was OK, what would that make me?"* Inconsistent? Or worse – a murderer. Now you may not change them. They may not leave there saying, *"Yeah, okay, I now agree with your position on abortion."* But what have you done? But you've communicated. What you're telling them now is if you can demonstrate to me that this is not a human life, then I have no problem. This is about human life.

So, firstly, asking questions forces people to open up within their cultural assumptions. Secondly, let's take a lighter one. Look at the next passage starting in verse 27. *"Some of the Sadducees,*

who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question." Let me summarize it, it's a long passage. They say, "Look, there was this guy, he got married, but unfortunately, he died. So according to our custom, his brother married the same woman. But this man also died. So according to our custom, his brother married this woman. He also died. And then the fourth brother married the same woman, he also died." You would think at one point one of these brothers would realize that this is not a wife, this is a serial poisoner. Nobody twigs to this fact. All seven brothers marry the same woman, and they are all dead. "So Jesus," they say, "tell us, on the day of resurrection, whose wife will she be?"

Now this is fascinating. I used to teach philosophy at the University of Sheffield. I've always maintained that teaching Philosophy is the secular equivalent of speaking in tongues, the key difference being that when you teach philosophy, even angels cannot understand what you are saying. Within philosophy, when you do logic, we have something called the *faulty dilemma*. Let me illustrate for you. I actually did this and this will tell you what a difficult child I was. When I was eight, I was in my primary school in the Middle East, where I spent most of my life. I was playing one day in the primary school and a question suddenly dawned on me, and I spent the next two days finding people, getting them on their own, or getting them on their own with a couple of friends around them and say, "Can I ask you a yes or no question?" And they would say, "OK." And I would then say, "Does your mother know you are stupid?" Now, you see the problem – if they say yes, they are stupid and their mother knows. If they say no, they are *still* stupid, but their mother doesn't know. And if they say 'I don't know', they are saying I am so stupid I don't even understand the question.

What you do in a faulty dilemma is you artificially limit the options. You phrase the question in a certain way so that it doesn't matter which option you choose, it's always wrong. There's only one way out of this. You introduce another option, which is precisely what Jesus does here. He doesn't ask a question but he just makes the point. "You understand neither the Scripture nor the power of God. On the day of resurrection, people are neither given nor taken in marriage, they'll be like the angels." If you're in a

conversational context, and someone puts something to you in a way that no matter which option you choose, you're going to look stupid, most likely, it is a faulty dilemma or a cultural assumption.

Let's go back to questions. Asking questions makes people think. Let's stay in Luke 20. This is only one day in the life of Jesus Christ, by the way, I don't know if you've noticed that. When you think you might have a rough time with people asking you difficult questions, well this is just one day in the life of Christ.

Then Jesus said to them, "How is it that they say the Christ is the Son of David?" That's an interesting question, isn't it? What do you think is also one of the motives for asking the question about paying taxes to Caesar? If the Christ is the Christ, what would he not do? He will not morally compromise. And they go on and on. So a lot of the times, they're asking him questions. "By whose authority are you doing this?" We're going to come back to that question in a minute. "David himself declares in the Book of Psalms: The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool under your feet." David calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?";

What is the force of that question, what is Jesus making them do? He's making them *think*. You believe in the Messiah, you believe he will be descended from the line of David. *Your understanding in this is faulty, because he cannot just be one of David's descendants. If that is true, how can David say, "The Lord said to my lord, sit at my right hand"? Why does he call him lord? Do you remember one of the complaints they bring against Jesus in John [chapter 8]? What's wrong with that complaint they had? To do with his heritage. He claims that God is his father. And they also then bring, "But we know that the Messiah will be from Bethlehem, there is no prophet that comes from Nazareth, and isn't it the case that we will not know where the Christ comes from? But we know where this man comes from."*

Let's take the Gospel of John. Note how many times Jesus ends up in conversation with people, and how many times he asks questions. A lot of the time it's actually to make people think. That's the third thing that asking a question does – it

makes someone think. Thinking is not the enemy of the Christian faith. The great thing is when you make someone else think, what do they often conclude? If you're teaching someone, what's the advantage of asking questions? They have to participate, and when they come to the answer, what do they then do? What's the benefit? They own it, because you have now taken them through a process by which you've made them come to the conclusion on their own. Thinking is not the enemy of the Christian faith.

Now let me just make an aside. Are you a person of faith? Some of you are looking so disorientated at this point, you're not even sure. Let me ask you another question. If you stand in front of your non-Christian friends, and you say, "*I am a person of faith.*" What are you saying? What would that person assume about your belief? You made a leap. A leap into the what? The irrational and into the dark. Since when in the gospel is conversion described as a leap into the dark? Is that what it says in John? "*Behold a great darkness came into the world...*"? Have you ever heard someone share their testimony: "*I used to be able to see, I was in the light, but thankfully God switched out all the lights, and I was plunged into the darkness, making faith possible*". In the world's eyes, to say "I have faith" means: I believe something but I'm not sure if it's true or real, but I need it to be and I want it to be, so I have faith. You make that big leap into the dark. Strong faith, therefore, would be when you suspect what you believe isn't true, and you are still able to believe it. That's *strong* faith. The strongest possible kind of faith you could have would be when you *know* it's not true and you're *still* able to believe it. I mean, how much faith do you need then?

Has anyone ever said to you, "*I wish I could believe what you believe, but I can't.*" Have you ever stopped to say, "*What do you mean by that?*" I think what most people mean is this. They're saying, "*Michael, I wish I could believe what you believe, but I can't. Michael, when I look at your life, there does seem to be something different, and it's true that there seems to be a joy and a peace and a completeness which, actually, I find attractive, and a happiness that I want... and I am so desperate to be happy, I wish that I could have what you have. But I can't believe what you believe, because it isn't real.*" What do you call people who believe in things that are not there?

Mad people. So what they are saying is, "*Michael, what you believe is not true, and it's not real. You are actually insane. But the main thing is that you are happy and insane. And I am happy that you are happy. I am so desperate to be happy myself, I, too, would become insane if I could, but I just can't do it, I can't embrace insanity to get there.*"

Now, faith is a gift, that's what Scripture teaches, but it is not the gift of stupidity. It is not the gift that allows you to believe in things that are not there, such that if you're given an unusual gift of faith, you could even believe in fairies! That's not what the Bible means by faith. If you pick up an English concordance of the Old Testament, and you look up the noun 'faith', I think in the NIV it will come up about 10 or 12 times. In the good old King James, it will come up twice. I think in the AV it comes up four times. But if you pick up a Hebrew dictionary and look up the noun 'faith', you know what you will find? Nothing. Because there is no noun 'faith' in the language. You can't have a faith, *the* faith – there is no noun. Even in Habakkuk 2:4, in the Hebrew, there is no noun there. But they did have a *verb*. The verb was the process of putting your weight and trust into something which you knew was true and real. It was connected to truth and reality. In Greek, you could have two words for faith. 'Pistis' and 'Nomizo' – the second one doesn't occur in the New Testament so you may not know it, but it still occurs in Modern Greek. There are two words. This word, pistis, ultimately comes from the verb "peitho", which means "to be persuaded". 'Pistis', therefore, the noun, carries the same kind of connotation. It means that you are persuaded as to something's truth and reality, therefore you can trust it. 'Nomizo', which was used by the Hellenistic and also classical Greeks, was the verb which they used to describe belief in their own gods because the Greeks had a whole pantheon of them, and it means, "*I believe*" but with no specific basis. This (pistis), however, does not mean that. As a matter of fact, even the word *belief* in Scripture actually comes from the same verb. What's amazing is how has this changed? I would like to do a European study on this, so if anyone here is really interested and you want to do some research on it so I can quote you without attributing it, I would be very grateful. But in the English language, up until what we call the Middle English period, faith was a verb, in distinction to belief, and the verb faith was the process by which you put your trust in something because

you were sure of its reality. Even during the Middle English period, both Chaucer and Shakespeare used the verb faith. But that's not what the word means for most people today, is it?

Thinking is not the enemy of the Christian faith, because the more you are convinced as to God's reality and truth, the more you will believe, the more you will trust, the more you will lean on him. The less convinced you are of his reality and truth, the less what? When things go wrong, and they don't happen as we'd have them and we know incredible suffering ... I had my ... well it's not incredible, immediately before coming in here, I had my wife on the phone and she's told me my eldest daughter has fallen very seriously ill, and so she's trying to look after two children. Now, what does trusting God mean in there? Does it mean that my faith is so great that I know no matter what happens, everything will work out and be just fine? Is that what it means? What does it mean? It means that no matter how things work out, I know I can trust him. The more sure you are as to his reality and truth, the greater your faith. It's the only appropriate response to a God who is real and true, which is why we need to overcome this fear of asking questions, because even within the church we have sometimes passed on the message that you shouldn't ask questions. But that can't be true, can it? You only have to something to fear from the asking of questions if what you believe or what you are saying is either not true or not real, because you might get found out. So that's why Jesus so often challenges people to think. I am in no sense a rationalist in the sense that I think you can just use pure unaided reason to somehow arrive at God. I'm not convinced by that. But this is intimately connected to truth and reality.

So asking questions makes people open up within their cultural assumptions, it helps expose faulty logic and ways of thinking. It helps define what the issues are. It makes people think, which is a good thing.

Asking questions also helps us expose general assumptions. Let's take Luke 18:18: "*Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*" Imagine you leave from here and someone stops you as you walk into your hotel and they look at you, and they say, "*I can see you are a good man. What must I do to inherit eternal life?*"

Without going to what Jesus said, what's the first thing that comes into our head? What would be a typical response? "*You must repent and believe, trust in the Lord Jesus,*" or, "*Turn or burn*" if you use 18th century formulation. (Spurgeon had a sermon with that title, and it was great. It was a message he preached from Psalms, "*The Lord has whetted his sword against the ungodly*"). So why doesn't Jesus say any of those things? "*Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*" "*Trust in me. You must repent of your sins and put your faith in God.*" Why doesn't he say that? Was it that Jesus didn't really understand the gospel, which is why Paul came and wrote all these complicated epistles? To somehow bring out the depth because Jesus missed it? You can believe that if you want to but that's blasphemy. You stop the average person on the street in the city in which you live, and you say to them, "*If there is a heaven, how would you get there?*" What would most people say? "*Be good.*" Has anyone ever said to you, "*Are you saying that my grandmother who was a good person, is going to hell? How can you condemn all of these good people?*" That seems unfair. Wouldn't you say it would be unfair for good people to go to hell? I think it is. What does Jesus do? "*Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*" Answer: "*Why do you call me good?*" Now Mark and Luke both give this rendition; Matthew has the definite article in there; and I'm convinced that Mark and Luke are right on this because the question is asked of Jesus, even though a very notable biblical expositor in our midst would actually take a different opinion. But that's OK. "*Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*"

"*Why do you call me good?*"

He's got the guy thinking; he's got the guy opening up within his general assumptions. Then he says what? "*No one is good but God alone.*" If you have to be good to go to heaven, and God alone is good, who is going? No one, apart from God himself. In other words, your application to join the Trinity has been refused. You do not meet minimum entry requirements. You don't get in. Run it backwards. *If* Jesus is good, and *if* God alone is good, who is Jesus? God. Who alone can answer this question with authority? God. Questions are very powerful things aren't they?

"*Some of this is almost like counseling, where you*

have to find out where the person is coming from. Do you sometimes agonize and fear that you will miss the question?"

Yeah, and if you get the question wrong... Let's suppose someone asks you something, how can you know where someone's coming from? You ask a question to find out where they're coming from, but then you can still make mistakes. If you don't get where they're coming from, and then you give an answer, what will happen? What will they do with what you just said? They'll disagree. If you're ever in a conversation that's going round and round and round in circles, and you just think, we're going nowhere, one of the possibilities might be *you haven't nailed it*. You think they're asking one question, they're actually asking another. We're dealing with people, not with machines, which is why in Luke 10, when Jesus is asked, "*Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*" he answers differently. Has he changed his mind between Luke 10 and Luke 18? Maybe he's had the benefit of a couple of theology lessons, and he's just polishing it up so he's got a more detailed answer? Or was it that he's dealing with a different person, with a different background, a different motive, asking the question for a different reason, and therefore he has to respond in a different way? The words were identical: "*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*" It's identical word for word, but they're actually different questions. So, in answer to your question "is it like counseling?" the answer is "*Almost*", to the extent whereby all the questions of Jesus is asked, what have they made the questioner do? To think and to open up within themselves, and also to understand the real nature of what they're bringing to him. In counseling, part of the process is you must get a person to understand what the problem is.

Let's take another example. A guy comes to Jesus and says, "*Teacher, tell my brother to divide my inheritance with me.*" [Luke 12:13] On the face of it, what is that question about? Fairness. In terms of economic justice. This is an older brother, he's inherited everything, younger brother gets nothing. I'd just like to say, as an older brother, I can see no problem with this system whatsoever, and I'm entirely in support of it. How does Jesus respond? The first thing he does is ask a question. "*Man...*" which actually is a very short

form of address, it's not polite, it's not rude but it's very sharp. "... *who made me an arbitrator or a judge between the two of you?*" The first thing he does is to drive the guy back to the point of authority. Who has given me this authority? Is it *you*, in which case, will you listen to what I have to say? Is it *God*, in which case, you still have to listen to what I have to say? Who has given me this role? But then what does Jesus do? "*Take heed and beware of covetousness,*" which is a compound Greek word, and it contains within it the idea of insatiable desires, desires that are not easily satisfied – beware of that. And then he tells a parable about the barns. The guy says he planted his seed and his ground brought forth abundantly, and that word 'abundance' is 'euphor sen' coming from the Greek word 'euphos' – *euphoreo* is to bring forth. What does 'eu' do to the word? It strengthens it and expands it, makes it big. And so this guy not only brings out a crop that comes forth big, it comes through *really* big. As a result of the *euphos*, his abundance of things, he says, "*I will build bigger barns, and I'll say to my soul, you have plenty of things stored up for yourself, eat, drink, and be merry.*" Anyone know what the word merry is, just out of interest? It's a really weird word *euphraino*. 'phren' is the diaphragm. How do you *euphraino*? How do you make your diaphragm expand to make it bigger? [Breathes deeply] You see the chain of logic? From the *euphos*, from the abundance of things comes the *euphraino*. It doesn't just mean frivolous enjoyment, this guy is thinking, this will allow me to inhale deeply and let out a long sigh of relief, of contentment and satisfaction knowing now that all things are well. It's the same use when the father receives his lost son back and he says, "*We have to celebrate,*" literally, we have to have big diaphragms as a result of this. "*How can you be so angry about what has happened? This is a big diaphragm moment.*" You see the train of logic? From the abundance of things comes the *euphraino*. Then God says, "*You fool!*" The word 'fool' is the opposite of *euphraino*: *a-phron*. God says, "*fool!*" – *aphron!* You who think from the *euphos*, the abundance of things, comes the *euphraino* satisfaction in life, you are *aphron!* You have no diaphragm at all! The mental picture is of someone who is completely empty and shriveled up inside. Then Jesus takes him to a point of judgment. "*When you die, whose will all these things be? So will it be anyone who is rich himself, but is not rich towards God.*"

Look at the question. What is Jesus doing there? What is the assumption behind the question? The question seems to be about economic justice, but what does Jesus do? Where does Jesus take him? He takes him to the *motive* behind the question. You believe that if you get half you will be *euphraino*. There was a man who had more than he ever anticipated, so much more he was amazed, and he said, "*This is it! I will be euphraino*" And then in the Greek ... It's the complete opposite. You're going to get the complete opposite of what you thought you were going to get.

The next thing asking questions does is it exposes people's motives. People have reasons for asking their questions. People even have reasons for believing the things they believe. There's a well-known English author called Terry Pratchett who writes these novels about a make-believe world. They're quite interesting. He was interviewed and the interviewer says to him: "*Terry Pratchett, you have a lot of gods in your novels (he has a whole pantheon of gods). Are you a religious person?*" And he says, "*No. I am an atheist who is angry at God for not not existing.*" I am an atheist. And I am angry. With God. For *not* not existing. In other words, I want him *not* to exist, but I'm angry with him because he *does* exist. Not many people are that honest. Asking questions exposes those motives. This is illustrated from Luke 20, which we alluded to earlier. The religious VIPs, the Pharisees and Sadducees, both come to Jesus and they say, "*Teacher, by whose authority are you doing these things? Tell us.*" I will give you no prizes for telling me how Jesus responded: He responded by asking a question. The only reason I'm spending so much time here is to illustrate the fact that I'm not talking about anything which is unusual or bizarre here, we can go all through the gospel and find this. Jesus then says, "*I will answer your question, if you will answer mine.*" What was his question? "*By whose authority did John the Baptist exercise his ministry?*" And they get into a little huddle, the holy huddle, and they say, "*What shall we say? If we say that John the Baptist's authority came from men, the people will reject us because they all believe he came from God. But if we say John the Baptist's authority came from God, the people who are standing around us will say, 'Why didn't you believe him?'*" So they turned

round and they say, "*We don't know.*" Is that true? Is it true that they think they don't know? No! Now they are wrong, but they think they *do* know, but they won't say. Do you remember what Jesus says next? "*Neither will I answer you.*" Not "*I don't know,*" but "*I will not.*" If you will not be honest, I cannot, I *will not* give an answer. Exposing someone's motive as to why they are asking a question is very helpful to the person you're talking to, and how they respond is instructive.

Let me just share a confession here. I often get this wrong. I'll never forget what happened several years ago while I was on a university event. It has been my practice to, instead of speaking, go into a student bar if we're on a university campus. We'll get agreement from the place that they turn down the music, and I'll stand up and say, "*I'm a Christian. I'm just visiting here for a while, and any question you'd like to ask me about anything whatsoever you are now free to ask.*" You should see some of the questions we get, it's electric. One day, I was doing one of these things, and it was big, we had about 250 people. Someone stood up and they said, "*Okay, here's my question, who created God?*" And I thought, "*This guy ... is a moron.*" You know the Greek word, 'moron'? The Greek word moron is a word that is translated in English as 'moron', it means to be moronic, to be stupid. So I said, "*I don't understand your question.*" And he looked puzzled, he said, "*Well, my question is who-created-God?*" And I said, "*I still can't understand the question.*" At this point, he began to sweat, and he said, "*Why can't you understand the question?*" I said, "*Here's my problem. You're saying who created God, who by definition is eternal. He has always existed. There was never a time when he didn't exist. But when you say 'who created...' you're assuming there was a time he didn't exist, and had to be brought into existence. So what you're asking me is 'when did the being who always existed, there was never a time when he didn't exist, when didn't he exist?' The question makes no sense.*" At the end of the meeting, he came down to the front and he gave his life to Christ. He'd actually heard the gospel and was persuaded about almost everything, he was just wrestling with this really stupid question and it just needed to be taken away, and that was it. Another time, I was doing a big thing at Oxford University, one or two years ago. I finished the talk, and someone asked a question, and the

question was so leading, I thought, "*This is a Christian. This Christian has asked a really lame question.*" I don't know if you've been at one of those events where they say, "*Any questions?*" You normally have to give it at least 10 seconds of silence, but what sometimes happens is after two seconds, the Christians get really nervous. "*I better ask something, otherwise everyone will be silent.*" They stand up and ask a really lame question, normally. I'm sure if you do that, that's not true. But it seemed to be so obvious and silly I just dealt with it very briefly and brushed it aside, and then turned my back a bit, and then said, "*Now, any questions from this side of the room?*" Afterwards, the guy came up to me and he wasn't a Christian at all. It was just the fact that he was so close... This is my greatest problem, lack of discernment. If I could look into someone's life and tell exactly where they are, I'd be fine. So you have to be careful with this motive thing.

Let's consider a slightly modified version of the Engel scale. Are you familiar with the Engel Scale? -10 is you've got someone who hates God, or is completely violent and antithetical to the gospel. This is not quite how Engel used it. Then +10 is a saint, someone who is perfect in all of their ways, like Greg Pritchard, who convened this event. What we say in evangelism is that the goal is to move people along – to there [0, conversion], and then you help them move along here [towards +10], that's discipleship. When it comes to exposing motives, the only thing you have to remember is that we're not quite as clever as we think about where we put people on this scale. Let's do a biblical case study together. Saul, in Acts 8, is breathing murderous threats against the church. He went off for a good persecution because he's got most of them in Jerusalem and he's running out, so he's going somewhere where there are a few more. So he can have a bit of fun. Where would you put him on this scale? -10. He is destroying and persecuting the church. If we had -11 maybe we'd create an extra category for him because this is unusually violent behavior. What does the voice say to him? "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*" That's what it says in Acts 9. Paul tells this story twice. It happens in Acts 9, he repeats it twice in Acts. Are we given any extra information in here? The voice actually says more than "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*" The voice says to him, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?* It is hard for you to kick against

the goads." To be goaded into something means you're being drawn into it. God himself comes to Saul and says, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.*" You're being drawn into believing, aren't you, Saul? You've been goaded in, and it's hard for you to kick against that. So by God's authority, where was Saul? He's just here (near conversion). God himself says, "*Saul this is getting very hard for you, isn't it? This is becoming truer and truer. You're being drawn more and more strongly into the reality of this gospel, and it's getting hard, isn't it, Saul, for you to fight against this?*" That's why he was so irrational.

I'm not saying we should just do away with this kind of scale idea, it can be helpful. I'm just saying we're not as clever as we often think. Have you ever had the experience where you've invited two people to an evangelistic meeting, one is really close, and you think is just about to fall off the tree. And then someone else agrees to come, and they're a million miles away and you're scared they're going to be driven away by the speaker? You've been in that situation. What normally happens? Isn't it the case that the one who you thought was so close and this meeting seemed to be just for them, they go away and they didn't like it at all? Meanwhile, the one who seemed to be a million miles away, who you thought would have no interest in this, leaves going, "*Wow, that was incredible.*" A number of times I've had that experience, and that just made me believe the one called the doctrine of human stupidity. You need that doctrine firmly somewhere in your overall lexicon of your theological understanding and human limitations. We're not as clever as we think.

[Inaudible question] We need to recover the courage to start asking people in our conversations about how they respond to the claims of Christ. I ask lots of people, "*Would you like to become a Christian?*" Sometimes they say yes, and sometimes no. I sometimes say to them, "*If I were to ask you to become a Christian right now, what would be holding you back? Is it something you don't know, or something you're not prepared to admit to?*" That often brings a bit of clarity. I spoke at an evangelistic meeting recently, and I had someone exactly in that situation. When I asked him, he just broke down, and said, "*No, it's ... I think it is true.*" He just needed

someone just to ask. Now, I'm not saying that everyone is an evangelist but I honestly believe that it shouldn't be abnormal during a lifetime of a Christian, assuming you're going to be around for several decades, to see one or two people during that time becoming a Christian, even if you say you have no evangelistic gifting whatsoever. Sometimes, it's just the hook that's needed, and we get them along.

But let's go back. What is giving an apologetic? If an apologetic is "*giving a reason for the hope that we have*" it must be the case that any apologetic must flow to or flow from the *cross*. If you give an answer for the reason for the hope that you have, and the reason you have hope is tied up with Jesus – his life, his death, his resurrection, if you have given an apologetic, what have you done? Which means any apologetic that *doesn't* take us to the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the gospel, basically, is not an apologetic in this sense. It may be useful – they thought there was no such thing as truth and no such thing as God and you talk to them, and now they think maybe there is such a thing as truth, and then you can take them on from there. I'm not saying we don't need to engage in that or that it's not useful, it is. But we can't leave from there saying I've given an apologetic. We're engaged in a process but the goal of the apologetic must be to what? You can't separate apologetics from evangelism. It's very dangerous. Because the answer for the reason for the hope that we have *must* be Christ. Again, I know that within the history of theology and theological disciplines, these things have been separated out into very discrete areas, but for me to be an evangelical means that you can take me to any teaching in the Bible and challenge anything I say, and I'm prepared to change. But it also means that when we start defining terms and using them in ways which actually are not consistent with the Bible, then we have to be just a little bit careful. It is useful, especially if you're teaching at the seminary level, to sometimes separate some of these things out, but then we have to stick them back together again.

To summarize, we talked about giving an answer to everyone who asks us for the reason for the hope that we have. We said it was a command addressed to the church, we said it was in the context of how we live, and in the context of

spiritual battle – set apart Christ as Lord in your heart – that must come before you give an apologetic. Why? Because it's a spiritual battle, if the lordship of Christ isn't settled, you stop before you even start. But then we just said that giving an apologetic is more than just giving answers to other people's questions. And that's involved, Jesus didn't only ask questions, he also gave answers, we haven't even got that far yet. But we started talking about the questions we ourselves need to start asking.

I was re-reading through some of [Francis] Schaeffer's books last year. One thing that struck me, and I can't remember where it was but it's in the first few pages of one of his books, was when he said, "*The greatest problem I have today, as I look at us as a Christian church, is that we don't even know what the questions are, let alone what the answers are.*" I thought, "*This is exactly it.*" The reason why this can live within the church is that when you look at the life of Christ and as you see it worked out through the apostles, a lot of it was true about asking questions. Anyone can ask questions. My four-year-old daughter can ask questions. "*Why? Why? Why?*" Asking questions helps the person who is asking the question. It teaches them what they're assuming culturally, what they're just assuming generally, helps expose their motives to them, helps clarify what the issues are. It does all of these things, and it also helps you know where they're coming from, so that as you listen to them, you can then speak to them more effectively. But the goal isn't simply to have nice conversations with people. The goal must be the cross. That's what I always have before me in any situation. I think we've lost our public voice on this, we're scared of asking. Sometimes we just need to, and if they say no, we can say, "*What would you say you're struggling with?*" And when someone says, I'm struggling with this, I'll sometimes say to them, "*If I were to answer that question to your satisfaction, would you give your life to Christ?*" Very often, 9 times out of ten, they'll say no. And then I'll say, "*Well, what is your issue?*" And then you get it. "*My father died when I was a young boy.*" Or, I've heard this as well, "*I'll have to stop sleeping with my boyfriend.*" Or girlfriend. And then all of a sudden, an issue now comes out which actually *is*. As long as you do not identify that issue, the more you are just talking around, because the apologetic addresses the heart, the spirit, as well

as the mind. It's a spiritual battle, and so that's what I want to try and leave you with in this limited session.

Questions

"You said that this was for the church. Tell me concretely, how would you train the church in conversational apologetics?"

A couple of things. Sometimes now when I preach, I'll convince the church to allow me to say, at the end of the sermon instead of going into the next song, *"Michael will now answer any question based on anything which he has said."* Church leaders are nervous about this, but the congregation normally loves it. It's great discipline for you too because it'll show you if you've miscommunicated somewhere. I think we just need to encourage it within the church. It's not always appropriate, I'm not saying we have to do it all the time, but when it is appropriate. Secondly, I would do something similar to what we do when we do our full training. The first exercise we do is to say to people, *"What are the questions you would least like to be asked? Imagine we're the non-Christian, what is the one question you would not want to be asked? What is the one question that will get you praying for Jesus Christ to come back immediately just to get you out?"* Then we take those questions and we start speaking to those.... I often do this now, I just say, *"If you could ask one question and have it answered to your satisfaction, what would it be?"* We also need to listen to what are the questions that the world is actually asking. Not that our agenda or the gospel is being driven by the world, but if they're asking that question, and then I somehow build a bridge from there to the gospel, and then back again to them, that's... I think we just need to help the church through that, and just encourage them and say that you can ask your questions. I can't answer every question, but I'll tell you what I'll do at the end of this meeting, I have the cell phone number for a guy called Ravi Zacharias, ring him anytime day or night and he'll be glad to speak to you.

"Is there any book or anything that talk about examples."

This is something that's really hard to do. There are lots of books. There's a book available through our ministry called *"What's true for you is true for*

you, what's true for me is true for me" by a guy called Paul Copan, who's actually no longer with us, but I think we still have copies of his book. Josh McDowell also has many books that have lots of typical questions which he answers. You can get a tape from our ministry called *"The Top Five Questions University Students Ask"*. It's a set of I think it's three audio tapes, and what they did is Ravi and William Lane Craig went to one American university, and the university radio station ran a poll for basically atheists and agnostics. People phoned in with their questions and they had a student-wide voting and they picked out the top five most popular questions, and then put them on the spot, and then you just get them answered, it's quite interesting. I've promised IVP I'd write them a series of four books with this, but I wouldn't hold your breath. Probably sometime in 2010 I'll actually stop doing so much travel and start writing.

"Are there any groups working on this on the internet?"

There are, there are many available, let me just give you a couple. If you go to our website, www.rzim.org, there is a links page that links you to various sites, including a philosopher's one, so if you have a philosophical question or questions about various issues, or specific things related to the bible and those tricky things, read that. Another book, which I'd strongly recommend, is by a guy called [Norman] Geisler. He has two books. One's called, *"When Critics Ask"*, and there's another one called, *"When Skeptics Ask"*. But this one is very useful. *"When Critics Ask"* takes every alleged contradiction in the Scripture, Old Testament and New Testament, and then gives you an exposition on it. It's not the kind of book you sit down and read unless you like reading dictionaries. But it's a great reference book. Another site because there are so many questions about creation is this website called AnswersinGenesis.org. They've got millions of stuff. So there is some stuff on the Internet but if you go into the RZIM links page and then you go from there to other links, you can find almost anything on the internet. And even on our website you can actually download short talks on different things.

© 2010 Michael Ramsden (transcript)

© 2004 European Leadership Forum. Used by

the kind permission of
www.euroleadership.org (audio)

Find out more about The Zacharias Trust