M19A1 Resisting Debate

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Let’s start with the conclusion of chapter 3. Debate is most effective one on one. At best, debate in small groups, and small might be plus or minus five. Everyone in this small group should be interested in the topic. You can’t convince a disinterested person. A disinterested person may simply push your buttons to manufacture personal intertainment. Further, debates bring out the worst in people who hate the truth.

Chapter 1 Analyzing Debates

Every debate has a general purpose and a specific purpose. The general purpose of every debate is to discover truth. The specific purpose is to establish that one’s viewpoint is true. “Winning or losing is not the concern of sincere debaters.” -lecturer Biased debaters may forget that finding truth is the goal of fair debate.

We may need to periodically restate the purpose of our debate. And if things don’t go well, we can remember Jesus’ instruction to his disciples: Matthew 10:14 “And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.” Another day they may be more receptive to Christian truth.

We find different types of debaters. They may be sincere, seeking only truth. This can lead to a beneficial discussion. Sincerity, however, doesn’t necessarily equate to knowledgable. If superficial they may try to cover up their weakness with fancy talk. When the debater is sincere but strays to fanciful talk to cover up, we should quickly wrap up the discussion.

Offen debaters are interested or insincere. Some people like to argue for the fun of arguing. When we discover the debate is going nowhere, not seeking truth, we can try to wrap it up quickly.

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.” -lecturer We certainly see this Wild West form of debate in the U.S.A. during political debates.

Common tactics wrongly used in today’s Wild West style of undisciplined debates:

1-RAPID-FIRE (MACHINE GUN) APPROACH

Your opponent starts by shouting a rapid list of questions. As you begin to respond he overpowers you with yet another list of questions. Then seek not answers but intend to overwhelm the apologist. Even experienced apologists can’t answer 5 questions in the space of five seconds. You must stand your ground, firmly demand that the next series of questions be asked only after you’ve given answers to the current list of questions. You must insist on time to answer all questions.

2-BANYAN TREE (JUMPING SQUIRREL) APPROACH

Your opponent asks one question at a time, allows you to start your answer but fires the next question before you can complete your answer. These questions may be heavily coated with your opponent’s philosophy, so you may struggle to even comprehend his question. Insist your opponent allow time to sufficiently respond. Of course, we must allow for our opponent to understand our questions as well.

3-BLOCKING (GOALKEEPER) APPROACH

An insincere debater may simply want to block your progress. They insistently raise premature objections. Debaters do try to block their opponents, bur sincere debaters at the same time advance their own points. However, a debater who continually blocks your points without advancing his cause demonstrates that he isn’t interested in debating. So we might progress by asking him leading questions to reopen the dialogue. Or simply expose the insincerity of the debater by asking leading questions. You can then go on to win the debate.

4-SEMANTIC ACROBATICS (JUGGLING) APPROACH

Some debaters are masters of vocabulary. They use words like our own but attach different meanings or connotations to them. The lecturer mentions Neo Orthodox theologians, the Post Modernist thinkers, and the Emotionalists and Mystics of our generation. Unfortunately he fails to give examples of how the word meanings differ. He says to define Jesus as the historical Jesus of Nazareth and ask if he is using the word with that meaning in mind. But I still don’t know what the neo Orthodox has in mind.

I looked up neo Orthodox at britianica.com, got questions.com, and Wikipedia. Got questions was respectful toward the neo Orthodox but clearly not written by them. I wasn’t as sure of the authorship of the other two. It is described as closer to reformation theology than Orthodox belief and as a response more conservative than liberal Christianity. I think the differentiation is a difference in discussing the Word of God,

I found personally that I approved both the Orthodox and neo Orthodox explanation. So I guess I don’t see much difference, a fine line that the gotquestions tried to clarify into the neo Orthodox belief that understanding comes from an experience. I see a problem with this only if a person rejects the plain word of God. I don’t think we are fair to ourselves or to others unless we recognize that our understanding of a truth outside of the logic of pure science and mathematics is influenced subconsciously by our personal experiences.

If we grew up abused by the men in our lives, we can choose to know that God the Father loves us but unless we develop relationships with men who show love to others, if not ourself, we will fall short of understanding our Heavenly Father.

I’m sympathetic with both Orthodox and neo Orthodox on this matter. Both make sense to me. Please don’t expect me to say whether or not Seventh-day Adventists are in one camp or the other on this issue. I’m not sure I know.

I have not further studied neo Orthodoxy.

5-SLIPPERY-STAND (SLIPPERY FROG) APPROACH

I think that the lecturer may do a disservice when he insists that his opponent precisely state his position. He claims that without this preciseness the opponent is slippery. I’d say that it’s legitimate to hold forth that I and others don’t hold a black and white line. That there may be an element of legitimacy in more than one viewpoint.

Jesus made the emphatic point that pharisaical rules against healing on the Sabbath was more rigid than God says. Jesus tells one man to take up his mat and walk. Healing was defined by the church as a prohibited Sabbath work. Carrying a bed was prohibited Sabbath work. Yet the healed man couldn’t just leave his mat because it might be stolen. If your bed is at home it’s not a normally needed thing to carry it on the Sabbath. It would then be prohibited work on the Sabbath.

Jesus defended his disciples action of rubbing grain legally gleaned in the field on the Sabbath. The Pharisees didn’t report stealing. They reported threshing of grain on the Sabbath as a violation of their church made law. Jesus defended it as simply eating on the Sabbath.

I may have completely missed the intention of slippery stand debating. I think we sometimes debate *thinking that we know our opponent’s position.* When what we may want to do is box him into a corner.

6-PHILOSOPHICAL EDIFICE (SMOKESCREEN) APPROACH

This smokescreen approach tries to obscure the issues, possibly because your opponent doesn’t know his position or possibly because he wants to avoid your line of reasoning.

The lecturer gives the example of the neo Orthodox whom he says rejects all Orthodox theology. The lecturer says to cut across the smokescreen using Leading Questions to fight this kind of deception.

7-SPECULATIVE (FOG) APPROACH

Some debaters present speculation in the place of premesis and try to build a sense of reasoning from speculation alone. The apologist must expose this false reasoning.

8-PRESUPPOSITIONAL (SWINGING BIRD) APPROACH

I suppose I understand this thought. Looking at the example of Muslim and Christian talking I realize immediately that Muslims have some understanding of Christianity that’s clouded by their own experience and probably biases. The Christian understands a little Muslim thought but certainly insufficient to assume he can adequately explain Muslim belief. I find the same experience when talking with a non-Adventist about Adventist beliefs. Non-Adventists confuse us with Jehovah’s Witnesses and with Mormons. Almost no one from another Christian faith gets close to understanding Adventist Christianity. It is difficult to explain our beliefs to someone who thinks he already knows Adventism but is not Adventist. They even often think we don’t believe in Jesus or the Trinity. If they condescendingly nod their head when we tell them otherwise then they aren’t willing to learn.

9-CONFUSION-CREATION (LIZARD'S TAIL) APPROACH

I never knew the lizard distracted his predator by dropping his tail. Some debaters raise many side issues that lead away from the central issue. They distract the audience. It can be difficult to interject leading questions that get us back to the intended topic at hand.

10-MOCKERY/PEJORATIVE TALK (SKUNK) APPROACH

Some debaters drop into character assignation and mockery. The audience may laugh and jeer. Keep calm, stick to facts, and speak to those still listening, drawing the audience to reason.

Always analyse your opponents reasoning and respectfully point out its weaknesses.

Chapter 3 Responding to Debates

Anatomy Of A Twisted Argument

Twisted arguments have only four parts.

**Human limitations**: Most of us know less than we think we know.

**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.” -lecturer

**Propaganda techniques**: Clever debaters appeal to human emotions. But our gut skips the reasoning process.

**Debater’s techniques**: The apologist must study Christian debates, analyze them for these twisted arguments, and familiarize himself with the best responses to them. He must prepare in advance. He can then better diffuse hostile situations that might develop.

How To Counter Twisted Arguments

It is best to discuss person to person. Crowds are susceptible to mob mentality and once that is reached, continued discussion becomes impossible.

The following help to debunk the opponent.

**Focus on the Bible**. “All theories, interpretations, assumptions, and opinion of the experts are to be examined in the light of the Bible, and Bible alone.” -lecturer

**Focus on facts**. In non Bible discussions, focus on facts. Demand facts and use only facts.

**Ask leading questions.** You can state affirmations. But the audience may think of these as your opinions. It’s best to ask leading questions. They force the opponent to make statements and justify those statements. He is forced into making reasonable conclusions and can’t easily cheat. He cannot disown his conclusions.

The right attitude leaves strong impressions.

BE FIRM IN YOUR CONVICTIONS.

BE HUMBLE. Leave a lasting impression. A humble conviction may not seem to win the day, but it is remembered.

I recall a debate between the seminary professors in my college dorm 55 years ago. I agreed with the professors but still respected the calm conviction of the splinter group in the face of angry professors. The group had come on campus uninvited. So they didn’t belong. In time their organization dissolved. A friend at my church today left the SDA church for a couple of decades. He was a theology student and still agrees with the Brinsmead teachings. Their calm conviction was powerful for awhile. I just looked up their prime doctrine and still disagree with it. But if I had been sufficiently disgruntled with my church I could have followed their calm example.

DRAW ABSURD CONCLUSIONS USING THE SAME ARGUMENT.

A Sabbath observer, according to creation week and the fourth commandment might counter the statement that we can worship God any day of the week by asking, If your wedding was scheduled for June 1 at 2 PM, would it make a difference if the groom decided to show up at 5 PM after the football game ended? Would his bride welcome him four hours later? If your employer said your work day began at 8 AM would you likely keep your job if you consistently came in between 10 AM and 11 AM? If not, why should God be overjoyed that you come to worship on Friday or Sunday when he specifically said he would meet for community worship on the seventh day of the week. He meets with us individually in prayer when we choose to pray individually. But in Eden, in the Old Testament, in the New Testament and on the new earth (Isaiah 66) he tells us he will meet with us as a community on the 7th day Sabbath (which is the only day he gave a name to).

Yes, I know you don’t agree on this. But it’s an example of absurd questions I might ask, although I don’t think I’ve been that forceful on the topic in conversation. I normally just explain what I believe and practice without pushing the point that perhaps God is displeased when we ignore the 7th day for another day at our convenience. I prefer to keep personal connections rather than go out of my way to offend.

I apologize in a sense because I may have offended you. I attempt this study to benefit me and my witness. So I think of ways the course might benefit me. The Sabbath and salvational grace along with the expected soon coming of Jesus are my primary convictions. Note that my understanding of grace assumes loyalty to God and some intention to morally obey our creator.

PRESENT A STEP BY STEP EXPOSITION OF TRUTH

Truth must be shared. We can’t just debunk argument from our opponent. Once people recognize error, they need truth to replace what they now recognize as error. Finding truth can be difficult.

How To Present Arguments Concretely

An opponent arguing against truth my well not feel bound to the ethics of debate. Remember to

**Know your positions and details of fact.** For example, 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. Note that it mildly surprises me that the lecturer is friendly, in any way, with this range of creation positions. I also assume you may find yourself debating a Christian who is a proponent of a different kind of creationism from your own.

**KNOW THE PREMISES OF YOUR STAND**: Know your doctrines and the premises you depend on. 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** Some premeses even your opponent may agree with. Others may be so weak you should leave them unsaid.

**PRESENT ONLY STRONGEST ARGUMENTS** “Since under stress a chain breaks at the weakest link, no weak links should be allowed in the debate.” -lecturer

Once your audience is convinced then you may present the auxiliary arguments.

Precautions To Be Observed

Remember

1-Beware Of Causes That Work Against

YOUR AUDIENCE IS OFTEN SYMPATHETIC TO FALSE CONCLUSIONS. Remember to quote scripture. It has at least some aura of authority. Fail to quote scripture leaves you standing on your own authority. And you may well not have collegiate letters following your name, for what that may or may not benefit you.

Be aware that the AUDIENCE IS OFTEN UNABLE TO OR UNWILLING TO STRAIN THEIR BRAINS. Error doesn’t necessarily need to stretch the brain. The apologist, much like the computer specialist must learn to talk at the level of his audience.

AUDIENCE IS OFTEN NOT EQUIPPED FOR COMPREHENDING THE SUBJECT. They may understand at some overall level but the apologist must be able to walk them through the complex steps.

AUDIENCE IS OFTEN INTERESTED MORE IN AMUSEMENT. A touch of humour, or an ability to present the subject suitably for such an audience is very essential.

2-Keep Analyzing The Receptiveness Of The Opponent.

3-Keep Bringing The Audience And The Debaters Back To Point.

4-Stick To The Major Argument. Reserve the minor arguments and related issues for sincere seekers.

5-Handle In Manageable Segments. Be sure the topic you debate can be handled adequately in the time allowed.

6-Learn To Present With Seriousness As Well As With Humor.

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.” -lecturer

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1. How this module helped your studies?

Note: I find questions 1, 2, and 4 to be closely equivalent.

I could ask absurd leading questions. But one on one, they seem to me to more likely come across as disrespectful.

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2. What new lessons you learned?

I find it interesting to see the lecturer saying “one should know whether one stands upon the premises of Bible Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone, and Christ Alone.” I understand the Bible as the only dependable word of authority in attaining salvation. I believe only Jesus' grace provides the possibility of salvation. I believe we cling to His grace by faith alone, we must never look to ourselves or others for eternal salvation. Interestingly, I also believe many will be saved who are strangers to Jesus as a person and may have no access to the Bible. Yet I believe God’s grace seeks out those individuals who attempt to live according to the principles of God’s love. They may sin in ways we as Christians might fault. But God forgives ‘our’ sins when we choose to live according to His principles and sometimes fall short.

It’s dangerous to be exposed to Christ and the Bible and choose to walk a line of indecision. But there are people not exposed to Christ and I believe Jesus welcomes humility and Christ likeness even when this person who doesn’t know Christ attributes his integrity to Buddha.

3. Your critical evaluation on the topic. We mean what is the shortcoming you see in the text, your suggestions for improvement.

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Apparently neo Orthodox focus more on the word of God being Jesus, John 1:1 and less on inspiration of the whole Bible. I believe that Jesus (in the beginning) led in the creation of the world. That Jesus was the presence in the cloud by day and fire by night. That Jesus is found throughout the Bible, old and new testaments. Jesus inspired the entire Bible. Jesus (Ephesians 1:4) “hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” He planned for both contingencies (1) sinlessness by Adam and his descendents or (2) restoration by Jesus’ grace in bearing our sin after the fall of Adam that he foresaw. His word is throughout the Bible.

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4. How does this lesson help you?

I appreciated finding that the professor lecturing recommends debates be generally limited to one on one sessions. I imagine such a limited conversation better allows either party to courteously end the back and forth, move on to an easier conversation or walk away. Sometimes we need time to adjust to unexpected information. This could be to rethink our position, either to partially change our mind or to study to be better prepared another time.

A Christian isn’t going to change his mind about God’s love for mankind. Debate with an atheist won’t convert the Christian to atheism. But often Christians may find themselves in friendly debate with another Christian and realize his opponent’s position isn’t necessarily in left or right field. His explanations may or may not change our reasoned understanding. But it may have broadened our personal understanding. Even when we don’t change our mind, we may realize there are reasons for and against each of our positions on the topic. We may each stay with our position, but one on one we feel less compelled to completely win. We can meet again another time with mutual respect.

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