Sunday, March 15, 2015—Tactics: Developing a Game Plan for Discussing the Word Rightly Divided—The Columbo Tactic

Note: Gregory Koukl's book *Tactics: Developing a Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* was used as a guide for developing this message. It should not be assumed that I agree with or support everything Koukl believes.

Introduction/Review

- In our last study, by way of introduction, we considered the following points:
 - Why This Study?—explained where the idea to do the study came from and told the story of Sylvia's lunch encounter.
 - What This Study is Not?—a list or series of lists full of topics and verses for you to memorize and or use should certain issues come up. Believers to be prepared to given an answer. As your pastor I can help prepare you for the defense and confirmation of the gospel in that I discharge my responsible in teaching you the doctrine. However, it is incumbent upon the individual believer to develop their own "skill" in using God's word. There is no substitute for experience.
 - O What This Study Is?—this study is primarily about teaching you some tactics for how to navigate in conversations so that you stay in control—in a good way—even though your current skills/knowledge maybe limited. Successful ambassadorship/diplomacy requires three basic skills: 1) knowledge, 2) wisdom, and 3) character. It is the second skill of tactical wisdom that I would like to focus on in this series of studies.
 - Oifference Between Strategy and Tactics--My goal is to teach you how to find clever ways to exploit someone's bad thinking for the purpose of guiding them to the truth while remaining gracious and charitable at the same time. Our aim ought to be to manage and not manipulate. Make sure it's your ideas that offend and not you, that your beliefs cause the dispute and not your behavior.

Difference between an Argument and a Fight

- Fights are the sorts of things the people win or lose.
- Arguments are good things. They are reasoned presentations that marshal evidence in support of a particular proposition. Arguing is a virtue because it advances clear thinking and helps refine one's understanding of the truth.
- The Apostle Paul was a master of using argumentation to teach truth. Consider the following example,

- o I Corinthians 15:1-19
- When believers avoid principled conflict on things that matter because of fear of disunity and division they hamper the body of Christ and the church's testimony in three ways:
 - o Paul commands us that we should guard and protect the truth (Acts 20:28-31).
 - Believers are denied the opportunity to learn how to argue among themselves in fair, reasonable, and gracious ways (Rom. 14:5).
 - o Fight-phobic churches do not prompt genuine oneness but contrived unanimity and shallow artificial peace (Eph. 4:3-6).

The Columbo Tactic

- The effectiveness of the Columbo Tactic rests in the phrase: "Do mind if I ask you a question?" Columbo would then follow that question with stating, "just one more thing." This in turn would lead to further questioning.
- The key to the Columbo tactic is to go on the offensive in an inoffensive way by using carefully selected questions to productively advance the conversation. Simply put, **NEVER MAKE A STATEMENT, AT LEAST AT FIRST, WHEN A QUESTION WILL DO THE JOB.**
- Challenge 1: "You dispensationalists cut up your Bible and believe that the Old Testament and the 4 Gospels should be thrown out and are not Scripture."
 - O Possible Responses: "Who do you believe the 4 Gospels were written to?" "Can you give me an example of someone who actually made that statement?" "What verses would you use to prove that the Gospels apply to the church today?" "Can you explain to me what Jesus meant in Matthew 10:5-6 and 15:21-24?" "Does it not sound to you like Israel still enjoyed a position of spiritual advantage in these verses?"
- Challenge 2: "You mid-Acts Pauline Dispensationalists are a cult that worships Paul and not Christ."
 - O Possible Responses: "Really, can you please tell me why you think we worship Paul and not Christ?" "Have you ever heard me or some other Pauline Dispensationalists actually say, I worship Paul?" "Didn't Paul claim to have seen the resurrected Lord and receive further revelation?" "If you think I am worshiping Paul, can you please explain to me what you believe about the following verses I Corinthians 11:1 and 14:37?"
- Challenge 3: "Isn't dispensational theology a new development in church history. Aren't we better off following those doctrines and teachings that are well established in the history of the church?"

- O Possible Responses: "Infant baptism and baptismal regeneration are well attested to in church history, should one believe these doctrines on that basis alone?" "If dispensational Bible study is a new development in church history, can you please explain to me why Paul uses that term in the Bible?"
- Koukl points out the following about using questions, "First, each is a question. My initial response in a situation like this is not to preach about my view or even disagree with theirs. Rather I want to draw them out, to invite them to talk more about what they think. This takes a lot of the pressure off me, because when I ask a question, the ball is back in their court. It protects me from jumping to conclusion or distorting their meaning." (Koukl, 45)
- "Second, each of these questions is an invitation to thoughtful dialogue. Each is an encouragement to participate in conversation in a reflective way." (Koukl, 45)
- Third, these are not idle queries. I have a particular purpose for each question. With some, I'm simply gathering information ("Really, can you please tell me why you think we worship Paul and not Christ?"). Others you might have noticed, are subtly leading; that is, the questions themselves suggest a problem with the other person's thinking ("If dispensational Bible study is a new development in church history, can you please explain to me why Paul uses that term in the Bible?"). (Koukl, 45)
- There are four general advantages to asking questions.
 - They invite friendly interaction. I have met very few people who weren't willing to talk about themselves and what they believe.
 - O You'll get an education. You will leave a conversation knowing more than when you arrived.
 - Questions allow you to make progress on a point without being pushy.
 - o Carefully asked questions put you in the driver's seat of a conversation.
- During his earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus Christ taught using the methodology of questioning.
 - o Luke 20:1-8
 - o Luke 20:19-26
 - o Mark 2:1-9
- The Apostle Paul also teaches using questions throughout his epistles.
 - o Romans 6:1-4, 15-16
 - o Romans 8:31-35
 - o Galatians 3:1-5
- According to Koukl, "There are three basic ways to use Columbo. Each is launched by a different model question. These three applications comprise the game plan I use to tame the most

belligerent critic. Sometimes I simply want to *gather information*. Other times, I ask a question *to reverse the burden of proof*, that is, to encourage the other person to give the reasons for their own views. Finally, I use questions to *lead the conversation is a specific direction*.

Using "What do you mean by that?" To Gather Information

- The question, "what do you mean by that?" provides a natural opening for any conversation and puts no pressure on you. Sometimes this question is directed at a specific statement or topic. Other times, the question can be more open ended.
- This question immediately engages someone in an interactive way and serves as an excellent conversation starter.
- Next, this question uncovers valuable information; it helps you know what a person thinks. There are two reasons why this is important: 1) you don't want to misunderstand them, and 2) you don't want to misrepresent them.
 - o Misrepresenting a person's view is a serious misstep even when done by accident.
- **Be sure to pay attention to the response to your questions**. If the meaning is still unclear, follow up with more questions. For example, say "Let me see if I understand you on this." Then feedback their view to make sure you got it right.
- Don't underestimate the power of the question "What do you mean by that?" Use it often. You can ask it in its many variations all day long. It will keep you engaged in productive, genial conversation while keeping the focus and the pressure on the other person, not on you.