

## Sunday, March 22, 2015—Tactics: Developing a Game Plan for Discussing the Word Rightly Divided— The Columbo Tactic, Part 2

Note: Gregory Koukl's book *Tactics: Developing a Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* was used as a guide for developing this message. Pages 58 through 88 were used in the preparation of this lesson. It should not be assumed that I agree with or support everything Koukl believes.

### Introduction/Review

- Last week in part two of this mini-series on “Developing a Game Plan for Discussion the Word Rightly Divided” we discussed the following:
  - The difference between an argument and a fight. We saw how the Apostle Paul used argumentation to teach God's truth (I Cor. 15:1-19).
  - Introduced you to the Columbo Tactic and the use of carefully selected questions to productively advance a conversation. Simply put, **NEVER MAKE A STATEMENT, AT LEAST AT FIRST, WHEN A QUESTION WILL DO THE JOB.**
  - In addition to looking at examples from the Lord's earthly ministry and Paul's epistles of the use of questioning we considered the following four advantages to asking questions:
    - They invite friendly interaction.
    - You'll get an education.
    - Questions allow you to make progress on a point without being pushy.
    - Carefully asked questions put you in the driver's seat of a conversation.
  - We considered the three uses of the Columbo Tactic: 1) *gather information*, 2) *reverse the burden of proof*, and 3) *lead the conversation in a specific direction*.
  - Lastly, we discussed the question, “What do you mean by that?” as a powerful way of either opening a new conversation or responding to a question you have been asked.
- In this study we want to consider the second and third uses of the Columbo Tactic. Namely, *reversing the burden of proof* and *leading the conversation* in a specific direction.

### The Burden of Proof

- The burden of proof is the responsibility someone has to defend or give evidence for their view. Generally the rule can be summed up as follows:
  - **Whoever makes the claim bears the burden.**

- The key here is not to allow yourself to be thrust into a defensive position when the other person is making the claim. It's not your duty to prove them wrong. It's their duty to prove their own view.
- An argument is different from an assertion. An assertion simply states a point (*The Chicago Cubs are a terrible baseball team.*). An argument gives supporting reasons why the point should be taken seriously (*The Chicago Cubs have not won a world series in over one hundred years.*). The reasons then become the topic of mutual discussion or analysis.
- Think of an argument as a roof supported by walls, i.e., a house. The roof is the conclusion, and the walls are the supporting ideas. By testing the walls we can see if they are strong enough to keep the roof from tumbling down.
  - **Don't let someone flatten you by dropping a roof on your head. Make him build walls underneath his roof. Ask him for reasons or facts to support his conclusions.**
- The second Columbo question is designed to enforce the burden of proof rule.
  - **How did you come to that conclusion?** Other variations include:
    - Why do you say that?
    - What are your reasons for holding that view?
    - What makes you think that's the right way to see it?
    - I'm curious. Why would that idea seem compelling to you?
- The first Columbo question helps you know *what* another person thinks. This second question help you know *why* they think as they do. It charitably assumes that someone has actually come to a conclusion and they have reasons for their view not merely emotional attachments or appeals.
  - **Many people have never thought through their views and don't know why they hold them.**
- The question, "How did you come to that conclusion?" accomplishes something vitally important. It forces the person you are in conversation with to given an account of their own beliefs.
- An alternative explanation is not a refutation. Giving an explanation is not the same thing as giving an argument. Many Christians will seek to explain their views by appealing to stories or experience rather than presenting a scriptural argument supported by verses.
  - I Timothy 1:4, 4:7—Paul warns multiple times about not given heed to fables.
  - II Timothy 4:4
  - Titus 1:14
  - II Peter 1:16-19—Peter had more confidence in the word of God than his experience.

- When you find yourself stymied in a discussion ask yourself, “Did they give me an argument, or did they just give an opinion?” If the latter, then say, “Well, that’s an interesting point of view, but what is your argument?”
- The Professor’s Ploy—don’t fall into the trap of attempting to deal with a person in authority in a head-to-head confrontation on their own turf. This approach rarely works because it violates a fundamental rule of engagement: Never make a frontal assault on a superior force in an entrenched position. An unwritten law of nature seems to govern exchanges like these:
  - **THE MAN WITH THE MICROPHONE WINS!!!!**
- Don’t disengage! Utilize the Columbo questions from your tactical tool box.
- The “professor’s ploy” is to shift the burden of proof from himself to someone else. He demands that others defend views they have not expressed even though he is the one who has made specific claims. He tries to sidestep his responsibility, but the burden of proof is still his.
- **Don’t take the bait** when faced with any form of “Why don’t you try and prove me wrong?” Shift the burden of proof back to where it belongs, on the one who has made the claim. A generic example, might do as follows:
  - “ \_\_\_\_\_, I actually haven’t said anything about my own view, so you’re just guessing right now. More to the point, my own view is irrelevant. It doesn’t really matter what I believe. Your ideas are on the table, not mine. I’m just trying to understand you. I’m asking for clarification and wondering if you have good reasons. That’s all.”
- Let me think about it—these words are magical because once you say them you free yourself from any obligation to respond further at that moment. All pressure is gone because you have already pleaded ignorance. You have no obligation to answer, refute, or reply once you have admitted you are outgunned and need to give the issue more thought.
  - Do you due diligence after the fact. Study, keep notes on each encounter, and practice what you might say next time.

### Using Columbo to Lead the Way

- The third use of Columbo takes us more on the offensive, yet in an inoffensive way. We ask a different kind of question, sometimes called a “leading question.” These are questions that take person in the direction you want them to go.
- Every time you ask a question and get a favorable response, the person is telling you they understand the point you’re making and agree with it, at least provisionally. By doing so, they

take another step forward with you in the thinking process. This allows someone to not feel forced into your point of view. Allowing someone the ability to retrace their own mental steps is a powerful thing.

- Leading questions are used to inform, persuade, set up the terms, or refute.
- The skillful use of leading questions highlights the first need of an ambassador from our first study, knowledge.
  - *Knowledge*—an ambassador must know God’s word rightly divided and what God is doing today in the dispensation of grace.
- If you don’t know what God is doing today in the dispensation of grace you will have nothing to lead someone to via your questioning.
- The third use of Colombo allows you to set up the conversation in a way that is most favorable for you. If you are placed in a situation where you suspect your conviction will be labeled intolerant, bigoted, narrow-minded, or judgmental, use Columbo to turn the tables.
- When someone asks you for your personal views about a controversial subject, preface your remarks with a question that sets the stage in your favor.
  - “You know, this is actually a very personal question you’re asking. I don’t mind answering, but before I do, I want to know if it’s safe to offer my views. So let me ask you a question: Do you consider yourself a tolerant person or an intolerant person on issues like this? Is it safe to give my opinion, or are you going to judge me for my point of view?”
- This tactical maneuver trades on the important knowledge: there is no neutral ground when it comes to the tolerance question. Everybody has a point of view they think is right. Adopting this approach takes the tolerance issue off the table before you answer.
- This third use of Columbo requires insight that the first two questions do not. You need to know the specific direction you want the conversation to go, the precise purpose you want to accomplish with your leading questions. One key is to pay close attention to how the second Columbo question is answered: “How did you come to that conclusion?”
- This skill takes time to develop, so don’t be supressed—or discouraged—if you find yourself stalled out at first. It’s not always easy to flush out the error in someone’s thinking or to maneuver in conversation using questions instead of statements. It takes practice.
- Some question stems to help you use Columbo to lead the way include:
  - Have you ever considered . . . ?

- Can you clear this up for me?
  - Can you help me understand this?
  - Can you help me with something that confuses me?
  - Can you clear this up for me?
- If you find yourself in a situation where asking a question might seem awkward or contrived you might consider using one of the following approaches.
    - Let me suggest an alternative, and tell me if you think it's an improvement. If not, you can tell me why you think your option is better.
    - I wouldn't characterize it that way. Here's what I think may be a better or more accurate way to look at it. Tell me what you think.
    - I don't think that is going to work, and I'd like to suggest why. Is that okay with you?
    - I'm not sure I agree with the way you put it. Think about this . . .
- **REMEMBER, AS AN ABASSADOR OF JESUS CHRIST YOU DON'T HAVE TO HIT A HOME RUN WITH EVERY CONVERSATION. USE YOUR FRIST TWO COLUMBO QUESTIONS—"WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?" AND "HOW DID YOU COME TO THAT CONCLUSION?"—TO GET INTO THE GAME. THE REST WILL COME IN TIME.**