

Gospel Encounters in Acts

**Paul's Reasoned Arguments**

Acts 17:1-15

---

**Context: Paul and the Church's Spread**

- In Acts 13-14, Paul completed his first missionary journey.
- The gospel is spreading, but resistance is also growing in the form of persecution.
- A disagreement between Paul and Barnabas on whether to take John Mark with them cause them to split up for the second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-41). Paul brings along Silas instead.
- In Acts 16, Paul meets Timothy who would go on to be mentored by Paul.
- We see miraculous conversions, including that of the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25-40).
- Paul is continuing his strategy of reaching the nations by proclaiming the gospel first to the Jews in the synagogues and then to the gentiles.
- Acts 17 is a case study in evangelism strategy, both to Jews and to gentiles.

**The Role of Reasoning and Apologetics**

- In this section, we see Paul “reasoning” with the Jews from the Scriptures and leading the Bereans in their examination of the Scriptures.
- We’ve also seen already how Paul and the other apostles have made defenses for doctrine, as in Acts 15 (the Jerusalem council).
- The role and value of argumentation, and the related discipline of apologetics, is something worthwhile to consider when we approach evangelism.
- What is reasoning?
  - Involves the fair weighing of claims in pursuit of truth.
    - **James 3:17** <sup>17</sup>*But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.*
    - **Isaiah 1:18** <sup>18</sup>*“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.*
  - Requires humility and willingness to learn.

- **Proverbs 1:7** <sup>7</sup>*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*
- Assumes that truth is objective and valuable.
  - **Colossians 2:8** <sup>8</sup>*See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.*
- What is apologetics?
  - Comes from the Greek word “apologia”, meaning “defense”.
    - **1 Peter 3:15** <sup>15</sup>*but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,*
  - Idea is tearing down barriers to gospel understanding by providing explanations, reasons, and arguments.
    - Barriers can related to you (defending your credibility as a witness)
    - Barriers can be related to the gospel (defending the gospel directly)
  - As arguments are being made, the goal is intellectual persuasion toward the end of spiritual acceptance.
    - **Matthew 22:37** <sup>37</sup>*And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*
    - **Acts 26:24–28** <sup>24</sup>*And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.”* <sup>25</sup>*But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words.* <sup>26</sup>*For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.* <sup>27</sup>*King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.”* <sup>28</sup>*And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?”*
    - **Acts 17:4** <sup>4</sup>*And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.*
  - Three aspects of apologetics:<sup>1</sup>
    - Apologetics as proof – Providing a rational basis for the faith.
    - Apologetics as defense – Answering objections of unbelief.
      - **Romans 9:19** <sup>19</sup>*You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?”*

---

<sup>1</sup> Borrowed from Andy Davis’ lesson on Apologetics, in which he borrows from John Frame.

- Apologetics as offense – Attacking the foolishness of unbelieving thought.
    - **2 Corinthians 10:5** <sup>5</sup>*We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...*
- What are the limits of arguments, reasoning, and apologetics?
  - Ultimately the heart has to be changed and drawn to Christ by the Father.
    - **John 6:44** <sup>44</sup>*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.*
  - Transformation comes as a gift from the Spirit.
    - **John 3:6–8** <sup>6</sup>*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup>Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup>The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*
  - The gift of salvation cannot be worked for or achieved by mental assent.
    - **Ephesians 2:8–9** <sup>8</sup>*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup>not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*
  - God is the one who changes the heart.
    - **Ezekiel 36:26** <sup>26</sup>*And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*
    - **Ephesians 1:16–18** <sup>16</sup>*I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, <sup>17</sup>that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, <sup>18</sup>having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,*
  - God is the one who creates life out of nothing.
    - **2 Corinthians 4:4–6** <sup>4</sup>*In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup>For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. <sup>6</sup>For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*
- Reasoning, argumentation, and apologetics are worthwhile tools to be developed in the hands of God’s skilled workforce for the building of His kingdom. However, no one can be argued into the kingdom; their heart has to be changed by the Spirit of God through the proclamation of the gospel.

## Paul's Basis of Argumentation

- What is the basis of Paul's argumentation in Thessalonica and Berea?
  - The Scriptures!
- It's easy to focus on developing argumentative skill and forget that the Scriptures were given to make people wise for salvation.
  - **2 Timothy 3:14–15** <sup>14</sup>*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it* <sup>15</sup>*and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*
- God specifically has chosen to work through his inspired Word to both convert and mature his people.
  - **2 Timothy 3:16–17** <sup>16</sup>*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,* <sup>17</sup>*that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*
  - **Romans 10:17** <sup>17</sup>*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*
- It's only through God's Word that we can see and understand His redemptive purposes, including both our need for and His provision of a savior.
- It's imperative that we guard ourselves from drifting toward argumentation singularly; the Scriptures are sufficient and cannot be forgotten!

## Paul's Method of Argumentation

- **Consider the audience.** Paul knew he was addressing Jews, and thus knew the “pain points” and potential barriers to belief.
- **Establish common ground.** After assessing the audience, he used the common ground of understanding the Scriptures to support his claims.
- **Follow the needs.** It appears Paul addressed the specific concerns and questions they had, and was ready to do so.
- **Answer with Scriptural truth.** Paul was quick to point them to Scripture, which they understood, to answer their questions.
- **Spend enough time.** There was likely much back-and-forth that went on over three weeks (three Sabbaths' worth of time). Paul invested in the effort with patience.
- **Be content with whatever response comes.** Since his mission is to be a faithful witness, Paul helped those that were interested and bore with those who grew angry.
- **Know when the time to move on comes.** After persecution stirs, in these instances, Paul departs. We may be tempted to stay and continuing arguing, but there's wisdom to being receptive to the Spirit's leading elsewhere.
- **Trust the Holy Spirit.** When Paul moved on in Acts 13:49-52, it says he was full of joy and the Holy Spirit.

## **Applications for Our Evangelism**

- Pray for wisdom.
- Consider your audience. What can you learn?
- Know how to present the gospel.
- Prepare well. Memorizing Scripture or utilizing a tool can be helpful in evangelism.
- Remain kind and gentle. Avoid the temptation to get angered easily or grow frustrated.
- Ask good questions. What ways can you draw information out in order to better present the gospel?
- Avoid rabbit trails. It's easy to get distracted on the way to Christ!
- Be willing to end the conversation and pick it back up.
- Be willing to move on if the individual doesn't appear to be further interested.
- Trust the Holy Spirit and the power of God's Word.