



*Part 0 of 1: Truth, Love, and Defending the Faith*  
with  
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*Mikel Del Rosario* Welcome to The Table where we discuss issues of God and culture. I'm Mikel Del Rosario, Cultural Engagement Assistant here at The Hendricks Center, and today our topic is Defending the Faith. We have two guests today. In studio, we have Dr. Darrell Bock, who is the executive director of Cultural Engagement at The Hendricks Center and Senior Research Professor of New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary. Welcome, Darrell.

*Darrell Bock* I'm glad to be with you.

*Mikel Del Rosario* And joining us via Skype from sunshiny Southern California is my good friend, Dr. Sean McDowell. Sean teaches Christian Apologetics in the MA program at Biola University. We have a great love for our alma mater and for sunshiny SoCal. Welcome, Sean.

*Sean McDowell* Hey, thanks for having me, Mikel.

*Mikel Del Rosario* Sean, you recently wrote a book called A New Kind of Apologist, and when you tell people that you're an apologist, sometimes they're thinking it sounds like you're going around just telling people you're sorry all the time for stuff. How do you explain to people what an apologist is and why apologetics is even important?

*Sean McDowell* Well, did we have somebody call Biola a few years ago now and say, "Why do you have classes on teaching people to apologize for being Christians," meaning saying that you're sorry. So part of the difficulty in this book was deciding do I even put the word apologist or apologetics on the cover, 'cause frankly many non-Christians and Christians don't have a clue what it means, but because the word has had I think really from the Old Testament, the time of Jesus, Paul, forward, apologetics has been a staple of the Christian faith, I chose that I didn't really want to get rid of this word but let's rehabilitate it.

So essentially, 1 Peter 3:15, when it says, "Set apart Christ as Lord in your heart," always be ready with an answer but give it with gentleness and respect. In the original language, the reference to giving an answer is translated in English as apologetics and it just means simply giving an answer for why we believe what we believe, so it was a common term. When Plato wrote his defense of Socrates, he called it An Apology, so apologetics is just simply the theological subdiscipline of having answers and being ready to explain why we believe what we believe and to respond to objections against the Christian faith.

*Mikel Del Rosario* And why is it important for Christians to be able to give that answer? Some people will say, "Well, if you have all these reasons, then how can you have any faith?" How do we put these things together for people?

*Sean McDowell* Well, I think the latter part of your question is very important 'cause I think there's a huge amount of misunderstanding on the nature of faith. In fact interestingly, this past weekend, I was preaching at my church on Exodus 7-11 and the point I was making through each of the ten plagues, it's interesting. Moses would say to Pharaoh, he would say essentially, and I'm rewording it, "But I'm going to do this," in reference to the miracle, "so that you will know," meaning have knowledge, "that there's a God, one true God of Israel, and then act in obedience."

So there's a pattern repeated over and over again that there's a miracle or in evidence that is given that gave the people knowledge so they would know and then they're called to faith. So biblically speaking, faith is not believing something without evidence. It's not believing something against the evidence. It's in God but is essentially, as one of my colleagues, J.P. Moreland would say, "Faith is a trust in what we have reason to believe is true." So faith is not blind.

I mean even in Mark 2, when Jesus heals the paralytic, he says, "So you may know that the son of man has the authority on Earth to forgive sins." He did the miracle as a sign and confirmation that he is who he claimed to be. So as Christians, we are called to have an intelligent faith.

*Mikel Del Rosario* Very good, so far from being something that is anti-evidence, actually we see the evidence came first and then people had faith.

*Sean McDowell*

I think that's right. Now it's interesting in the chapter in Mark, I think it's in Chapter 5 when they lower the paralytic through the roof and it says, "Seeing their faith," and then Jesus responds to their faith and says, "Your sins are forgiven."

Now the skeptic would push back and say, "Ah, faith came first and then he acted," but here's the more basic question. Why did they come to Jesus in the first place thinking that he could even heal the paralytic? Why did they bother to climb up on the roof when they couldn't get inside, lower the paralytic down? Why? Because they had heard stories or maybe they had seen with their own eyes the power of who Jesus is and they had knowledge and then they acted in faith and Jesus rewarded that faith.

*Mikel Del Rosario*

Yeah, well, let's fast forward now to the 21st century where we are right now. How do you see the need for a new kind of apologist today?

*Sean McDowell*

Well, one thing that's important to make is that apologetics I think always has been a staple within the church. I think you see a kind of apologetic in the Old Testament where a case was made that the God of Israel is the true god and the other gods are false. I think you see Jesus being a kind of an apologist when he reasons and he puts forward in the first few chapters in John, fulfill prophesy, testimony of the father, the scriptures, Moses. He's giving an apologetic. We certainly see Paul do this, and throughout the history of the church, apologetics has been one core staple of the faith.

Now we can't change the truth and the doctrine that's been passed on to the saints. That truth remains the same, but culture around us changes, so it changes in a couple of ways. No. 1, the way we communicate, the mediums of technology change, but also, the issues change. So a new kind of apologist is to kind of say we need to reach to the past and hold onto something Christians have always done and we need to keep doing it, but we also need to be aware of how culture is changing, how we best communicate the gospel, and the unique challenges that are raised and stand as barriers in the way of the gospel and respond to those appropriately.

So a new kind of apologist is just essentially saying, "All right. Let's take stock 'cause a lot of things have changed around us today. Make sure that we are communicating the gospel and defending the faith in a way that's God honoring and effective in our culture today."

*Mikel Del Rosario* Now Darrell, you've written over 40 books and you've been doing apologetics for the past 30 years or more. How have you seen the culture change and how have you seen people who are in apologetics have to adjust how we give our message?

*Darrell Bock* Well, the way I like to describe the change that we've seen is that whereas before, we've kind of had this cultural net that was Judeo Christian wrapped around most of the Western world, that net is now gone, and so you could assume certain things in your conversation that you can no longer assume. People had a belief in God. People had at least a healthy respect for the Bible. If they didn't believe that it was inspired, they at least saw it as a valuable reflection on religious faith or on a person's walk, that kind of thing. So there was kind of a backup position to drop into.

That's no longer the case. In many cases, the Bible itself is directly challenged. It's seen as an ancient book that doesn't have much to tell us, that kind of thing. The existence of God is up for grabs in a way that I think generally speaking in Western culture didn't exist before. And the interesting thing is that not only have we moved kind of to where things were in the first century, we've almost moved beyond where things were in the first century, 'cause the first century was a very religiously oriented period. People thought there were transcendent forces out there to deal with in their lives. They took that mostly for granted.

And I like to joke that the ancient calendar had 150 religious holidays in it. We ought to adopt that calendar. It would be nice to have a holiday every three days, but and that was to the various gods that people felt an obligation and some sense of accountability to. We don't have that level of accountability in our general culture in large swaths of it anymore, and so that changes the way we react.

So we come to a text like the paralytic and you're talking about faith. This faith that you're talking about is faith not only in ideas, which is important, that I believe or trust that certain truths exist, it's a faith in a person. It's a relational faith and to nurture that, there's got to be a sense of I'm a creature. There's a creator. I'm accountable to that creator, that kind of thing. So you almost have to bring things back to square one.

So whether you're in Mark 2 or Luke 5, the parallel, wherever you're seeing that story, the orientation that you might know that the son of man has authority on Earth to forgive sins, you've got to know that there's a son of man out there who has authority to forgive sins who you are related to whether you recognize it or not.

And so the apologist, if you will, it's interesting. Some of the earliest church writings, just to reinforce what Sean is saying, came in the generations immediately after the New Testament. There's a group, you get the apostolic fathers first generation and then you get a group that's nicknamed the apologists. They actually are in the process of defending a Christian worldview in the midst of a pagan worldview and explaining why Christianity matters in the context.

Well, we need another generation of apologists, and maybe put the new before the name, and there are a variety of issues that they need to address and the way that they need to address it needs to be aware that there are certain assumptions they can no longer make as they make the case for why the Christian faith is a valid way to look at life, not just a valid way to look at life but really the way to look at life.

*Mikel Del Rosario* In the culture that oftentimes pushes back against Christianity where, as you say, the Bible is often the question and not the answer in the minds of people, how can we as Christians earn that right to be heard and to speak into some of these issues of the day?

*Darrell Bock* Well, there really are two important elements, it seems to me. One is earning the respect and credibility of someone by just the way you relate to the person next to you, the way you engage them, their seeing your sincerity. Christianity has an inherent critique of the way people live. That's not an easy thing to deal with, and so I like to tell people they won't care about your critique unless they know you care, so that's an important way to think about. So that's Step 1.

The second step requires a significant adjustment, it seems to me, on the part of believers, and it goes like this. We're used to saying, "The Bible says and so it's true." That's how we think about it, "So it's true because it's in the Bible." I like to reverse that and get people to think about maybe it's in the Bible because it's true, not it's in the Bible because it's true but it's true because it's in the Bible. You wrestle with that, but the point is that it's in the Bible because it's true. So what makes this true? What makes this authentic about a way to live that we need to probe in order to understand why God would put it in his inspired word?

Because what he's telling us and what he's communicating to us are the realities of life and if we appreciate why those realities are the way that they are, why the truth is true, if you want to say it that way, you don't have to appeal to the Bible for it. You can also appeal for what this means for the quality of life, or for human flourishing, or a variety of different ways, the common good, lots of ways to talk about it that makes it valuable, and you can lead people into reflecting on the nature of what it is you're arguing for in and of itself without appealing to the Bible for the warrant. For someone who the Bible is not a warrant to say the Bible says it, it doesn't do them much good.

Now we could get into a discussion here about presuppositionalism versus evidentialism. I'm trying not to go there, but the point here is that there's a way to have a conversation across a table with someone that emphasizes that aspect of the equation. That's why I like one of the opening chapters in Sean's book is about apologetics as a conversation and rather than thinking about it as a debate that I've gotta win or something else, because I think that is the right tonal way into the conversation that we're talking about.

So I guess I said there were two things here. There are three. One is how you relate, the second is knowing how to make the argument, and this third one is understanding you're not in a debate, you're in a conversation and it's important to draw a person into the topic that you're talking about.

*Mikel Del Rosario* Now Sean, you've led students on trips to college campuses like UC Berkeley and trained them to have good conversations with people who see Christianity differently than we do. Could you share a little bit about how you train people to engage in those kinds of contexts?

*Sean McDowell*

Yeah, let me give you a little backstory which relates to something that Darrell shared that I think might be helpful. I'm currently helping my father update his classic book, *Evidence Demands a Verdict*, and he wrote it in the early '70s and I just asked him the same question that you addressed, Darrell. Interestingly, I said how has apologetics changed since when my dad started basically in the '60s. And he said the big way that it's changed is the amount of information that is accessible and how this changes how people relate and understand the world.

So when my dad put evidence together, there was nothing like this. If you wanted basic apologetic arguments, sometimes you had to go to a library in Europe and find it yourself. Well, now the difference is people have too much information. Everybody has a voice, so how do I know what I can trust and what I can't trust? And this is why what I think Darrell said about conversation is so important. Apologetics used to be if a skeptic says A, you respond with B. If they say C, you respond with D. Well, it doesn't work that way anymore.

When I was speaking to an atheist group at Berkeley, they were sitting there just Googling what I said at that moment looking for responses.

*Darrell Bock*

Exactly right.

*Sean McDowell*

So it's no more that we have to teach content and material. Apologetics today has to involve things like how do we listen? How do I understand somebody's worldview? How do I recognize faulty thinking and in a loving, gracious way, help that person arrive at truth?

So conversation. That's why we began *A New Apologist* with the chapter on conversation is we want to set the framework like this is not a lecture, this is not a one-way street. This is listening, showing respect, and having dialog and earning the right for somebody to really take our ideas seriously.

Now what you mentioned, I'm at Biola full time, but I take high school students. I taught high school for a decade at a Christian high school worldview, and apologetics, and theology, and I still do it part time and I kind of got tired of seeing my students graduate, go to a university, and just have their faith picked apart by a professor, either aggressively or just incidentally. So a buddy of mine, Brett Kunkle with Stand to Reason, I know you know him, Mikel, was doing these trips and I said, "Man, you've gotta come over and train our students and work with us."

And so for the past probably eight years, we take students either on outreach mission trips to Salt Lake City or we go into Berkeley and we invite in atheists, we invite in agnostics. We brought a fellow who's Dad's a pastor. He's an atheist now. He's a gay man and just had him share our story, but we teach these students how do you listen? How do you show love and respect to somebody who frankly some of our guests just think we're crazy, and we're nuts, and absurd for what we believe. How do we actually have these loving conversations?

And my experience is we had 30 high school students and we also brought in a Unitarian reverend to speak to our students, and I'll tell you, when people say how do you motivate students to care about theology and apologetics, you get something like that on the calendar and you really bring somebody in or go on their turf, they will be very interested instantly. "How do we know the Bible is true? Did Jesus really claim to be God? How should Christians think about the gender issue, et cetera?"

So I think students are ripe for this. They want to respond and if people are listening saying, "Well, I'm not sure my students are ready for that. I need to shield and protect them." Well, you probably need to get your head out of the sand because kids are being exposed through the Internet to ideas, and beliefs, and worldviews at such a young age that they never were before in the past. So I think we need to be a step ahead of this, get our kids out of their comfort zones, and my experience is these students walk away and go, "Gosh, we have good reason to think that Christianity is true."

And their big takeaway, what is interesting, Mikel, is we go to UC Berkeley and we give our students surveys, and they go on the campus, and every year, they just get into conversations for a couple of hours with willing students, and Berkeley's one of the top public schools in the nation, brilliant students. My students come back and their takeaway is always No. 1, "Gosh, a lot of these students really don't even care. It doesn't matter. No. 2, they're just not that thoughtful. They're brilliant in math, brilliant in science, brilliant in history, but when it comes to religion, they're not even that thoughtful about it."

And my students will say, "Gosh, we just read one book. We have a few trainings. We can engage in thoughtful conversations with really smart people with different belief systems."

*Darrell Bock*

Yeah, and you know what's so interesting about that, and there's so many different levels I want to comment, Sean, because I think you're making several valuable points, but one that's really, really interesting is the idea of most people when it comes to religion, they've never darkened the door of a church or anything like that, so all their understanding of religion is what they've absorbed in the air that's around them and a little bit like a sponge. So what I like to say to Christians when I talk about this is, "Imagine if your view of Christianity is based upon what you hear in the general public, what view would you have? What would you think, et cetera? That's what you can expect a lot of times." Now that's one level.

The second level that's really more complicated is when they go to the university campus and they take a religion class. They're on the exact opposite end of that spectrum. They're not dealing with someone who's just taking it in as a sponge. They're dealing with someone who probably has reacted in many cases to a religious experience in the past of their life and they're made it their mission, should you choose to accept it, they've made it their mission to undercut the Christian faith in what they do, and what they teach, or to reconfigure it in a way in which it's less confrontive with the other religious movements in the world, and they've developed a knowledge and a knowledge pool that runs pretty deep, and then you're swimming in high cotton. It's a different deal.

And so to have a student be able to work with that range of material coming out of high school and hitting the college campus is a very, very big challenge.

*Mikel Del Rosario* Now Darrell, you have been on many college campuses, including Ivy League places like Princeton and Yale. How do you help the Christian students who are there set the tone to engage with their skeptical friends?

*Darrell Bock* Well, I emphasize the values that Sean's talking about. This is a conversation. The goal is not to win a debate, because actually the goal is to win a person. You're actually trying to invite someone. I call the phrase you're trying to invite someone to sacred space, out of public space and into sacred space, and to do that in the midst of trying to challenge them at the same time. It's not a straightforward invitation, "Oh, gee whiz, take it or leave it. You can come."

It's a challenge that says on the one hand, the reason you need to step into sacred space is because life is messed up and that includes your life and my life, and so that's not an easy message people want to hear, particularly in an age where they feel entitled to the things of God as opposed to something that God has to grace us with because he shows us his mercy. I mean everything about it is swimming uphill.

So you just have to wrestle with how you do that well and the best way to do that is to be very, very secure in who you are in Christ and very, very secure about what it is the scripture does give you, but to do it with a depth that is able also to explain why those things are kind of on their own terms.

*Mikel Del Rosario* Sean, when you dialog with skeptics, what are the things that you hear them saying about the way that Christian apologists or Christian leaders on campus tend to talk and what can we learn from those interactions?

*Sean McDowell* I've had quite a few interactions like that. A couple of years ago, what I talked about when I spoke to an atheist group at Berkeley, and probably my biggest take – I had a couple of takeaways. No. 1, if a couple them in particular were really harsh, not all of them. I don't want to stereotype, but some of them were really harsh in the way that they treated us and we responded graciously, and caringly, and didn't take the bait. It just reminded me that there's a lot of hurting people on college campuses, not just atheists, I mean all sorts. Many Christians are as well.

And when we're doing apologetics and evangelism and having conversations, we have to keep in mind and realize that there's an experience behind somebody. Sometimes it's pain, sometimes it's hurt, sometimes it's seeing hypocrisy. So if we try to win an argument at the expense of really understanding where somebody's journey is, we're often going to win the battle but lose the war.

*Mikel Del Rosario* Yeah. What I hear us saying in this segment at least is we need to have grace and truth at the same time. We need to have relationship that's part of that conversation, and this isn't a combative kind of debate that we need to be entering to, especially in this day and age.

Sean, I hear you're quoting Darrell Bock a lot nowadays. Last time we were together at ETS in 2014, you mentioned that he had said something that really resonated with you.

*Sean McDowell* Yeah, I went to a session that he did on the church responding to the broader issue of homosexuality and same-sex marriage, and something said at the end really stuck with me. And correct me if I don't get this right, Darrell, but the idea was that in the minds of people when they hear the word Christian or they think about Christians, one of the first things they think of is intolerant, bigoted, hateful, homophobic, and the most important way that we can help change this narrative for the sake of the gospel getting a hearing, is when somebody hears this charge against Christians and their first thought is, "Gosh, that doesn't really ring true. I know Christians and they don't treat me that way."

In other words, the power of individual lives and Christians reaching out to nonbelievers and people of all different stripes is probably the most important way to overturn this cultural stereotype that is affecting the way that we're seen and relate to people.

*Darrell Bock* Yeah, I think it's fascinating the very passage that we started off with in 1 Peter 3. It's a memory verse in a lot of memory verse packages and everyone knows the part that says, "Be prepared to give a defense for the hope that is in you." But many people don't go on to memorize the rest of that passage which talks about communicating with meekness or humility, however you want to translate *praytētas*, and respect, and actually, that's one of several passages that communicate this.

Colossians 4-6 talks about, "Let your speech be seasoned with salt and always –" and when I read this, I always go, "always, always, always, that's like all the time, be gracious." That's emphatic.

And so the passage in 2 Corinthians 5 where it talks about our having a ministry of reconciliation, "We plead with you on behalf of God be reconciled to Christ." And you just note the tone of these engagement texts.

Now 1 Peter, even coming in the midst of a text that says, "You know what? You may do what's right and be slandered for it." Now what people think about being slandered for doing what's right? Most people end up being slandered for doing what's wrong. But the scripture tells you we live in an upside down world in which sometimes that happens. You need to be prepared for it but you don't minister out of fear or out of terror for that. You understand that's part of what may be involved and you give that defense but you did it with meekness and with respect.

*Sean McDowell*

You know what, Darrell? If I can jump in here, I think the only way we can really speak with meekness, and respect, and gentleness, is in fact if we know what we believe and why we believe it.

*Darrell Bock*

That's right.

*Sean McDowell*

One of my favorite things to do at churches, camps, conferences, is I show up. People know it's me, that I'm a Christian professor, but I go into role play and I put on glasses and become an atheist. And I tell the story for like four or five minutes of my friend who's an atheist and then I open it up for questions from the audience and I respond and I shoot them down, kind of gently, and graciously, and kindly as an atheist to break their stereotypes of how they think atheists may be, and I'm telling you, almost every time I do it, 15, 20, 25 minutes into it, people get frustrated. They get upset. I've been called names. I've literally had a guy stand up and threaten me one time. People get agitated. They get upset. They get angry and you can feel the tension coming over the crowd.

And then I'll stop, I'll take the glasses off, and instead of saying, "How do we defend faith?", I'll just say, "Here's my first question. How did you treat me as your atheist guest?" And the eyes of people, it's like, "Oh, my goodness. I hated you. I wanted to bash you. I was angry at you."

And then I'll say, "Why did people get so defensive?" And then I'll say, "I think it's because you don't really know what you believe and why." And when I push back, it shows an insecurity so you lash out with anger and defensiveness.

So Christians today, if we want to be able to tackle and talk about the difficult subjects, we have to have a confidence in terms of what we believe. Then we're not threatened when other people challenge our faith.

*Darrell Bock*

Yeah, I think that's exactly right and I also think that sometimes what happens is that people – and this is the fault of the church to a certain degree – they haven't heard an atheist speak directly. Everything that they've heard, they've read, "This is what atheists think or say," which oftentimes isn't the best way to find out what atheists think and say because you end up getting a filtered version of it if you're not careful. And when they get a new argument, it's like, "Now what do I do?" Panic sets in.

So when you put on those glasses and become I guess Madalyn Murray McDowell or someone like that, we can do that in these times, then all of a sudden, they're caught off-guard with these new arguments because they haven't been adequately prepared. So we really have to do a better job in the church of preparing people and particularly young people, the freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors in high school who are getting ready to head off to college and if they've been bubbled and cocooned all their life without an awareness of what this is, when they hit the big campus, all of a sudden their actual feeling toward the church is they feel betrayed.

"Why didn't someone tell me about this earlier? Why am I hearing about this kind of stuff for the first time?" That kind of thing, and so it ends up being new. Not only do they not know how to respond but it ends up being new and they think that they've been baited and switched, if I can say it that way, and so the better job we can do of preparing people, the better.

*Mikel Del Rosario*

Sean, in your ministry, what would you say is the No. 1 issue that gets people angry like that where they're so defensive that they don't know how to respond with grace and what should we prepare people for? What issue do you think is the top one?

*Sean McDowell*

Well, in my experience with students and interacting with nonbelievers, I think there's a few common issues that come up. I think a huge issue in particular is just how can Jesus be the only way? It seems exclusivistic in a culture which tolerance and inclusivism is becoming the highest virtue to say that my Buddhist, or atheist, or Hindu, or Muslim friends can't go to heaven. It just feels so hateful, so that riles people up.

I think with students, questions of science and faith are huge. Is evolution true? What do we mean by evolution? Can a Christian believe in evolution? Do we embrace intelligent design? That's a huge issue.

I think the other huge issue, it always has been and probably always will be, is the problem of evil and suffering. I, in fact, posted a blog today. I call it Epic Fail, where I was having a conversation with somebody about evil and it was all about answering their problems but not understanding the suffering they had been through. So evil, I've found in a lot of my conversations when we get down to it, it's just that people don't like the way God runs the world.

And then the last one, so the exclusivity of Christ, science and faith, the problem of evil, and then clearly today issues around gender and sexuality, homosexuality, transgenderism, and I'd be curious what you think, Darrell. It seems to me the question is less in people's minds is Christianity true, but is Christianity good. Because if I don't think Christianity is good and it means that my friends who are gay can't get married, then why would I even want to believe it even if it's true? So it seems to me this question of whether Christianity is even good or not is at the forefront, whether people realize it or not, of their minds and how they filter and even process Christian claims.

*Darrell Bock*

Yeah, I think that's true and I think it's because we've had a shift. One of the shifts that we are talking about that's happened in our culture is we used to be a culture that did wrestle with ideas and try to pursue truth. As we've moved into a culture that thinks that truth is more relative and it's about perceptions rather than realities, if I can say it that way, and there are many truths out there from one angle or another, that kind of thing. We've moved out of a discussion that rotates around ideas to how people feel and perceive the things that they engage with, and in that move, you open up a lot of territory for conversation.

So there's no place to land. We're all like hovercraft that have no place to land and we're all trying to negotiate this space together side by side and some of us are jets, and some of us are drones, and some of us are helicopters, and we're all trying to negotiate in, and with, and around each other, and when you take the idea of truth away, you're fighting for space. And what people want to do, it's the great irony. We say we're a more tolerant society but if you actually look and see what's going on around us today, we're actually becoming a more intolerant society in the midst of the claims of tolerance because we all have visceral feelings about some of the things that we see and hear without a place to land.

And so yes, I think for a lot of people, the question is is Christianity good, which is why goodness from a Christian is so important because it challenges the feel that people have that somehow Christianity is exclusive, it's elitist, you think you're better than I am, it's arrogant, it's hypocritical, fill in the blank. When people live in a way that denies all that and they care for people in particularly in ways where they go, "Why are you doing that? No one else treats me that way despite disagreeing with me or whatever?" It stands out and then it becomes a draw.

*Mikel Del Rosario* Darrell, how do we see Jesus and Paul, we want to go back to scripture and say if our culture is starting to be more like the first century, what tips can we take away from the way that Jesus and Paul engaged that could help us today?

*Darrell Bock* Well, first of all, they engaged. They didn't withdraw. And secondly, they tried to build bridges to people in ways that sometimes would catch someone off-guard. I think the key to apology is what I call causing someone to hit the pause button on what they're thinking.

And so when Paul begins his speech on Mars Hill with, "I see that you're very religious in every respect," which is the last thing you expect to come out of Paul's mouth because not a few verses earlier, it said, "He was provoked by all the idols that he saw." He wasn't happy those idols were there. And yet he builds a bridge to them and the way he builds a bridge is, "I saw this idol that was kind of a –" fill in the blank, to the unknown god.

Now let's talk about what goes in that blank and what he's saying is, "I respect your desire to be engaged with the spiritual but let's talk about what that spirituality is," and he walks in and he tries to get them to hit the pause button by what he says. He challenges them. He says, "God can't be contained in idols. He isn't a bird, or an animal, or something like that." He's challenging them directly but he's set it up in such a way that the person on the other side is supposed to go, "Hm, I don't know if I've ever quite thought of it that way."

And the more apologetics can do those kinds of moves, the better off we are. The hard part is that we now have 2,000 years of Christian history that we're responsible for in some degree that we have to defend and explain that didn't exist in the first century. So that backlog kind of sometimes slaps us in the face and we have to admit to some things that were done in the name of Christ that are regrettable and that adds to the burden but that doesn't change the way in which you make the approach and try to have the conversation.

*Mikel Del Rosario* Sean, many of the thing that you mention, clearly we need love and truth coming together at the same time. When it comes to things like science, for example, or issues in the Bible, how does integrating love and truth work with those kinds of things?

*Sean McDowell* Well, I was a communication major at Biola and they'd always talk about in the process of communication, there's two core things. There's truth, which is the content, and then there's the medium in which that truth is communicated, which is either text or some particular technology for the relationship in which we carry it out. So when you talk about science and faith in these different apologetic issues, we need to be willing to have courage today. In fact, I'm becoming more and more convinced that kindness and courage are the two most important Christian virtues today, and we need to have courage to actually speak truth and say things that are unpopular.

I did my dissertation on the fate of the apostles and I was just stunned. I read the whole New Testament paying attention to every time either they were persecuted or the apostles were told to expect persecution, and it is at least a theme if virtually every book in some fashion except I think maybe 3 John and one other small – and so if I remember, it's if you believe in Jesus, expect to be treated this way. So instead of crying foul and freaking out when things don't go our way as Christians, we should have the confidence and expect this. Now we don't need a persecution complex and go too far, but we need to expect that it's gonna be difficult for people to hear.

I mean Darrell just gave an example of Acts 17 where Paul preaches truth. Well, most people weren't converted, but afterwards, a handful of people were interested in hearing more. So we need healthy expectations and to be willing to speak truth but in a way that is just kind towards the people we speak to.

I've seen so many examples of just Christian apologists who just have a condescending tone, who want to win arguments more than others, and a part of the purpose of a new kind of apologist is just to wake up apologists to say, "You know what? If we don't have love, if we are just trying to win an argument, we're going to actually do more harm than good." So speak truth but really do a gut check and say, "Why am I speaking this?"

And I've found in principle that if I don't know atheists and I speak about atheism as this abstract kind of truth that's out there, those atheists, those postmodernists, those Muslims, when I get out and actually build relationships with them, then I'm a lot less likely to stereotype people and I'm more likely to speak truth lovingly because these are individuals that come to my mind that I really, really care about.

*Darrell Bock*

Yeah, there's another passage in Acts that's important. It's in Acts 4 when Peter and John are released and the community prays about what they're going through, and they don't pray to nuke the enemy and they don't pray to avoid the persecution. What do they pray for? They pray for boldness and faithfulness in the midst of it.

One of the things that the church does is we whine a lot. We whine a lot about the persecution that we go through and in fact what the scripture tells us is you shouldn't be whining. You should expect it, as you've noted, and then the question is have the boldness to go through it. So you're right. This courage and love combination is really, really important. This courage and truthfulness is also important. A phrase that I've heard is convicted civility. We have convictions on the one hand but we're civil on the other because we understand that our battle, our spiritual battle, that person is not the enemy. That person is in one sense the goal.

I like to use the picture of we're like a Delta Force called to rescue someone out of the clutches of someone else who is trying to destroy them, and so people are in the clutches of the devil. "Our battle is not against flesh and blood," Ephesians 6 says, "but it's against the spiritual forces and spiritual powers," and our assignment is to try and rescue them out of the hands of those spiritual forces. So I care about them when I'm attempting to rescue and in the midst of that then, that impacts the way I engage them even if they're engaging me with ideas that I know are the opposite of what scripture is saying.

*Mikel Del Rosario* It sounds like there's definitely a spiritual formation component that needs to be part of apologetics training, that these things aren't separate from each other where one's all head and one's all heart but it's actually both together. How would you advise say a pastor asked you, "How can I help my congregation move away from this let's fight the culture war kind of a mentality to more of a conversation of being an ambassador?"

*Darrell Bock* The most important way to do it is gonna be reflected in how you talk about the culture you're engaging with and I think if you listen to the way most people talk about culture, interact with culture, describe culture, and there are things to challenge in the culture. There's no doubt about it, but you get a sense of does that person, when they're talking about all these other people who are out there really care about the people that he's talking about? And so I call it Jimmy Cagney theology, "You dirty rat. You shouldn't be doing that." It's kind of that and you ask where's the good news in that? Where's the communication of love and concern that's in the midst of that?

And what you want to do is say, "Yes, our culture is messed up. We're all messed up. We're all in the same boat. We all have the same need. Were it not for the grace of God, that would be me. In fact, without the grace of God, that's where I was." All those kinds of things that can be said to connect to where the culture is.

And then another thing that often never happens is we don't talk about the aspirations of culture at its best when it shows those inklings in the human heart because we're made in God's image, reaching out and groping for that which is best in life and to spot those moments from the perspective of the culture and grab hold of them. These are aspirations that you understand as well and scripture has the ability to take you there, that kind of thing. We don't do enough of that, either.

So either we're too negative or we don't see any of the positive bridges that exist and when we do both, all that we do is we create a world of "us" and "them" and the "them" understands they're not us.

*Mikel Del Rosario* Sean, how do you do this at the apologetics program at Biola in terms of marrying truth and tone in the way we train people?

*Sean McDowell* Let me answer this in light of the question you just asked Darrell, like how can a pastor do this? 'Cause I think it's the same for our program as well. Probably the most important thing is to just actually model and do this, because I found a congregation and also my students, whether my high school students or my students at Biola, will follow the example that I set, whether it's right or whether it's wrong.

So I had a chance to speak this past Sunday at my church and I was talking about how faith is intelligent, Exodus 7-11, and I just told a story about my wife and I buying a used car last week. We got a minivan, I'm somewhat sad to admit, but actually it's great. I love it. But a conversation that I had with the car salesman there that led towards spiritual things and just today, I sent him a book.

Well, if we want our congregation to engage culture, we better be actually doing it and better be looking for opportunities to share our faith, to have spiritual conversations. So I'm not just standing up on a podium or standing up in my classroom and saying do this. I'm sharing stories of how I do it and how it goes well, and the blog I wrote about today was actually about a time it was an epic fail and it didn't go well. So we need to get out there and actually do it.

Another way, I love what Darrell said about finding positive things within culture. I love to review movies. I reviewed *The Jungle Book* last week, and the first thing I always do is I find positive things, "Oh, this was done well. This was great. This matches up with the Christian worldview." And then of attacking it, just saying, "Here's ways as Christians we might see this a little bit differently. Here's how it might differ from the Genesis account."

So I'm drawing a contrast but in a way that's respectful to them, a way that's caring. It's not an attacking way but a thoughtful way just to draw out spiritual truth. So I think if we do these practical things as leaders, whether as pastors, or whether teachers, or whether parents, I think that's the best way to model it for the next generation.

*Darrell Bock*

Yeah, and I think that what that does is it builds segues into conversations so that when you connect with culture in that way, all of a sudden you find yourself, "Hey, I'm walking through an open door," and now I'm into a conversation where I didn't have to make a theological move because the move was already made for me and I'm already there.

*Mikel Del Rosario*

I think in all of this we're seeing that not only do we need to marry truth and tone but to help people understand that apologetics isn't an end in and of itself, that we don't want just people to accept Christian truth claims just because we think they're right or just because they are right, but we want to see people walk into a saving relationship with a living God. We want people to encounter Jesus, and so to help people who are representing the Christian faith as ambassadors, to have that forefront in our minds, and here at Dallas Seminary, we call that teaching truth and loving well, so I really like how we do that.

We've just barely scratched the surface of this. I'd love to have you back another time, Sean, so we could talk more about engaging as apologists and ambassadors in the 21st century, so will you come back again?

*Sean McDowell* Absolutely. This has been a blast. Thanks for having me.

*Mikel Del Rosario* Awesome. Well, thank you again, Sean, for being with us today. It's a pleasure. Dr. Bock, thank you once again for being with us.

*Darrell Bock* It's always good to be here.

*Mikel Del Rosario* And we hope that you will join us once again on The Table here at Dallas Theological Seminary where we discuss issues of God and culture.