

Jesus - The Master Apologist

WE HAVE THE MIND OF CHRIST (1CO 2:6)

Introduction

The essential problem with trying to share the Christian worldview—in a multicultural society that views itself as postmodern and post-Christian—is that it is often met with apprehension by the average Christian. In fact, the number one reason why Christians do not witness is fear—mostly the fear of rejection and fear of being humiliated. Those fears are well founded, but ought not to stop us from sharing the gospel. Let us just accept the fact that we will be rejected and will be called foolish. Was this not the case with Jesus? Did not his own people reject him and try to humiliate him? Jesus told his disciples, “A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household! So do not be afraid of them (Matthew 10:24-26).

The question we must answer is “Is it enough to be like our master and teacher?” Once we accept the fact that we will be rejected and ridiculed, as was Jesus, then why bother being afraid? If it is enough for us to be treated the way Jesus was treated, then there is nothing to fear. However, just because some will call us foolish, that does not mean that we are supposed to be foolish. In fact, those who confronted Jesus ended up exposing their own foolishness. Our task is to examine the way Jesus handled tough—and often antagonistic—questions. To better understand how we can study the way Jesus engaged his questioners and critics imagine the following scenario.

You and your spouse are invited to a dinner party that is being hosted by the provost of your university. She is holding this event to welcome a new philosophy professor to the campus and to share some key thoughts about a few new academic policies she plans to announce at the beginning of the next school year. As you ponder this invitation, given the history of such events, you know that these new policies will most likely be a response to some of the current controversial issues making headlines, such as gay marriage. Of course, you are the only dean who is a Christian and will be quite outnumbered when the time comes to “discuss” these new policies.

After you arrive at the dinner and spend some time cordially greeting your friends and colleagues, everyone moves into the dining area for dinner. Casual conversation continues around the table and based upon some of the dialogues, you can get a sense for what the rest of the night has in store. In fact, the professor sitting across from you is not only very active in the gay movement on campus, but she is also a strong political advocate for legalizing gay marriage and was recently interviewed on a local radio show. You can also overhear your wife talking to the spouse of the new professor who is telling your wife about a past experience with a narrow minded neighbor who was quick to condemn a woman’s right to have an abortion. At that moment, a colleague turns to you and says, “You’re a Christian and have some strong conservative views, what’s your take on this gay issue? Do you think homosexuality is immoral?” Now, how would you respond? **What** would you say? **How** would you say it? What if Jesus was in that same situation—**what** would he say and **how** would he say it?

This training unit will examine the technique of *Jesus—The Master Apologist*. If we can learn the method and principles used by our Master in handling tough questions, then we can utilize it to help solve the problem of communicating absolute truth in a diverse and liberal society. The passage we will study is found in Matthew 21:23-32 – *The Question of Authority*:

The outline for this unit is as follows:

Matthew 21:23-32—The Question of Authority (God Or Human Governments?)

Part I—Identification of Truth (*The Principle—Knowledge*)

The Unavoidable Question (23)
The Unexpected Answer (24-25a)
The Unbelievable Response (25b-27)

Part II—Illustration of Truth (*The Parable—Understanding*)

The Truth About God (28)
The Truth About Humanity (29-30)
The Truth About Redemption (31)

Part III—Application of Truth (*The Personal—Wisdom*)

The Eternal Consequences of Belief (31)
The Eternal Consequences of Unbelief (32)

Part I—Identify The Truth (The Principle—Knowledge)

The Unavoidable Question (23)

The ultimate, unavoidable question in life is the question of authority—who has the right to determine the rules in life and the power to enforce them? This question is implied in almost every major decision we make in life. There are only two options with respect to the answer to this question: It is either God or human authorities (governments). The answer to this question is the most important decision any person can make in this life. Christian philosopher Peter Kreeft put it quite aptly when he said,

The idea of God has guided or deluded more lives, changed more history, inspired more music and poetry and philosophy than anything else, real or imagined. It has made more of a difference to human life on this planet, both individually and collectively, than anything else ever has.¹

Jesus, in this passage, is teaching in the synagogue. The priests and elders, who together number at least 120, approach him with a question intended to force him to say that he is the Son of God. If he does admit to receiving his authority directly from God, because he God's Son, the crowd will be a witness to his apparent blasphemy. They will convict him before he has a chance to explain himself and give the people his reasoning behind, and evidence for, his claim.

Let's think about this emotionally charged question. When someone gets emotionally involved with an issue, it becomes increasingly difficult for that person to follow a logical argument. The distraction can become so great that the result usually ends up with the discussion "producing more heat than light." This is the case with Jesus and it is also the case in the dinner scenario presented above. To give a direct answer to a question it is not always the wisest thing to do. Consider another statement by Kreeft,

¹ J. P. Moreland and Kai Nielsen, *Does God Exist?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 11.

There is nothing more pointless than an answer to a question that is not fully understood, fully posed. We are far too impatient with questions, and therefore far too shallow in appreciating answers.²

For Jesus to directly answer this question would truly be pointless and undermine his own authority because the question was not fully understood, nor fully posed. Hence, his direct answer would not be fully appreciated or understood in the context of who he was and the evidence he had offered during his ministry. Let's take another look at this question:

MT 21:23 Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?"

The spiritual leaders of Israel ask Jesus a two-fold question: "What is the authoritative basis for your teaching, and who gave it to you?" In other words, "We are the authority in Israel and none of us have given you the right to do what you are doing, so who did?"

Try to imagine that you are one of the people in the crowd, observing this interchange between Jesus and these religious leaders. Remember, it is the Jewish Passover and Jerusalem is packed with about 2.5 million people. The temple is jammed and you are one of the Jews who came to hear Jesus for yourself. You have heard many things about him, "he is a prophet," "he is Elijah come back," "he is a good teacher," "he demon possessed." However, you have decided to listen to him for yourself and make up your own mind. As you are listening and watching Jesus teach, the crowd parts and a very large group of religious leaders walk straight down the temple courts, stop Jesus and ask him this question of authority. What does he say, how does he answer?

The Unexpected Answer (24-25a)

The answer given by Jesus is most unexpected, because he answers their question with a question. Yet, when you study the dialogical method of Jesus and his use of logic, it doesn't take long to recognize that he almost always answers a question with a question. He said,

MT 21:24 "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵ John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?"

When you realize that Jesus almost always answered a question with a question, it is amazing. What is more amazing is that his questions are of a particular nature. His questions forced the questioners to examine the basis and assumptions of their own questions. Somehow, Jesus was able to stop those who questioned him before the interaction could actually take place—how? What is Jesus doing by using this method, why does he do it and how does he do it? If you look into the gospel accounts, you will see that Jesus asked approximately 153 questions. For example, consider the following passages:

MT 22:18 But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, ²⁰ and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?"

² Peter Kreeft, *Making Sense Out of Suffering* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1986), 27.

MT 7:3 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?”

MT 15:3 “Why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?”

MK 8:36 “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? ³⁷ Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”

MT 22:41 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ⁴² “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?”

MK 9:12 “Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected?”

LK 18:18 A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁹ “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone.”

Now, with this background on the questions of Jesus, let’s get back to the question of authority that the religious leaders asked Jesus and see what we can learn. Jesus said,

“I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?”

First, notice that the original question asked by the religious leaders was aimed at Jesus and his authority. By asking this question, Jesus shifts the focal point from his particular authority, to the truth about the basis for all authority—namely, God. So he basically says, “Okay, I will answer your question about authority when you acknowledge that God is the ultimate authority and not you men. Let’s talk about someone we all know—John—where did the authority for his baptism come from—you men or God?” Their answer to this question will show whether or not they seek the truth.

The Unbelievable Response (25b-27)

Now, this seems like a fairly simple question for the spiritual experts of Israel to answer—right? Remember that you are one of the people in the crowd watching this episode. So, let’s see how they respond.

MT 21:25 They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ ²⁶ But if we say, ‘From men’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”

In the original language, the term “discussed” means for a long time! This is not a hard question—in fact, the people in the crowd (including you) know the answer to this question—God, not men, authorized John’s baptism (ministry of teaching). Yet, these “experts” of Israel are forced to embrace the horns of a dilemma. Look at their initial thoughts, “If we say from heaven (God), he will ask why didn’t you believe him?”

Notice they are catching on that Jesus will ask another question. If they were men of integrity and answered Jesus honestly, they would have said that John’s authority came not from men like us, but from God. Logically, the dialogue might have gone something like this:

Jesus: “Why didn’t you believe John?”

Leaders: Believe what?

Jesus: Believe John when he said of me,

“I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God” (John 1:32-34).

If these leaders answered Jesus honestly, they would have had the answer to their own question! How does Jesus do this? His method of controlling a dialogue with a question is absolutely amazing! He uses a profoundly simple law of logic to force his questioners to acknowledge the truth principle behind this issue of authority. Namely, all authority comes from God. The profoundly simple law of logic is called the *law of noncontradiction*. This law of logic simply says that opposite statements cannot both be true at the same time and in the same sense. Up—down are opposites. In—out are opposites. True—false are opposites. All authority is from God or it is from man—these are opposite statements.

These religious leaders are forced to respond to this either God or men question, based on the law of noncontradiction. If they say from God, then Jesus will ask, “Why didn’t you believe him?” If they say they did not approve John as a prophet, they are afraid of the people who believed John was a prophet. So, what do they say? MT 21:27 So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

We don’t know! What kind of a response is this? It’s an unbelievable response! That was not a hard question. Remember you and the rest of the crowd know the answer to this question. Without saying a word about the dishonest and hypocritical nature of these leaders, Jesus undermines their authority by simply asking them a question! Their answer—typical unbelief—we don’t know. When the evidence is so overwhelming, the only place dishonest unbelief can go is agnosticism.

The response of these religious leaders is typical of intellectually dishonest people who are confronted with inescapable truth claims, they appeal to ignorance. Any open-minded person in the crowd, at this point, has to be thinking that this Jesus is quite amazing and would want to hear more of his teachings. Since the religious leaders publicly demonstrated their disregard for truth and authority, then they do not deserve an answer from Jesus and he tells them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.” What is important here is not so much the hardness of the religious leaders, but the open-minded skeptics in the crowd. The truth was put forth by Jesus and those who are open to the truth will find it.

Part II—Illustration of Truth (The Parable—Understanding)

Of course, the next statement of Jesus is a question. He says, “What do you think?” In other words, “Okay, the question about John was too hard for you men, so try this one.” Here is a parable—tell me what do you think?

MT 21:28 “There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’”²⁹ ‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.³⁰ “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.”³¹ “Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

In Part I, Jesus identified the truth principle that all authority comes from God. This principle gives us knowledge of that truth (what we need to know to make a decision). In Part II, Jesus illustrates that

principle with this parable to give us insight or understanding of that knowledge (how the principle applies in real life). It is one thing to “know” something, it is quite another to “understand” it or “visualize” it. When someone says, “I see your point,” that usually indicates a deeper understanding of what has been said (knowledge). This illustration helps us to “see” the point that Jesus is making. The parable contains three basic elements of truth: The truth about God, humanity and redemption.

The Truth About God (28)

“There was a man who had two sons.” The man refers to God the Father. He is the one who is sovereign over all humanity (represented by the two sons) and all authority rests with Him. God alone sets the rules and gives the commands. Hence, all people, including religious leaders, will give an account to Him. God needs no witnesses or jury, He alone knows all the facts of the case and is always right when He speaks and justified when He judges (Psalm 51:4).

God knows the hearts of men and cannot be fooled by empty words. You honor me with your lips, but your hearts are far away from me (Isaiah 29:13). People can fool other people and impress them with outward appearances and words, but not so with God. Men may judge on the outside, but God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). So, before anyone attempts to play games with God, remember, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes to him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13). This is the truth about God—He is to be feared above all else because “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31).

The Truth About Humanity (29-30)

MT 21:28 “He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’”²⁹ ‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.³⁰ “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.”

As previously stated, the two sons represent all of humanity. The curious thing about this parable is that there is no third son—the one who says yes to his father and actually does what his father asks. The reason for this is that there is no one who is righteous before God—not even one (Romans 3:10-12). For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

Actually, there is another son who said yes and obeyed—Jesus—he is the third son. Yet, the religious leaders actually believed that they fit into that category! However, the truth about humanity is that no one but Jesus said yes and did what the father said. CS Lewis said all humanity fits into one of two categories, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’”³

So, Jesus asks, “Which of the two did what his father wanted?” Their answer comes quickly—with no discussion—“The first,” they answered. The key phrase in the parable is “but later he changed his mind.” One son changes his mind and obeys the father, but the other keeps saying yes to God but keeps living a life of no. His words do not match his life, and the father knows! There are eternal consequences of denying God’s authority, or submitting to it.

What is fascinating about this parable is that Jesus uses the same principle of truth—all authority comes from God—but illustrates it in parable form. He gets them to agree with it and when they do, they indirectly indict themselves! They refuse to “change their minds” and embrace the truth of God.

³ C.S. Lewis *The Great Divorce* ((New York: Macmillan, 1946), 72-73).

Part III—Application of Truth (The Personal—Wisdom)

MATT 21:31 Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.”

There are personal consequences to accepting or rejecting the wisdom of God—as Richard Weaver said, “Ideas Have Consequences.” Acting on true ideas will yield good consequences and acting on false ideas will have bad consequences. God holds each of us personally responsible to apply the truth to our lives. God’s wisdom is very personal because He brings His truth to each of us in His own sovereign way and each of us will either reject it or yield to it. Hence, one of two consequences will follow.

The Eternal Consequences of Belief (31)

True repentance (changing ones mind about disobeying God) results in entering the kingdom of God—nothing more is needed. There is enough evidence to make a decision to submit to God so that no person on earth has an excuse. This is spelled out very clearly in God’s word:

RO 1:18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

God has clearly shown Himself to all people, everywhere. His eternal power (He is the first cause of the universe) and His divine nature (He is the basis for the moral law) have been clearly seen through natural revelation (creation). No one is excused from obeying God. Those who acknowledge and submit to God will enter the kingdom of heaven. That is the story of the tax collectors and prostitutes. They “changed their minds” and submitted to the only wise and true God.

The Eternal Consequences of Unbelief (32)

The eternal consequences of refusing to submit to the authority of God, is to spend an eternity isolated from Him. All who reject God will ultimately be cast out of His presence and live forever in a conscious state of eternal separation from God in hell. Some people are just not willing to submit to God. Jesus expressed this truth when he stood over Jerusalem and cried out, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, *but you were not willing*” (Matthew 23:37). CS Lewis calls the unwilling “rebels to the end.” He said,

I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*. . . . In the long run the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell is itself a question: “What are you asking God to do?” To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to give them a fresh start, smoothing over every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But he has done so, on Calvary. To forgive them? They will not be forgiven. To leave them alone? Alas, I am afraid that is what He does.⁴

⁴ Ibid., 120-122, 127-128 .

Part IV—Application of Matthew 21 (Principles, Parables & People)

Jesus: His Method & His Principle

When you take a good look at this section of Scripture, you will see how Jesus uses the inductive method of bringing his listeners to discover the truth principle behind the issue of authority. We use the same kind of method when we study God's word using the inductive Bible study method. We study the text and discover the principle of truth behind the text. In fact, in a good inductive sermon, the preacher will ask questions of the text to bring the people through the same thought processes he had when he studied so that they can see how he arrived at the truth principle (knowledge). Then, a good illustration or story ought to be told to help clarify the principle (understanding). Yet, if the preacher cannot tell us how this principle was applied in his own life (wisdom), he would be guilty of a great disservice to God's people. Hence, we need to do the same and apply what we have learned from Jesus to situations that call for knowledge, understanding and wisdom.

The simply profound principle used by Jesus is the law of noncontradiction: opposite statements cannot both be true at the same time and in the same sense. This seemingly insignificant law of logic is so powerful that nothing false can stand in its presence. We find it in Scripture as follows:

2CO 10:4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

All false statements (arguments and pretensions) oppose (set themselves up against) the knowledge of God. This profoundly simple logical law—used correctly and wisely—will absolutely demolish false ideas that oppose the truth of God. Actually, these false statements—when spoken in forthright English—self-destruct. Here are a few examples:

1. We cannot know anything about reality.
*Does this statement offer us any knowledge of reality?
If not, then it is meaningless. If so, then it is self-defeating.*
2. We cannot be certain about truth claims.
*How can we be certain that this statement is true?
If we can be certain, it is self-defeating. If we cannot, it could be false.*
3. What's true for you is not true for me, truth is personal.
*Is this belief true for both the speaker and listener? If so, it is self-defeating.
If it is the speaker's own personal truth, then it is only true for the speaker.
If it is only true for the speaker, then why bother telling it to others?*
4. There are no better views about reality; they are all equal.
*Is this view being offered as a better view of reality? If so, it is self-defeating.
Is this view just the same as (equal to) the view that there are better views?
If this view is just the same as (equal to) other views, why make the point?
Why should the listener consider this view, if it is equal to the listener's view?*

5. There is no objective truth, our minds mold reality.
*Is that the way it “really” is? Or, did someone’s mind mold that view?
 If that’s the way reality is, then it is objectively true and self-defeating.
 If someone’s mind molded that view, then what’s the difference?
 What’s the speaker’s point? How can the speaker have a point to make?*

6. Only that which is scientifically verifiable, is true!
*Is this view of truth a scientifically verifiable view?
 If so, who did the experiment, when was it done and how was it performed?
 If this view is not scientifically verifiable, then it is self-defeating.*

7. Learn tolerance and stop judging people who don’t agree with you!
*Is the speaker being tolerant of opposing views or judging them as intolerant?
 If the speaker is judging them, then it is a self-defeating position.
 If the speaker is truly tolerant and open-minded, then why bother speaking?
 Shouldn’t the speaker be saying that intolerant views are to be tolerate too?*

Now that we have a basic understanding of the method and principle used by Jesus, let’s apply it to the scenario given in the beginning of this unit. The moment of truth has come when a colleague says, “You’re a Christian and have some strong conservative views, what’s your take on this gay issue? Do you think homosexuality is immoral?”

Your mind races through several options. You can just state the obvious and say “Yes, you’re right—I am a conservative Christian and believe that the Bible clearly states that homosexuality is immoral. But, that does not mean that I am anyone’s judge. I care about all people, including the gay community and want God’s best for them.” Okay, that’s an option that doesn’t seem too bad. Unless the professor who advocates gay rights says, “How can you believe in some archaic ethical system, based on an ancient book written by male chauvinists? It is hard for me to believe that an educated man such as yourself would appeal to some religious dogma as the basis for moral authority in our contemporary society.” On second thought, maybe that’s not the best way to go.

Well, you could say, “I believe the act (sin) itself is immoral, but I love the actor (sinner).” That might sound right—uncompromising, yet loving. But, what if someone probes a bit deeper and asks, “What do you really mean? Are you saying that our moral judgments ought to only be aimed at the act itself and not the one who commits the act? Would you actually tell someone whose daughter was raped that the act of raping her daughter was morally wrong, but don’t think badly of the person who raped her?” Okay, that might not be the wisest response for this group!

What about Jesus, if he was sitting here and someone asked him about homosexuality, what would he say? One thing is for sure, he would have a question to ask—but what kind of question? He always seems to go from the particular to the general—when they questioned his authority, Jesus moved the question from his particular authority, to John’s authority, to God’s authority. In this case, the particular issue has to do with whether or not homosexual behavior is immoral. However, the moral standard to judge homosexuality in particular, must also be the basis to judge any sexual behavior in general.

So, maybe Jesus would ask a question that would shift the discussion from this particular issue to the general truth principle or moral law behind the issue. He might respond with something like this, “I have no problem in answering your question and would be open to hearing others on this matter as well. However, before I answer your question on this *particular kind of sexual behavior* (homosexuality), could you please

tell me if there is anything morally wrong with *any kind of sexual behavior*? For example, is there anything wrong with incest or rape or pedophilia?”

If the person responds by saying there is nothing morally wrong with any kind of sexual behavior, then all moral views about sex are reduced to mere opinions—matters of taste. As such, they are mere personal preferences, similar to “I like chocolate and you prefer vanilla.” If that’s the case, why take issue with someone who prefers vanilla to chocolate? However, if the individual believes that some kinds of sexual behavior are morally wrong, then we are discussing matters of truth and must agree upon the standard by which any sexual behavior ought to be judged.

Once this “principle question” is raised, it shifts the focus of the discussion from the issue to the assumptions built into the question and changes the point of entry in the dialogue. Formulating the right principle question narrows down the “battle field” from an all out war on opinions, to a focused “hand-to-hand” combat on truth. Consequently, your colleagues only have a few options in responding to the question, “Is there anything morally wrong with any kind of sexual behavior?” Let’s look at three possible responses from your colleagues:

1. There are no morally wrong sexual behaviors, all morality is subjective.
2. It depends upon the culture. In our culture, we have decided incest, rape and pedophilia are morally wrong. However, right and wrong, normal and abnormal are intangible concepts—all such “realities” are perceived only through the cultural screen (worldview) mediated by the “conventions” of the culture. There are no “better” views of morality.
3. Of course, incest, rape and pedophilia are morally wrong. However, gay people are born gay; they have no choice in the matter.

There are no morally wrong behaviors, all morality is subjective.

If your colleague believes that all moral views are subjective matters of taste—as in preferring one flavor over another—then whatever view you prefer to believe—such as homosexuality is morally wrong—ought not to bother your inquisitive colleague. The response from your morally subjective colleague ought to simply be, “Oh, vanilla is good if you happen to like it. However, I prefer chocolate.” With that, you can also ask, “Would you not agree that if someone preferred butter pecan (incest) or strawberry (pedophilia) that would be their preference too? Isn’t that what you mean by moral subjectivity?”

It depends upon the culture; moral principles are matters of cultural conventions. . . . There are no “better” views of morality.

If your colleague responds in this manner, make sure you clarify this view. If all views of morals are conventions, then so is this view of morals. You can ask your colleague if his view of morals is also a matter of cultural conventions. Or, is his view of morals true for all cultures (absolute)? Furthermore, there are many views of ethics, besides cultural conventions, so is your colleague’s view being offered as a “better” view of morality? Or is it just different? If he believes it is better, then his view is self-defeating, for there must be a standard to judge one view as “better” than another view. If it is merely a different view of morals, why bother debating the issue? Why bother when there are so many other views of morality to choose from? We are back to the ice cream analogy—just pick one that you prefer and don’t judge anyone else who happens to choose a moral view that you don’t like. Especially a moral view that judges homosexual behavior as morally wrong.

Of course, incest, rape and pedophilia are morally wrong. However, gay people have no choice, they are born gay.

If this response is offered, there is hope. We now have common ground—at least implied common ground. For in order to judge some sexual behavior as morally wrong and others as not, there must be a standard and that is where the dialogue needs to move toward. However, before that can happen, you must dismiss the idea of being born gay as not having a choice. Granting your colleague's point, which is not based in any scientific discoveries, you can ask a question or two to get the discussion moving towards a standard. You can ask your colleague "Is homosexual behavior the only sexual behavior that is genetically determined? Or, is it true for all sexual behavior?" (Again, note how the question shifts the focus from the particular to the general). To be consistent, the answer must be "all sexual behavior" is genetically determined. If he agrees, then how can anyone be held morally responsible for any sexual acts, including incest, rape and pedophilia.

Closing Remarks Concerning Absolute Moral Standards

The goal of the aforementioned examples would be to help others see why there exists a higher set of moral laws that transcend human governments and which are the assumptions (first principles) of all civilizations. C.S. Lewis thoughtfully articulated this first principle of law in his book titled, *Mere Christianity*. Lewis said,

The moment you say that one set of moral ideas can be better than another, you are, in fact, measuring them both by a standard and saying that one of them conforms to that standard more nearly than the other. But the standard that measures two things is something different from either. You are, in fact, comparing them both with some Real Morality, admitting that there is such a thing as a real Right, independent of what people think. . . . [If not] there would be no sense in saying that any one nation had ever been more correct in its approval than any other; no sense in saying that the world could ever grow morally better or morally worse."⁵

Consider putting what Lewis said in a simple logical options format to help others see the truth:

- Option 1: All views of morality are false (this claim is non-sense—it is self-contradictory).
- Option 2: All views of morality are true (this view includes opposites and is also self-defeating).
- Option 3: Some views are better than others (anyone who claims to have a view believes this).
- Conclusion: There must be an unchanging view—some Real Morality.

Remember, the goal is to move towards moral absolutes in general and if possible apply it to the particular issue. The standard that judges rape, incest and pedophilia as morally wrong, is the same standard that condemns homosexual behavior. The key is for the person, by God's Spirit, to come to that conclusion.

The main point here is to recognize how Jesus responded to certain kinds of questions. His method of using a principle question to catapult a conversation out of the emotional, subjective level and put it on a more non-emotional, objective level is quite powerful. So, we need to focus on questioning principles rather than personal beliefs in order to engage people at the level of concepts, rather than the level of convictions. Of course, this will take some effort on our part as we put the method Jesus used into practice.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 25.

In conclusion, consider how one professor, Burford J. Furman (Associate Professor, Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, San Jose State University), started using the method of Jesus in email correspondences. As you read his email exchanges and letter to the editor, note how his brief emails in question form can evoke responses that force the other person to think more clearly about their views. This ought to both challenge and encourage you to study the greatest thinker of all time—our Lord and Master—Jesus Christ.

Mountain View Voice Editorial May 28, 2004- Gay pride wins out in Los Altos

The Los Altos City Council exhibited its own sense of tolerance Tuesday, when it voted to change its collective mind and declare June 7 Gay Pride Day as well as Tolerance Day at the request of the Gay-Straight Alliance club at Los Altos High School, which serves Mountain View and Los Altos students. . . .

Mayor John Moss was one of two votes to change Tuesday. He told the Voice last week that while he was not against Gay Pride Day or homosexuals, he knew many people in Los Altos who considered gays and lesbians "perverts." He said then that he felt establishing a Gay Pride Day could have created a backlash in the community. Thankfully, the Los Altos City Council had the courage to change course and proclaim June 7 a day of gay pride. Perhaps it is a sign that the citizens of Los Altos are beginning to understand that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is no longer moral or legal.

Today's struggle for gay rights is similar to earlier fights in this country to ban discrimination against minorities in schools and other institutions. It is good to see Los Altos recognize how important, and harmless, it is to grant the students of the Gay-Straight Alliance a special day.

Dear Editor,

With regard to polarizing issues such as what your May 28, 2004 editorial, "Gay pride wins out in Los Altos" raised, I urge careful thinking and reflection along with respectful public discussion about the underlying principles of the issue rather than specific conclusions reflected in opinions on the matter. Your editorial brought up the morality and legality of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Several points are crucial to address in this regard. First, it is important to define clearly what is meant by "discrimination". Second, it is important to reflect on how the term ought to be applied. Are there any limits in its application? In other words, are there limits that allow for "just" discrimination? (For example, certain sexual practices, such as pedophilia, incest, etc.) If there are limits and instances where discrimination is required, then who sets the boundaries, what criteria ought to be used, and why?

Burford Furman

Dear Mr. Furman,

Thank you for your email. As a Council Member, it should come as no surprise that I support Gay rights. I have been supported by the Gay community in my past three elections. I believe that all Americans are protected by the 14th Amendment to the Constitution regardless of age, sex, religion, race or sexual preference. The oath I took when I was sworn in as a Councilmember was to protect and defend the Constitutions of the United States and the State of California. As was quoted in the Voice, I supported Gay Pride month because I believe the gay community has been discriminated against by society and I support efforts to erase this form of discrimination.

Michael Kasperzak

Dear Council Member Kasperzak,

Thank you for your prompt response to my email. I respectfully request that we continue this discussion on a few more points if possible. I'm interested to understand what you mean by discrimination in the sense that you believe the gay community has been discriminated against by society. What are you referring to when you use the term "discrimination"?

Sincerely,

Burford Furman

Dear Mr. Furman,

There are many instances. Gays are often assumed to be pedophiles and are often discriminated against as teachers, gay partners are not accorded the same legal rights as married partners, and so. There are many rights that married people have such as visitation rights at a hospital, inheritance rights and so, most of which have no religious meaning. I do believe marriage to be a religious event, not a civil event, and I believe gays should be accorded the same legal rights if they choose to bind themselves together legally.

Michael Kasperzak

Dear Michael,

Thank you for helping me see what you mean by "discrimination". You have brought up the particular issue of homosexual marriage, and seem to be assuming that there is nothing wrong with two people of the same sex getting married. This raises some fundamental questions that I wonder if you have thought through, and I hope to dialog with you a bit more about.

First, what is marriage all about? Who can marry? Are there ANY relationships that ought NOT to be sanctioned by governments? (e.g., two brothers, three people, a person and a pet, etc.) What is the standard, if there is one? Who sets the standard? Why?

I look forward to hearing from you about these fundamental questions.

Sincerely,

Burford Furman

Posted on Thu, Jun. 03, 2004

While I often agree with the Mercury News Opinion page's vigorous defense of free speech, your May 21 editorial was wrong to assert that a Palo Alto human rights commissioner has a free speech "right to disagree" with established city policy that gay people deserve the equal protection of the law. To the contrary, Palo Alto City Councilwoman LaDoris Cordell was well within our free speech tradition when she challenged the city's chief human rights officer for publicly stating that she could not fully support the city's anti-discrimination policy.

Public officials do not have all the same free speech rights as citizens. As Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes put it long ago, one "may have a constitutional right to talk politics, but [one] has no constitutional right to be a policeman." Or as another colorful Supreme Court Justice once put it, one has no First Amendment right "to ride with the cops and cheer for the robbers."

*Kathleen M. Sullivan
Dean, Stanford Law School*

*Furman's Email to LaDoris H. Cordell
Stanford Vice Provost for Campus Relations
Special Counselor to the President
Stanford City Counsel Member*

Dear Mrs. Cordell,

I'm writing you with regard to the issue surrounding Lakiba Pittman's abstention during a recent vote taken by the Human Relations Commission regarding gay marriage. You are quoted in the San Jose Mercury News as desiring that she step down from her chair position because of her abstention. It is quite common for individuals to abstain from votes if they are unable to vote in an impartial manner. In many governing bodies, bylaws require such individuals to state their reasons for abstaining, something she apparently did not do.

It is not clear to me if your problem with her abstention was that she abstained per se or that she did not support the resolution supporting gay marriage. I certainly hope that you do not think that she should step down because she does not support the idea of gay marriage. I certainly hope that there is room in your view for dissenting views. This is what democracy is all about.

Hi Burford,

I believe that the litmus test for those who are appointed to the human relations commission is that they are opposed to all forms of discrimination, since it is this commission which is our city's watchdog on civil and human rights. If one's religious beliefs preclude one from opposing all forms of discrimination, then, in my opinion, one has not passed the litmus test. I have always been an advocate for free speech and a proponent of free exercise of the first amendment. This particular issue has nothing to do with opposition to dissenting views. Rather, it is a "philosophical" one on which I hope there will be a healthy, public discussion. Thank you for your thoughts.

Dear Mrs. Cordell,

Thank you for responding to my email and request for clarification. I respectfully request that we continue this discussion on a few more points if possible. I would greatly appreciate hearing your answers to a few simple questions, so that I can gain an understanding of your position. I will try to keep my responses brief so as to respect your time. Since you appealed to the "philosophical" nature of this issue, I have just a few basic philosophical questions for you.

First, I am not clear on how you define "discrimination." Wouldn't you agree that in order for there to be a workable litmus test, the definition of discrimination must be clearly defined and generally accepted? What

do you mean by the term "discrimination"? Second, how ought it be applied? In other words, racially, sexually, religiously, intellectually, without limits? Or, are there limits that allow for "just" discrimination--such as some types of sexual behavior?

Second, how do you define marriage and are there any boundaries that exist? For example, can two brothers or sisters get married? Can three people get married? Can a person marry a pet? Finally, if there are limits and some discrimination is required, then who sets the boundaries, what criteria ought to be used, and why?

I would greatly appreciate you taking the time to help me understand your view.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Burford Furman

Hi Burford,

You pose some interesting questions, the answers to which I just have time, right now to respond. I will endeavor to get back to you in a bit.---judge c.

Hello Mrs. Cordell,

I'm following up with you to see if you have thought some more about the questions that I raised in my earlier email.

Hi Burford, Ii have been swamped with work (Stanford and city council), so I haven't had a chance to get back to you and won't for a while.--- judge c.