

THE GREATEST APOLOGETIC

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The class a couple of weeks ago on the topic of Apologetics, well thought out and taught by Scot Ruska, David's sermon entitled "It's not about me", and our Bible study of James chapters 3 and 4 converged to inspire this piece.

Scot effectively described that well formed apologetics from Christians are usually unlikely to result in the conversion of a "humanist". He pointed out that this is really the "small stuff", so to speak. A humanist has assumed the position that there is no Creator of the universe, no Issuer of laws and ethics for humans, no Judge to meet us in an eternity that doesn't exist. Effectively, for the humanist, he lives in a world with no God, and he is the master of his own life, the captain of his ship, the monarch of his personal kingdom.

Among many consequences of the humanist position is that he or she must examine the results of a world that attempts to function without the leadership of a loving God. If he is honest with himself, he must admit that mankind has not successfully learned to live together with one another, considering the atrocities that occur locally and globally, and the infighting that we constantly see taking place even among our most elite. On a less global level, he discovers that his personal world is sometimes rocked with loss, disappointment and personal tragedy; and he himself, the "god" of his own universe, is occasionally the cause of pain in other humans. His "god" is often inadequate for the help he needs.

Christians know that each human has his or her own spirit, a personal replication of the spirit of God the Creator, and each human somewhat hazily knows that he or she has inherent value. As Paul told the Athenians, "for we are indeed his offspring", a statement that was met without apparent objection by the great minds among his listeners.

We also know that God draws men to himself, and that the evidence that he has presented to mankind through his creation is a constant voice to men and women everywhere.

So, how do we appeal to the spirit of a humanist in the 21st century, who has embraced the contrivances of "science" to deny the evidences supporting the fact of God as Creator?

Fortunately, for everyone, the spirit that is within them, a gift of God to each of us, contemplates eternity, seeks justice (usually for everyone, but at the very least for himself), and is concerned with his own well-being. Most humans, unless their conscience has been seared completely, respond to genuine love. And on this point, I believe, is the greatest apologetic that Christians can offer.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:43-48

The world around us here in Folsom is nearly universally “nice” to friends, and strangers. The world can be very self-sacrificing towards their friends and neighbors. People in our community deeply appreciate generous acts and activities of kindness to people that they don’t know.

What makes a Christian different?

Hear again, what Jesus said:

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

So, the call of the Son of God to his followers is to do more than the world, in this respect:

We practice love consistently towards everyone, including our enemies! We don’t let our “feelings” get in the way!

Sounds kind of nutso, doesn’t it?

That’s because it’s just the opposite of “earthly” thinking, which inundates us constantly!

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes

down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. James 3:13-18

“Earthly” ethics are very happy to be “nice” to the other humans around them. But not at the expense of personal well-being!

“I don’t mind being generous with you, but I’m going to stop when you ‘burn’ me!”

The world and its counselors are going to tell you to “take care of yourself first.” However, the ethics of Jesus call us to practice heavenly wisdom and ethics towards even the worst of those who we interact with.

Earthly ethics can be responsible for national pride, neighborly action, good friendships, romantic marriages. However, “it’s all about me” is ultimately the prevailing ethic, and so we live in a pervasive world of war, broken relationships, disorder.

So, when the spirit of one of our humanist friends walks through our doors, what will they find? Of course, they will hear the truth, hear the beautiful acapella singing, see the quiet and reverent sharing of the Lord’s Supper, and our shared commitment to teaching our children about Jesus.

If they return enough to become intimate with the dynamic of our spiritual family, will they discover small group alliances, pettiness, bickering, snide remarks, unmerciful posturing demonstrated in emotional distancing or outright estrangement between members, families, marriages?

If so, they have seen what they’re already quite familiar with: “earthly” ethics at work.

In contrast, what if someone comes in to explore who is weary of the failures of humanist values in the world around him, and finds the family of God who are confident in the promise of eternal life, even the face of great personal loss; who consistently practice love and mercy towards even the undeserving within or without the family; where every “blow-up” is minor, because such conflict is universally regarded as subservient to the harmony that pleases the Father in heaven? Marriages in this family universally last for a lifetime, not because men and women stay “in love” at every moment, but practice love towards one another, afresh every new morning.

The faith of our children are put at risk by our society and educational system that values humanism, and so it is important that they understand that highly educated Christians like Dr. Scot Ruska can rely on their faith in God without sacrificing their God-given intelligence; hence the value of studies in apologetics.

However, I believe that the risks to our children are minimal, once they have “tasted” the

world outside God's family, and compared the disorder of the world to the "heavenliness" of the lives of their parents, their families, their brothers and sisters in Christ.

So also, the value of apologetics to someone whose spirit has been drawn to us by God; once they experience the "greatest apologetic", the beauty of heaven at work in us, then solid apologetics can help their minds overcome Satan's stumbling blocks to their spirit's choice to respond to the character of God lived out in his family.