

The Gospel Questions Everything

Long Beach Alliance Church • March 8, 2015 • Pastor Chris Lankford

[Jesus] asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven... Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

~Matthew 16:13-17, 20 (ESV)

1) A Brief History Of Apologetics & American Churches

- A) A formal justification or defense, usually through systematic argumentation or debate (verbally or in writing), is known as an “apologetic.” Apologetics can be applied to anything, a field of study or even a system of belief. Christian Apologetics is the formal defense of Christian beliefs; a just defense of the Gospel.
- B) The Apostle Peter, writing to Christians who were being persecuted for their faith, encourages them to always be ready “to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15). Even if being persecuted, we are to represent Christ. Luke lauds the Bereans for “examining the Scriptures daily” to affirm the teaching of Paul & Silas (Acts 17:10-11).
- C) Apologetics exists to answer questions about the Gospel from both inside and outside the Church. For those outside of Christ who have questions about the Gospel, apologetics is a systematic and organized way to provide thoughtful answers to difficult questions. For those who are in Christ, apologetics deepens biblical understanding through reason and logic, helping to clarify the truth from false teaching (2 Timothy 4:1-4).
- D) Because many Christians know very little about their faith, apologetics is very attractive. Apologetic study provides rational biblical answers about the Gospel, providing confidence to believers in their faith. In many ways Christian Apologetics exists because false teaching and hostility toward Christ exist.
- E) The United States was formed, in part, to escape oppression and establish religious freedoms. Partly because apologetics thrives in environments of hostility, Christian Apologetics has been very influential in American Christianity (for both Catholics and Protestants). Apologetics boomed in the post-WWII mega-shift in the United States from being a “farming/family culture” (post 1940’s) to an “industrial/city culture.”
- F) These cultural realities have helped to cause an apologetic divide among American churches. Some churches are dedicated to a very doctrinally rational and precise apologetic. In these churches:
 - i) A relationship with God is actually relationship to Bible knowledge. Bible knowledge means an authentic relationship with God.
 - ii) The emphasis is knowing the right answers through Bible study. If you think the right things, right things will happen in your life.
 - iii) The highest value is Bible knowledge, theological accuracy, and vigilant defense of all things viewed through a conservative Christian lens (biblical, political, cultural, moral, etc.). This framework lends itself

toward a high emphasis on the importance of defining “Christian” Doctrine.

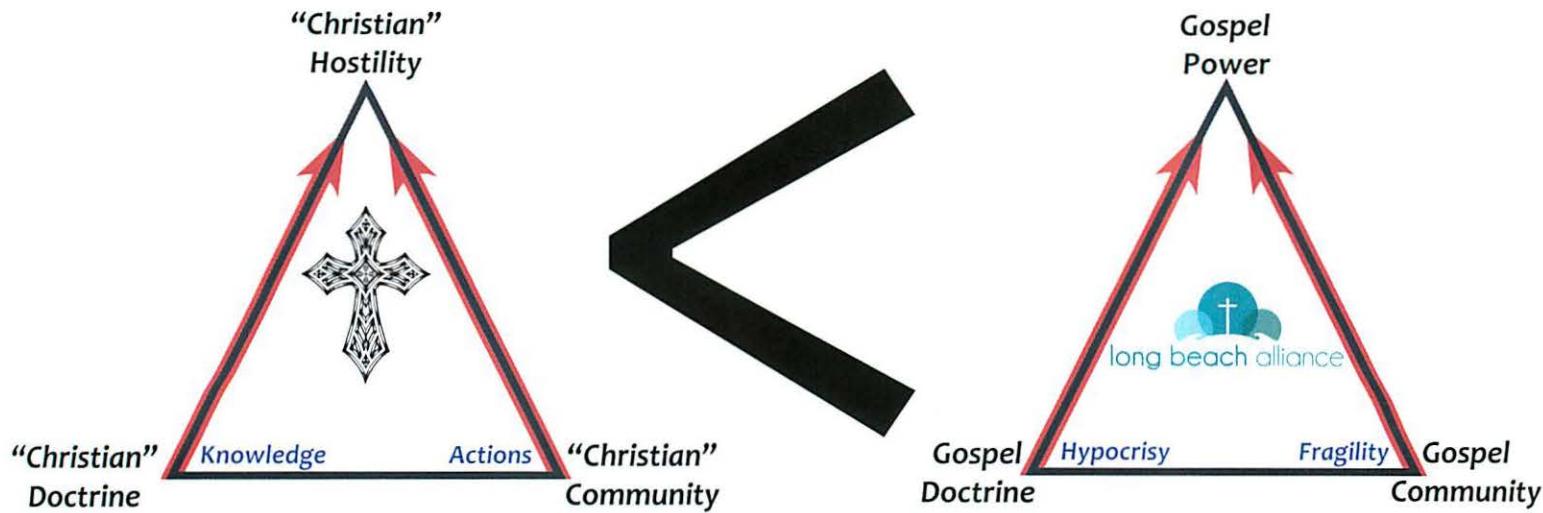
- iv) The question which needs to be answered is whether or not the Gospel can be explained. If there is no rational reason for belief, then the Gospel is impotent. Why follow Christ if you can’t explain it?

F²) On the other end of the apologetic spectrum are some churches who are dedicated to an experiential and action oriented apologetic. In these churches:

- i) A relationship with God is rooted in how you treat other people. Bible knowledge is only significant if contributes to being a better person, how you treat your “fellow man,” and socially impact culture.
- ii) The emphasis is doing right things under the banner of loving others as Christ loves us. There is a clear social and cultural emphasis. If you do the right things, you will learn the right things.
- iii) The highest value is placed on good actions, accepting of people, a Christian is an obviously vigilant defender of all things viewed through a liberal Christian lens (biblical, political, cultural, moral, etc.). This framework lends itself toward a very high emphasis on the importance of “Christian” Community.
- iv) The question which needs to be answered is whether or not the Gospel has social impact. If there is no social impact, then the Gospel is impotent. Why follow Christ if it doesn’t result in goodness?

G) Both of these types of churches have followed a truth to the point of losing contact with the Truth (Jesus Christ). The Bible is the self-revelation of God revealing His glory through a redemptive relationship with all of creation. We are invited into this redemptive plan, not for ourselves, but for God’s glory (Philippians 2:11; 2 Corinthians 5:20-21).

H) It is very important that our church not be swept into the popular “Christian” arguments regarding doctrinal or cultural issues. Rather, we keep the Gospel in view, choosing to follow Christ and His emphasis on clear **Gospel Doctrine** which ruins our individualism and creates **Gospel Community**, the best environment for the flow of **Gospel Power** which gives God glory in everything (Philippians 2:9-11; Ephesians 2:17-23; 5:25-27).



2) Apologetics And The Hijacking Of Gospel Discovery

- A) An unexpected impact of the socioreligious movements of the past 75 years has been a tendency to use apologetic means to prove the value of Christianity in Evangelism. Conservatives have developed organized and rational methods of delivery, while liberals have developed social movements to “pay it forward.”
- B) While these Evangelistic methods seem reasonable to our modern minds, they are not the way of Christ! Don’t misinterpret, Christ certainly had methods to deliver the Gospel, and He was very socially engaged. Jesus was not interested in providing easy answers or instructing in end-result behaviors.
- C) Jesus asked questions. Lots of different questions. Jesus revealed Himself (evangelism) through a discovery process more than any other way (e.g. Matthew 12:9-14, 22:15-22; Mark 10:17-18; John 4:13-26, 5:1-9; 21:15-17).

Growth Group Guide

"the Gospel questions everything"

matthew 16:13-17,20

march 8-13, 2015

Ice Breaker!

Think of a time someone asked you a question about your faith and you were not able to give an answer. How did it make you feel? Why? Share with your growth group.

Looking Up!

What does Matthew 16:13-17,20 tell us about God?

Leaning In!

This week we want to try something different. We will spend most of our time in this section. Read each of the following 5 portions of scripture, outline what each says, and list the similarities between them all. We will then come together in our groups and compare our observations. Think about the following statement as you prepare to read each section of scripture: "Jesus asked questions. Lots of different questions. Jesus revealed Himself (evangelism) through a discovery process more than any other way." How might that shape how we understand His truth and apply it to our lives?

Matthew 12:9-14

Matthew 22:15-22

Mark 10:17-18

John 5:1-9

John 21:15-17

Stepping Out!

Thinking about the idea of discovery, list different ways we could help those around us who don't know Jesus to discover His truth.

Respond!

What is more important to you; knowing all the right answers, or knowing Jesus the source of all answers?

This week look for ways to take your focus off of "what you know" and place it on "who you know." Read Matthew 10:18-20 and meditate on it.

This Week In Action & In Prayer!

Pray that God would pierce your heart with questions drawing you into a deeper relationship with Him in Christ.

Pray for God's Spirit to provide 'Gospel Power' through a deepening knowledge of 'Gospel Doctrine' in active engagement with your 'Gospel Community.'