

Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man. - Colossians 4:5-6

When it comes to sharing your faith with unbelievers, it won't be long before your beliefs will contradict their ideas. Part of knowing how to answer every man is knowing why they should believe what you're saying instead of what they already think is right.

*“Yogi” Berra, a famous Yankees baseball catcher of yesteryear, was noted for his humorous and contradictory sayings. His quips were so popular that they got their own name—“Yogi-isms.” Notice the conflict within some of his famous sayings:*

- 1. “No one goes to that restaurant now-days; it’s too crowded.”*
- 2. “A nickel ain’t worth a dime anymore.”*
- 3. “Always go to other people’s funerals; otherwise, they won’t come to yours.”*
- 4. “I usually take a two-hour nap from one to four.”*
- 5. “I never said most of the things I said.”*

*While self-contradicting statements can be humorous, it is not funny when people accept them as profound truth. Satan is a deceiver, and he can use even obvious contradictions to fool people into disbelieving God and His Word.*

What do you think is the most convincing piece of evidence that the Bible is true?

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# How to answer the ignorant

Paul's second missionary journey was filled with opposition. After being driven from cities Thessalonica and Berea by unbelieving Jews, Paul was conducted to Athens for his safety. This prominent Greek city, filled with idol-worshipping people, stirred Paul's spirit.

1. What did Paul do when his spirit was stirred? (Acts 17:16-17) He went to the synagogue and the market and disputed with Jews, devout persons, and anyone that would meet with him

*Paul was in Athens to wait out the persecution he faced in Thessalonica and Berea. Athens was an unexpected stop on the missionary journey, but he didn't sit around and let the Athenians go on worshipping idols. He went where the people gathered and he "disputed" with them. This was neither a one-sided preaching service nor a heated quarrel. Paul was engaging unbelievers in a back-and-forth conversation in which he pleaded with them to understand the logic of the gospel.*

*Eventually Paul was taken to the Areopagus—the town square on top of Mars Hill—where he spoke to all who would listen to him. He starts by bringing up something they all understand.*

2. Paul says that the Athenians are too superstitious (very religious) in everything they do, "For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription 'TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.' Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him I declare unto you" (Acts 17:22-23)

*Paul is going to use the theme of ignorance to help the Athenians understand the gospel. They acknowledge they don't know everything by building an altar to something unknown, and Paul is going to prove they don't know everything by pointing out their contradictory beliefs. Admission of ignorance is a powerful tool for the Spirit-led Christian.*

3. What are some of God’s attributes and actions that Paul summarizes for the Athenians? (Acts 17:24-28)
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*Earlier, these men of Athens speculated that Paul was a “setter forth of strange gods.” They had little-to-no understanding of the God of Israel. Yet in just a couple sentences Paul is able to reveal enough about God to help the Athenians understand their need for Jesus.*

After declaring the God of the Bible to be their “Unknown God,” Paul is ready to expose the main problem with the idolatry of Athens. He explains the contradiction between what they know about themselves and what they know about idols.

4. Paul agrees with the Athenians that in God, humans “live, and move, and have our being,” and he agrees with the poets “we are also His [God’s] offspring” (Acts 17:28)
5. What biblical truth backs up what the poets said? (see Acts 17:25 and Genesis 1:27) Paul is emphasizing two points from Genesis and the rest of Scripture. First, God is the Creator of humans—it is only by His power that we have life to live, breath to move, and being to exist. Second, God created humans in His image, as a picture of who He is.

*The people of Athens got one thing right—humans are not simply objects or animals. Humans are special because they picture God.*

6. Paul then brings up the common-sense observation that idols are created from “gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device” (Acts 17:29)

*The people of Athens also understood that idols are made by people. Even the most beautiful idols do not come from heaven but are formed from things that artistic people (“by art”) and imaginative people (“man’s device”) come up with on their own.*

Paul points out that what the Athenians know about people (that they're the offspring of God) and about idols (that they're made by people) is a problem. If God created people, then people can't create God. That belief is self-contradictory and "ignorant."

7. What does Paul suggest the Athenians do instead of continuing in idolatry? (Acts 17:30-31)

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8. How do the Athenians respond when Paul brings up Jesus—"that man who He hath ordained" (Acts 17:32-34)

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*Notice that Paul doesn't give a drawn-out explanation of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. He's simply beginning a conversation from which some would eventually believe. When it comes to speaking to the ignorant, we are seldom going to lead them to salvation in the first encounter.*

*Sometimes helping someone see a contradiction in their thinking will lead them in the next step of understanding the truth of the gospel. Sometimes, we'll have opportunity to speak all at once—like Paul does in this scenario. Other times, we'll have to share the truth piece by piece, one question at a time.*

## Tactic 4 - "What if you are right?"

*So far, we've learned three questions that help us start and advance conversations toward the gospel. When people say something about their beliefs, you can ask "What do you mean by that" to learn what they believe. As they share their thoughts, you can ask "How did you come to think that" to learn why they believe what they do. Then, as you understand their background, you can ask, "Have you considered this" to suggest biblical alternatives to their ideas.*

While you're talking with someone, you may notice that one of their core beliefs is a self-contradiction. A self-contradicting belief doesn't live up to its own standards, and it can be restated as "This is the case" and "This is not the case."

*A silly example of a self-contradiction is "I saw a square with three sides." Everyone agrees that squares, by definition, always have four sides. Therefore, we can restate the claim as follows: "All squares have four sides" and "There's a square that doesn't have four sides." Some self-contradictions are obvious.*

1. What is the problem with accepting a self-contradicting belief?

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*Self-contradicting beliefs are dangerous because they are based in a lie. One law of God's universe is that opposite statements cannot be true at the same time. People depend on this law all the time to live. But when someone believes a contradiction, the devil pulls the rug out from under them, and they cannot be convinced of a truth that does not back up what they already believe.*

Once you have identified self-contradicting belief, you can follow tactic four and ask the question, "**What if you are right?**" This tactic involves the following steps: 1) Point out the belief as simply as you can; 2) Take their belief for a "test drive" to see its conclusions; 3) Bring up the truth that the test drive reveals; and 4) Explain the implications of that truth.

**Example:** 1) What if you're right that God doesn't take sides? 2) That would mean that God is happy with everyone who doesn't take sides, right? But doesn't that also mean that God is unhappy with those who do take sides? 3) Would you agree that looks a lot like God is taking sides against those people? 4) I guess God does take sides after all, and He's either happy with people or unhappy with them.

2. Can you think of an example of a self-contradicting belief to which you can respond, “What if you’re right?”

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*There are more common self-contradicting beliefs than I have space to list here. Some common ones include: “There are no absolutes”; “You can’t say that someone else’s choices are wrong”; “All religions are the same”; “Reality is an illusion”; “Only science gives reliable truth”; “Christians believe faith, not facts”; “It is wrong to argue”; and “You shouldn’t share your beliefs.”*

The reason that asking “What if you are right” works is because inwardly, people crave order. They want answers to their questions, purpose for their existence, and explanations for their problems.

The Bible clarifies that all sinners are living lives of contradiction: “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful . . . and their foolish heart was darkened” (**Romans 1:21**). We know the Solution, and His name is Jesus Christ.

## God’s Command

No longer do unbelievers have the excuse of not knowing about God, and no longer do Christians have the excuse of not sharing the truth of God. “Because He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness” (**Acts 17:31**).

Paul’s spirit was stirred by the idolatry of Athens. What sins grieve your heart the most about the time and culture in which we live?

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Can you identify any contradictions that are believed by the people who practice or promote those sins?

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Paul went to the synagogue, the market, and Mars Hill to share the gospel. Over the next two weeks, where can you go to start gospel conversations with people who hold those beliefs?

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*Our Gospel & Company ministry will continue this Saturday at 10:30 AM. All are invited to come for about an hour of knocking on the doors of people in our community, inviting them to our church, and starting gospel conversations if possible.*

This lesson was adapted from chapters 7-10 of *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* by Gregory Koukl.