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SERIES: GROWING AND GOING

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TITLE: Loving God With All Your Mind Pt. 2

I encourage you to pursue truth, and as John Mark Reynolds said, *it will lead to Jesus*. But don't let fear push you away from the pursuit of truth. Many have done just that. In fact, yesterday I mentioned that **the first snare of Christian anti-intellectualism is fear.**

Futility is the second snare of anti-intellectualism. This happens when persecution, an onslaught of questions, heresy, and ultimately, the negative changes that never seem to end has weakened us. The Christian gets to the point when they say "Who cares?" or, "I'd speak up, but it's meaningless." It is as if they shut down.

Unless you are living under a rock with your eyes closed and your ears plugged, there is a culture shift going on world-wide. The voices of the Christians seem to be getting quieter and quieter, while the voice of the opposition only seems to grow louder. One option is to shut down and become indifferent about the change, but I don't think that's what we should do. The other option is to do what Jude writes in **Jude 1:3 (NIV)** "**Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people.**"

At the time of Jude's writing, false teachers were spreading heretical doctrine. Jude says "I was so happy to write you about how awesome our salvation is, but I need to cut to the chase. You've got work to do, so go now, and contend with all you've got for the true faith!" This is like being an athlete or a soldier. It is putting everything we've got to defend the truth of our faith – orthodox Christianity. This is the call and need for Christian Apologetics.

Let me put to rest the old-time joke. Apologetics is *not* the art and science of asking your spouse for forgiveness and the permission to leave the doghouse. You see, so many people today when I talk about Apologetics, they say, "why are we talking about the art of an apology?"

Apologetics comes from **1 Peter 3:15**, which states "**But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.**" Give everyone an answer, an *apologia* – a defense of your faith. Apologetics is simply the art and science of defending the Christian faith. It is the why and the what of your Christian beliefs. It demonstrates the core beliefs you have, but to the inquisitor, the most important question is, "Why do you believe it?" Can you give people the why - the reason for the hope that you have? You can tell people you believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, but can you tell people why? There are very good historical and logical reasons why you should believe Jesus rose from the dead.

Let's talk about sexuality - this is a hot and relevant topic today. But can you explain why sexuality is sacred and must not be tampered with? What about evil and suffering? Can you answer people as to why God can allow evil and suffering? These are big questions, but people are sincerely asking. Can you give an answer? An apologetic?

Friend, standing up is not meaningless. Yes, there are loud voices in the world today, but Christ has *already* overcome the world. God by His grace, He has *given* us answers. He's given us a mind to think. He's given us ears to hear, and a mouth to speak. It's *not* meaningless. It may be daunting, but it's not meaningless. So let's listen to what people are saying, and let's be prepared to give an answer. Let us contend for the true faith.

But let me remind you, like I have to remind myself, of what James said: **“Be slow to speak and slow to become angry. Instead, be quick to listen.”** I believe we do have reasonable answers – truth to convey. And so often we need to listen and ready the soil, *before* we start scattering the seed of truth.

And secondly, we need to stop confusing the main thing for symptoms of the great problem. Here's what I mean: The Gospel is the main thing. Christ came, not to make Republicans out of Democrats, or pro-lifers out of pro-abortionists. He came to make dead people live. He came so that souls would be saved and lives would be changed.

So many causes are worth investing in, but they can never replace the Gospel. They can never replace our need to sow the Gospel first. Once the Gospel is shared, and once that Gospel is received, that's where the real change happens. So please, let us together make the Gospel primary. Let's listen before we answer. And by all means, let's not give up. The fight is not meaningless.

DISCUSSION:

N: Let's bring in Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney and talk for a moment. The voices of the enemy are getting louder and much bolder these days. Cara, what do we need to keep in mind about people who appear to be our enemies?

A: Well, I think the word “appear” says it all - people will appear to be our enemies. And I try the best I can - and I have to remind myself to do this very much, a lot - try not to make assumptions about a person. I can't know what someone is thinking. I can't know what they're struggling with internally. Things are not always what they appear to be. And I try to picture Paul when he was evangelizing to his jailers - they might appear to be our enemies, but that is not always the case. So there you go.

N: That's great perspective, great perspective. Arnie, there were a lot of issues in politics going on in Jesus' day, but He connected with people anyway. How do we do the same thing today?

A: Well, that's a great question. And it's pretty complex, because what most people want to do is argue politics, and we're very, very polarized, so it's complicated to say the least. The one thing that I see - people that are very skilled Christ followers, they will always bring the discussion back to Jesus. In a time when you can hardly say anything on social media, and

somebody isn't having a cow, the skillful people are bringing it back to Jesus - and not that, you know, quoting some modern day, where everybody just flips out on either side. And I think that is a tremendous example of the Bible is relevant for today, just as it was all the years, through all the different political upheavals, and that to me seems to be probably the best way to go. So you still need to be bold, and, you know, especially the U.S. is becoming pretty anti-Christian, so bringing up Jesus is not taking the easy way out, but I think it's a good way, if done properly.

N: Yeah. I think one of the key examples that Jesus demonstrates is, though He saw people for who they really were - I mean, obviously, God in the flesh - so He knew exactly what was going on in their hearts; He could recognize a person though, humanly speaking, as a Pharisee, as a zealot, as a Gentile, as a pagan - that didn't faze Him though. He just treated people, like people made in the image of God. And I think that is what we need to remember. Whether Republican, Democrat, mask-wearer, non-mask-wearer, whether they live in this neighborhood, that neighborhood, you name it - at the end of the day, they are people made in the image of God. The only difference between us and other people is Christ - Whether we've embraced Christ, or whether they have not. And so we need to do exactly what you're talking about: Bring it back to Christ. We must not add more offense to the Gospel, because the Gospel is offensive enough.

Snare 3 of anti-intellectualism is ignorance. This happens when Christians choose to have a *blind* faith. They simply shut out the noise of inquiry, and they shut out the noise of proof. Early church father, Tertullian, felt theology had nothing to learn from philosophy. He was credited with saying, "*What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?*" In other words, what does faith have to do with reason? But this attitude was foreign, not only to the early church, but to God!

Isaiah 1:18 (ESV) states, "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool." The word "reason" is the Hebrew word *yakach* (*yaw-kahh*'). It means to judge or decide. Warren Wiersbe described it as a decision or judgement made in court. It's the process of going back and forth in a court; putting forth claims and examining the evidence in order to make a right determination. God here is appealing to human reason. This ability to reason allows us to research and see God's existence, His goodness, the reality of Christ's Resurrection, and the existence of a good God in a fallen and evil world.

J.P. Moreland said, "In Scripture, faith involves placing trust in what you have reason to believe is true. Faith is not a blind, irrational leap into the dark. So faith and reason cooperate on a biblical view of faith. They are not intrinsically hostile."

Scripture backs this up, but it goes even farther. Scripture tell us we can and should use our minds to love God. **In Matthew 22:37, Jesus says we are to "LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND."** We are not just to love God with our heart, but we are to interweave our heart – our experiences and emotions – with our soul –our essence - with our mind. God doesn't want just a blind faith. He wants us to really know Him, His promises, His work, His character; He wants us to know Him wholly.

Just like your spouse, you didn't meet them and then say "I feel I should marry you, now that I just met you." If you did, maybe we should talk. No, you took time to get to know them. You experienced them. And you talked, you asked, you listened, and you gained greater insight into who they are. But it didn't stop there. After you got married, you hopefully didn't say, "Okay. I know you now. I do not need any more information." I have talked to couples who have been married for over 50 years, and they say that each day, they learn something new. But the reason why they are still learning is because they are asking and seeking. This is the same for your relationship with God. As Christians, as the body of Christ, we must be prepared to give an answer. This requires a better approach than being fearful, indifferent, or ignorant.

Oxford professor and apologist Os Guinness puts it bluntly, but I think appropriately: "*At root, evangelical anti-intellectualism is both a scandal and a sin. It is a scandal in the sense of being an offense and a stumbling block that needlessly hinders serious people from considering the Christian faith and coming to Christ. It is a sin because it is a refusal, contrary to Jesus' two great commandments, to love the Lord our God with our minds. Anti-intellectualism is quite simply a sin. Evangelicals must address it as such, beyond all excuses, evasions, or rationalizations of false piety.*" If we are to be salt and light in the culture; if we are to be salt and light in the world, we must reject being anti-intellectual Christians. We can do this, embracing the call to be ambassadors for Christ.

What does it mean to be an ambassador for Christ? I think it means we have three essential skills: Knowledge, Wisdom, and Character. Knowledge: This is what we've been discussing today. It's the *what* and the *why* of our faith, and it's the *what* and *why* of other religions. I am challenging you to shut off the TV 30 minutes early this week, and pick up the Bible. Power down your tablet after dinner, and go grab a cup of coffee with an outsider, and ask them about their life and beliefs. Why don't you put away the smart phone, and go watch a debate by William Lane Craig or Ravi Zacharias? But commit this week to learn something new, relevant to your faith and the world around you.

Ambassadors need more than just knowledge. They need wisdom. Wisdom is the how-to of our knowledge. It's the implementation of our knowledge. When do we use it? What parts? It is the winsome delivery of our knowledge.

Last is our character. **Colossians 4:5-6 (NASB) describes this: "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person."** As an ambassador, you must have an attractive manner. This does not mean a perfect record, because if it did, we'd all be hosed. But instead, a person of character has a consistent life of devotion to God, service, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. A winsome ambassador is one who meets people where they are. This was Paul's method. Acts 17 records Paul's discourse and reasoning with outsiders. Paul was in Athens, reasoning in the synagogues about Scripture and Christ. But then he moved into the Areopagus. There he changed his method. He still reasoned with them; he still engaged them, but he reasoned with them where they were at. They didn't know about the Scriptures, so he reasoned with them, based on their beliefs and

knowledge. Paul learned to become all things to all men, so that some might be saved. I think this is what we need to do today.

One of the greatest ways I have learned how to do this is by asking questions. One of the greatest mistakes I have made is giving an apologetic, when a pastoral response was the need. What do I mean? So when someone comes at you, and asks you a serious question about faith and God, ask good questions: Simply by saying, “Wow. That is a really good question. Before I respond, may I ask you why you are asking that?” Because if they ask something like “How can you believe God exists, when there’s so much evil and suffering in the world?” and you give them a healthy dose of the moral law argument, when they really were asking “Why did my dad have to die when I was only 5 years old?” or “I have been bullied my whole life, but no one was there for me, not even God. So where is He?” Do you see by asking a simple question, we can determine what people are really seeking? More often than not, a pastoral response is needed first, then an apologetic can be given. And when you do so, do as Paul exhorts in **Ephesians 4:15: speak truth in love**. When we do this, we show grace upon grace.

When you as an individual, and we as a church, love God with our heart, soul and mind, we are ready to impact lives and the culture. I love how Ravi Zacharias described the relationship Apologetics shares with the life changing Gospel: *“Apologetics is the seasoning, the Gospel is the main course. You do not want too much of the seasoning or it will make the main course insipid. Apologetics does not dominate our message; it undergirds our message. Argument doesn’t save people, but it certainly clears the obstacles so they can take a direct look at the Cross. Support the argument justifiably, but recognize it is Jesus Christ who you need to lift up, and it is the Holy Spirit who brings about change within the human heart. An argument may remove doubt, but only the Holy Spirit can convict of truth.”*

When we become wholly committed to God, and love Him completely, we will love Him with all of our heart, all of our soul, and all of our mind. When we do this, grace will be the natural outpouring to all those we encounter.

N: Well, Cara and Arnie, give us some pointers on meeting people where they are. How do you do that with grace? And how do you turn the conversation to God?

C: Well that’s hard to answer, because every person and situation is different. So meeting them where they are, I will say, I’m never argumentative. I’m not a person who enjoys confrontation, and you can’t argue someone into the Kingdom. So I guess, without participating in sin - that’s important - I try to meet people where they are. So when you encounter - I mean, some sins are just so right there. And I try not to look at that. I put on my poker face and I try to see that last human who needs Jesus, like I need Jesus. And sometimes I even go, as far as this is someone’s kid, you know, did someone - this person has a mom and a dad and people who love them. And I like to ask questions about their life, and that circumstances will allow me to, I’ll turn it biblical - good cop/bad cop, but the bad cop is their circumstance or their choice. And then I try to let them see things as they are for themselves. Ask them good questions, you know - that’s the only way

to do that, I think.

N: Well, and it's such a natural way to talk about the most important things: start by asking questions. You've heard me say this before, but learn to be interested and not interesting. And when you do that, when you sincerely ask people, they are inclined to then ask you, "Well, what do you think"? And then you've got an open door to share whatever it is that's on your heart. And you have a big inroad to sharing the Gospel and talking about what the Bible has to say. But I think there's one area that causes people a lot of anxiety today: When we talk about faith and getting into discussions, and that is, of science and faith, and Arnie, you hang out with some pretty smart people. And so you've got friends in the science community, people who I think many Christians would be hesitant with - to reason with about faith, but I don't think you're afraid to do that. So tell us what is the secret to engaging with these smart people, and reasoning with them about science and faith?

A: So as a young believer, I had two friends. One was a nuclear physicist that was an atheist, and another was a top scientist in artificial intelligence. So I wanted to witness to my friend that was the nuclear physicist. So I actually got the two together for dinner, so that they could speak the same language. And afterwards, I realized that you don't have to meet them at their intellect. It's their heart is where the issue is, because, you know, I'm not going to convince a nuclear physicist anything on a scientific level, but from a heart standpoint - and there was an opportunity to really work with him being an atheist. And he was flying his airplane and it almost crashed - well, actually it did crash - and you know, I said, "Hey, George, did you pray? Did you ask God to save you?" He goes, "Well, yeah". Well, there you go. It's a perfect- you know, I'm not going to meet him on all these theories that are out there, but I met him where his heart is. And so for me, whether it's bright people, or whatever, my big thing is that I tell myself is to shut up, okay, and listen; and listen, and just shut up, and wait for the Holy Spirit to act. And having that approach with people really helps; and be interested, but let them do 80 to 90% of the talking. And you'll see that opening - that heart opening - that the Holy Spirit has put. And then that's the time I think you're going to be the most effective.

N: Wow. That is so good because you're right. It isn't an intellectual problem. It really is a heart issue. And for those of us who are apologists and love research, it's an easy place for us to go, to look at the data, to look at the science, to look at whatever it is, and want to lead with that. But at the end of the day, it's a heart issue. And so we need to engage with them for the things that really matter, and we let God do the saving. Cara, some Christians would say that actions are the only way to share Christ. Others would say, it's all in your words. What's your response to those thoughts?

C: Well, I think you run into people with all this COVID-19 stuff going around, and they seem to be unfazed, and then to find out they're Christians. You kind of want to know, what they know that you don't. So I think lifestyle evangelism is important, but also I think sometimes people will say, "Oh, I'm a lifestyle evangelist" - it's kind of a way around actually having to tell people about Jesus, because I think they feel like they don't want to deal with the possibility of rejection. [Right]. So I think both words and actions, because at some point, you're going to let someone

down, and it won't be intentional, and you may never even know that you've done it. But as human beings, we can never live up to another person's standards, because people are hard. [They are hard.] And yeah, so I would say you have to do both.

N: Yeah. I think to do one without the other can sometimes be very cold, especially giving words without some type of act of love. But most certainly, just, you know, feeding the poor, giving them socks, shoveling their snow, those type of things - those are great things, but God is not going to supernaturally give them the Gospel by you shoveling the sidewalk, you know, or mowing their lawn. They have to hear the Gospel. And so by our actions, we can ready the soil. But for sure, we've got to remember to give the Gospel. That social Gospel you talked about is very popular. It's easy. It's easy to just go out there and do an act of kindness. Hey, I'm going to get, I'm going to pay for that person's coffee behind me. That's great. They just had a hot cup of coffee on the road to Hell. So we need - to be sure - a little harsh, I know, but it is so true. We have to be willing to have the hard conversations and scatter the Gospel, no matter the consequences. I bet there are some people today who are thinking about what they've done in the past, whether they were ineffective in their ministering the Gospel, whether it's just their past, because of their decisions and their past sins - they probably feel like, you know what? This is meaningless. My witness is meaningless. What do they need to remember?

C: I think this is very simple, and I realized that someone listening might be the nucleus right now in a ball of chaos. I totally get it. But you are where you are right now for such a time as this.

A: Hmm - no, that's so true. And what I would add for those of us, that just really struggle - and okay, you got my one thing about shutting up 90% of the time - the most critical question you can ask someone that no one hardly ever asks, and what people really, really want, is someone to want to know how they're doing spiritually. So you can ask, "Hey, how's it going spiritually?" Everybody asks, "How are you doing?" - all of that. Try it sometime: just ask, you know, "Well, how's it going for you spiritually?"

N: Simple, using questions to engage people. And I think you're exactly right. Everyone - everyone - even people who claim to be atheists - still have that notion of how things really are in their lives. And when we build a level of trust and engage with them, we can ask them those questions. And then again, it creates inroads for talking about the things that really matter.