

## Rational and Relational

Ron waited patiently for me to finish my previous conversation. As the other student walked away, he stepped forward as if he had been waiting in line at a checkout counter. He looked more mature and relaxed than most college students. Turns out that was because he was a graduate student in his thirties. His question surprised me.

“Do you know of any pro-life organizations that come from a non-religious point of view?” he asked.

I didn't know where he was going. Typically, secularists are skeptical of organizations driven by religious motivation, so I was feeling defensive and reacted by asking if he saw any religious references on our exhibit (there are none). He explained that he was pro-life and might even consider doing pro-life work after graduation if he could find a group that would let an atheist work with them.

Rather than grill him on why he was an atheist, I invited him to tell me about his pro-life views (common ground). He explained that he had been involved in two abortions when he was younger and that they continued to cause him immeasurable guilt. He said he was very pro-life because he wanted people to live well and not suffer from their mistakes. He did not want anyone to suffer the way he had.

“So, where do you think that feeling of guilt comes from?” I asked.

“I believe it is a product of the way our frontal lobe has evolved,” he said.

“It seems as though we both must use faith in forming our worldview. You have chosen to be-

lieve by faith that all of the universe came into existence from nothing, or that it has always been here. I have chosen to believe by faith that a very intelligent being designed and created everything we know. So, we both live by faith, but which of us has a more reasonable view given the evidence?”



We then took some time to further explore the evidence and the reasonableness of the views at hand.

At the end of our conversation, I said, “Ron, you seem really intelligent and clear-thinking. These abortions obviously affected you deeply. Are you open to the idea that you may have chosen atheism as a self-defense mechanism because you fear facing a Creator and giving an answer for the choices you made in this life?”

A look of bemused sadness spread across his face as he slowly nodded his head.

“Yes, I am open to that possibility. Maybe it's even true,” he said.

Challenge given. Challenge accepted.

I reached over the barricade to shake his hand, but he just looked at me for an awkward second. Then he reached past my hand to my shoulder. We executed a perfect man-hug—a casual, back-slapping sign of encouragement. As he walked away, I was already hoping to see him again.

“We must put both of Peter's admonitions into practice: the rational and the relational...the reason and the respect.”

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## Reason and Respect

Why do you hope? What is your hope? Why do you believe in God? Why are you a Christian? Why is abortion wrong? Can you readily answer any of these questions?

**The apostle Peter told Christians throughout the Roman empire to “always be prepared...to give the reason for the hope that you have, but with gentleness and respect.” (I Peter 3:15)**

I often ask Christians whom I meet why they are pro-life. Many are more than ready to give an answer. In fact, they are excited to wield their words like weapons, without gentleness or respect.

On the other hand, some are gentle and respectful, but ill-prepared to give an answer. They begin, but they quickly lose their way or become defensive when confronted with the questions posed by serious abortion advocates.

For example, imagine an agnostic, who believes the Bible is no more than ancient literature, asks a Christian why he is pro-life. Then imagine the Christian answers with, “Because Jesus convinced me, and you need to ask him to convince you.” Does this sound like the kind of reason a skeptic would readily accept?

Here’s how one student explains Justice For All’s method of putting I Peter 3:15 into practice:

The tactics used within...pro-life organizations can sometimes be classified into a simple dichotomy: a “heart camp” and a “head camp.” The heart camp says that the only tool abortion abolitionists need is a compassionate heart, whereas the head camp supports...facts and figures.

Justice for All coupled the heart camp and head camp in a wonderful way in the...seminar I was blessed to attend... Dividing into groups to role-play scenarios was the cornerstone of the head and heart union. I retained much more from this style of teaching than if the seminar had been a dry lecture, especially thanks to the...realistic...exercises.

As far as heart lessons go, I came to appreciate the merits of listening to understand, not refute. I also discovered the importance of finding common ground during conversations, which I consider both a heart and head application.

In regards to head training, I was able to practice asking clarifying questions in order to avoid making erroneous assumptions... I learned something

more valuable than mere pro-life tips. I developed skills I will be applying to both my pro-life ministry and my personal life...

I strongly encourage you to experience this marriage of the heart camp and head camp for yourself. Hosting Justice for All is an amazing way to...better your group with improved pro-life reasoning and listening skills.

-Laura Smith, Georgia volunteer

Laura understands that we must put both of Peter’s admonitions into practice: the rational and the relational...the reason and the respect.

I am grateful that you have put your head and your heart together in support of my work with Justice For All. I hope you will consider accepting Laura’s challenge. Further marry your head to your heart by improving your reasoning and your listening skills. A great way to do that is with Justice For All training.

If possible, join me for one of our training events in Oklahoma or in North Texas this fall. In addition, I will keep you posted on opportunities to take a three-day, weekend mission trip to either Kansas or Colorado.

-John Michener

