



The Kulas Kronicle



113 N. Martinson—Wichita, KS 67203—316.683.6426—paul@jfaweb.org

February 2016

Ready to Give an Answer

A little before Christmas, on a typical day, the office phone rang. During that time of the year, our most common caller is a JFA supporter. I picked it up to answer, and immediately the man on the other end named Brian aggressively began peppering me with questions. It seemed clear that he had an agenda. “Tell me what you guys believe,” he demanded. “Are you going to punish a woman with the death penalty if you make abortion illegal? What are you gonna do?!” Although in a sense he was civil (he wasn’t yelling or name calling), he was very direct and persistent.

Although Brian’s question about punishment is one that comes up regularly at campus events, I wasn’t ready for this conversation. The substance of his question wasn’t the problem—it was his attitude and demeanor. I was clearly caught off guard, and much more so than at an outreach event. Granted, we should always be prepared for interactions with people who annoy or frustrate us, but I doubt any of us ever feel ready for intense conversations like this.

It felt like I was on trial.

The interaction with Brian continued. He made a lot of claims that he didn’t back up with evidence, though I asked for that specifically. He also wanted me to answer his questions without any room for me to seek clarification on what he meant. It felt like I was on trial. For much of the conversation, he wasn’t allowing me to do two of the important things we teach volunteers to do in conversation: ask questions and try to truly understand where he was coming from. I wanted an



I would have much rather taken Sophia’s call than Brian’s. The cute picture above is from several years ago in which Sophia is pretending to talk to me on the phone. Sophia, who is 14 now, was one year old when the photo was taken.

opportunity to show him respect and dignity as a person, but his approach wouldn’t allow it.

The topic Brian focused on is definitely an important one: “If you get your wish, and abortion is made illegal, what should the punishment be for the woman who gets an abortion?” Here’s essentially how I responded: “I think the unborn human being is equal to any human outside the womb, so I think if the circumstances and all relevant factors are equivalent then the punishment should be the same as for the killing of a newborn child.”

I think some of us who are pro-life may squirm when pressed with this question of punishment. I know I did, partly because I wasn’t sure what his purpose was in asking or what he intended to do with my answer. Additionally, I probably squirm when I get this question because it is hard to make a broad generalization without knowing more about the specific situation for each mother. The moral logic is clear, but a specific woman’s direct

or indirect involvement in the killing, her intent, premeditation, and possibly other factors may affect which punishment is appropriate. Add to this the fact that when we consider the reasonableness of a certain punishment, we are doing so within a cultural context in which the unborn has already been dehumanized. So I knew that it would grate against Brian's sensibilities to suggest that the punishment be similar for killing the unborn as for killing other innocent human beings.

I don't think he was intentionally trying to trap me with his line of questioning, but that is how it felt from my vantage point. Throughout the whole call the most prominent thought in my mind was, honestly, "I don't want to be on this call with this guy. I want to get off the phone!"

As annoying as this call was, I realized: "Ah! But this guy is exactly the person I need to talk to. He disagrees with me, and it's our passion here at JFA, to talk to people who disagree with us." I knew I needed to stick it out—no matter how he made me feel. This doesn't mean, though, that I had to settle for a "conversation" on his terms, with his incessant battery of questions.

After his sixth consecutive question or so, I finally said to him, "You know, I don't mind you asking these questions, but your manner makes it very difficult for me to speak and give any additional clarification. It seems like you only want me to give you a yes-or-no answer to your questions, and you're not really interested in having a conversation. I just want you to know, that's actually what we do here at Justice For All. We are very interested in having productive and meaningful conversations. A conversation is a two-way thing, though."

This clarification immediately changed the tone of our interaction. After that, he said, "Well, if you answer my question, I'll answer what you ask me as well." Our exchange then became more like a conversation.

Although he hadn't become pro-life by the end of the conversation (that I know of), he mentioned

that he appreciated my willingness to be honest and to answer his questions directly. He added, "I've called a bunch of pro-life organizations, and I just want to say 'kudos' to you, because everybody else I've spoken to either got upset with me or dodged the question. And they were really abrasive and mean in the way they talked to me."

I know from firsthand experience how hard it is to be caught off-guard like the other groups were, but I think Brian was making a good point. We have to be ready. I have taken his criticism to heart: If pro-life activism is my job—if ending abortion is my goal—then I should be ready to answer difficult questions like the one he asked.

I thank God that he helped me remain calm instead of being abrasive, because Brian had apparently not had many positive experiences talking with pro-life advocates prior to calling our office. My ability to remain gracious, despite the pressure I felt, could only come from someone much more powerful than I am—Jesus Christ. It's important for all of us, me included, to continue preparing ourselves intellectually and spiritually for interactions like the one I had on the phone that day. After all, as followers of Christ, we are his ambassadors. We never know when the next opportunity will come up to represent him.

But even if you should suffer because of righteousness, blessed are you. Do not be afraid or terrified with fear of them, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame. - 1 Peter 3:14-16 (NAB)

In Christ,



Paul G. Kulas