



Koukl, Gregory.

Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions

Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009. Pp. 207. Paper. \$14.99. ISBN 9780310282921.

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

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As someone who has a decent amount of books on apologetics lining the shelves in my library I wasn't exactly overly-excited to read Greg Koukl's *Tactics*. I figured it would probably just be more of what I'm used to reading and in some ways it was, but what Koukl has done with *Tactics* is repackage apologetics in a way that makes it accessible and even somewhat appealing to the average believer. Koukl's concern is with teaching his audience how to be good ambassadors of Christ. As ambassadors we represent Jesus and his kingdom and as such we're to conduct ourselves in a godly manner. Koukl prefers to a diplomatic approach to apologetics rather than a D-Day style invasion and the entire first part of the book is dedicated to explaining how exactly to do this. How can we share our faith and offer a defense of it without turning people off or being offensive? The answer is what Koukl calls "Columbo." This is a method that is so intuitive that the reader will probably find themselves saying that they've been doing this for years (I know that was my reaction). The gist of "Columbo" is this: *ask questions*. That's it! Just ask questions. E.g., what do you believe?; why do you believe that?; how did you come to that conclusion?; who told you that?; etc.

Here's the point: questions aren't offensive; they're meant to clarify. Questions don't automatically put people on guard but they do make them think (or at least they should). Koukl rightly observes that you can't love anyone into the kingdom (if that were possible then all of my family would be saved!), and he also rightly notes that you can argue someone into the kingdom as long as those arguments are working in conjunction with other factors (the most important obviously being the Holy Spirit's convicting of sin). But Koukl describes his goal as a modest one, that is, he's just trying to put a stone in someone's shoe. He's not trying to make converts in every conversation, in fact he points out how in many conversations he doesn't even present the gospel message. His goal is simply to get people thinking. Throughout the book Koukl offers various examples of how to employ the "Columbo" tactic by pointing to conversations that he's had with people in the past and to hear him tell it, this tactic is generally pretty effective.

The second section of the book is concerned with finding the flaws of your opponents arguments. The standard method of identifying logical fallacies is employed in this section but Koukl gives some creative names to these fallacies. For example, self-defeating arguments are labeled “suicide.” This is broken down into *formal* suicide and *practical* suicide. Some arguments are self-contradictory in form, asserting that something both *is* and *is not* at the same time (and in the same sense). But then some arguments while not being formally contradictory fail on pragmatic grounds, i.e., “*they simply cannot work in real-life application.*” (121) Koukl also talks of “sibling rivalry,” i.e., a pair of complaints that are logically inconsistent with one another, and “infanticide,” i.e., objections [the child] that are dependent on prior notions [the parent] where the prior notion ends up devouring the objection. Later in this section Koukl instructs the reader how to “take the roof off” of an argument. This involves three basic steps: “*First reduce the point of view to its basic argument, assertion, principle, or moral rule. . . .Second, mentally give the idea a ‘test drive’ to see where it leads. . . .Third, if you find a problem, point it out.*” (146)

What about the belligerent person you come across who just won’t listen to anything you have to say? Koukl gives some sage advice for dealing with this type of person, whom he calls a “steamroller.” First, be courteous; always try to stick to the topic and address their questions in order. If they won’t allow you to address their questions then ask them if they are actually looking for an answer. If you can’t get them to settle down then turn and walk away; some people just aren’t interested in what you have to say and are only out to try to overpower you by talking louder. Every once in a while you’ll come across people who parrot arguments that they’ve heard elsewhere but have no evidence to support it. Koukl suggests asking them where they obtained their information. He also warns against appeals to authority if they aren’t being appealed to correctly. Again, this isn’t anything that you won’t come across in any other book on apologetics, but it’s a bit more layman friendly.

At the end of the day *Tactics* is a good introduction to practical apologetics. It’s full of useful examples, each chapter ends with a summary of what was just read, and it really is what I’d consider a good manual to harness the things that come natural to us anyway. Are there things in this book to disagree with? Sure. At one point Koukl claims of the Bible that “[t]he manuscripts were accurate to over 99 percent precision. The Bible hadn’t been changed.” (102) For starters I’m not clear on what “over 99 percent precision” means but the claim sounds dubious on its face. Then there’s always the problem of instilling the reader with more confidence than is actually warranted. When you’re preaching to the choir it’s easy to get ‘amens,’ but in a popular level book such as this it doesn’t really arm the reader with the best of their potential opponents’ arguments. I’d strongly suggest using this book as a springboard into deeper study and not relying on it alone. My final analysis is that the newcomer to apologetics will benefit greatly from this work as long as they recognize its limits; on the other hand the salty veterans who have forgotten the basics of good manners will benefit from it as well.