

The Art and Science of Communication: How to Ensure Your Ideas Have Impact

The reality is that one can be a great scholar and a poor communicator and have little impact; or one can be an average scholar and a great communicator and have much greater impact! In this session, we'll help academics learn some of the tools of communication and persuasion that apologists and evangelists use to engage audiences with their ideas—and help you learn how not just to communicate your ideas better, but how to communicate the gospel into the academy with maximum impact.

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I. Conclusion

- A. “*The greatest problem when it comes to communication is the assumption that it has occurred.*”
- B. The New Atheist phenomena—bad arguments, terrible scholarship, but very influential. Why? Because Dawkins, Harris, Hitchens *communicate well*.
- C. You can have the best arguments in the world, but unless you can communicate *clearly*, it's all for naught.
 - 1. Behind every question is a questioner.
 - 2. We're not addressing disembodied minds, but *people*—with passions, prejudices, interests, hearts as well as minds.

II. A “Three Level Approach” to Answering Tough Questions

- A. Ground your answer intellectually
 - 1. Three tests for a worldview
 - a. Correspondence to reality
 - b. Coherence
 - c. Liveability
- B. Illustrate your answer existentially
 - 1. The power of stories (including your own)
- C. Demonstrate the answer pragmatically
 - 1. What difference does the gospel make to the question in the real world?
- D. Always lead people to the cross.

1. “Any apologetic that does not start or end with the cross does not deserve to be called Christian”.

III. Aristotle Meets C. S. Lewis

- A. We live in a world in which feeling and emotion have largely replaced the rational.
- B. Aristotle’s famous three levels of persuasion:
 1. *Logos*—the intellectual content of an argument.
 2. *Ethos*—what one’s friends and peers and community thinks.
 3. *Pathos*—The emotional quality of the speaker.
- C. A fourth level of argument that Aristotle missed—the power of the imagination.
 1. As Blaise Pascal once said, our task as Christians sharing the gospel is to present Christ in such a way that people *wish* that Christianity were true, and then and only then should we show them that it is.
 2. C. S. Lewis and the power of story.

*I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralysed much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings. And reverence itself did harm. The whole subject was associated with lowered voices; almost as if it were something medical. But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday School associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could.*¹

 - a. C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and the power of stories

IV. Engaging the Culture

- A. Jesus and stories
- B. Paul and connecting with the stories of a culture
 1. Acts 17:16-34
 - a. First, Paul observed and took the time to understand
 - b. Second, Paul found the points of contact
 - c. Third, Paul identified the idols of the culture and critiqued them
 - d. Fourth, Paul connected the conversation to Jesus.
 - a. “That reminds me of something Jesus said”
 - b. “That reminds me of something Jesus did”
 - c. “That reminds me of a story that Jesus told”

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories* (Orlando, FL: Harvest, 1994 [1966]) 37.