

Take-Home Six

With Gentleness and Reverence

Unless Someone Guides Me | Session Six

What We Found

The verse the whole discipline of apologetics is named after spends most of its words on manner rather than matter. Be ready to make a defense, yes. Also: reverence Christ in your heart, do it with gentleness and reverence, keep your conscience clear. And the purpose clause at the end does not say the critics will be shamed by better arguments. It says they will be shamed when they revile a life and the life turns out to be good.

In Acts 17 Paul speaks to pagan philosophers and does not quote Scripture at them, does not open by telling them they are wrong, and does not mock their idols. He compliments their religiousness, starts from an altar they had already built, and quotes their own poets. Then some mocked, some deferred, and some believed, which is the normal distribution even when it is done perfectly.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Justin Martyr

Dialogue with Trypho (summary)

One of the earliest works of Christian apologetics takes the form of a long conversation with a named Jewish interlocutor who is given real arguments and real courtesy, even though the work also turns sharply polemical in places.

Voice of the Church

St. Francis de Sales

Given as a summary of his method; no locus printed

Sent to a region that had largely left the faith, and finding almost no one would come hear him, he wrote his case out in short pieces, passed them under doors, and waited. For years.

Voice of the Church

St. Ignatius of Loyola

Summarized from the Catechism at CCC 2478

The Catechism cites his rule that every good Christian ought to be more ready to put a good interpretation on another's statement than to condemn it; that if he cannot, he should ask how the other understands it; and that if the other understands it badly, he should correct him with love.

Ready Response

The last three, and the most important.

When you are winning. Stop. Think of whoever came to mind when you were asked about the person who tried to change your mind and only made you dig in. That is what you are about to be for somebody. A person who has been publicly bested rarely reconsiders; more often he hardens, and he will associate the Church with how that felt. Winning the exchange and losing the person is the failure this whole course was built to prevent, which is why you were asked to name one thing you will not do with what you have learned here.

When you do not know. Say so, plainly and without embarrassment: “I do not know. Let me find out and come back to you.” Then actually come back. You already know this works, because somewhere in these six weeks somebody said it to you and you thought better of them for it, not worse.

When it is family. A table with an audience is the worst venue there is, and family arguments about religion are rarely about religion. So do not open it at Christmas. Try a year of being noticeably easier to live with, and say nothing at all until somebody asks you. It is slower and harder than the version you wanted, and it is the one that works.

Live It This Week

- Memorize 1 Peter 3:15-16, both verses, including the conditions.
- Do the thing you named in the closing practice.
- Go to confession before you go looking for a conversation.
- Keep praying for your person by name. You have done it for six weeks; do not stop now.

Memory Verse

“Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence.” **1 Peter 3:15**

Where to Go From Here

The modules: Three standalone sessions extend this course and can be run in any order: Peter and the Keys, The Seven Books, and The One-Liners.

Catechism: CCC 821, 856, 2471-2474, 2478. If you read only one for the rest of your life, read 2478.