

Prestonwood Connection 2005

#7 everyday EVANGELISM

What Should I Do If I Face Criticism?

Mark 14:1-9

Wednesday, March 16, 2005 • Dr. David McKinley

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Thank you so much Teresa, Bret thank you for doin a great job for us tonight and the student choir who were here with us along with our Wednesday Evening Connection vocalists and all of the instrumentalists. I'm grateful for this wonderful time of worship that we've shared together and I'm thankful that you're here and what we've just heard, what we've just applauded is the message of the pulpit of this church; Jesus died, Jesus was buried and Jesus rose again, that is the gospel truth and we've been talking about the gospel, embracing the gospel together and a..., just in every way seeking to understand what it means to be the messengers for the gospel of Jesus Christ in this day, in this hour and in this generation.

Now, you know, if we were to be completely honest as we've been going through this series on *everyday Evangelism*, the reality of it all is that it's very easy to honor Christ at church. When I'm at church and when we're singing and when this praise and worship is going up, it's easy for me to engage and it's easy for me to honor Christ at church. But, it's a whole different matter when we're not gathered in mass and in group and when we walk outside the doors of this place and when we walk into places where people do not honor Christ with us and where we find ourselves a..., being criticized for our faith. Because every single one of us wants to be liked, accepted and respected by others, but Jesus Christ made it absolutely clear to every one of us that if we are His followers we are going to find that to be true to Christ will be to face the criticism of the world and we live in a world and we live in a day where there are many who do not understand and who do not applaud our faith. Christianity and the Christian faith in particular is under attack in America today and we find that time and time again as it is played out in the news media and as it is played out from city to city and county to county, community-community across the breath of this country, because today there's a battle for the souls of men and there's a battle for the mind of a nation and there's a battle for the direction of the future and therefore we in particular are seen as obstructionists to those who would want to see the world a..., fit together in a different way. And so I'm not saying this to say tonight that we need to have some sort of a "poor me" spirit. I don't think we need to have that at all. I just think it's a reality check that every one of us needs to see and understand that we're living in days

where we face conflict over the gospel and many people see us as being fools for Christ's sake. It's true in the courtrooms and the courthouses should I say across America where today the Ten Commandments are under attack and every other thing that has been true and sacred to the church and to the community form the fiber and the basis of our law and the Ten Commandments to the sanctity and the purity of live and of marriage. These things are under attack today. And then it's also true in our classrooms today where it is not acceptable to opening speak of a defined faith in Jesus Christ or of the Christian religion, but instead today it is acceptable to give equal credence to all religions, as though it were, and I'll talk more about that in just a moment and where basically the foundation and the worldview of instruction is that that leaves God out.

I heard about an elementary school in which a teacher was teaching, teaching some of the sciences. She was teaching the basics of the theory of evolution. She was reinforcing what was found in the textbooks about how that everything came from nothing and so in the process of teaching she decided that she would give an illustration and so she picked out one of the children there in her class named Tommy and she said, "Tommy I wanna ask you a question." She said, "I want you to look out that window," she said, "Do you see a tree outside?" And Tommy said, "Yes I do." And then she said, "Now Tommy I want you to look up and do you see not only the tree outside, but a..., you see the sky and then look down do you see the grass?" And he said, "Yes I do." And then she said, "Now, I want you to look back up into the sky" and she said, "I wanna ask you a question" she said, "Tommy do you see God?" And he said, "No I don't." And so the teacher simply said, "We don't see God because He isn't there." Well, the other children just sort of sat there and looked and were trying to take this in, but another little girl lifted her hand and said, "Teacher can I ask a question?" And she said, "Sure, you can ask." She said, "Can I ask Tommy a question?" And she said, "Sure!" She said, "Tommy, look outside again," and she said, "Tommy do you see a tree?" And he said, "Yes!" And then by this time Tommy's getting exhausted and exasperated. "YES!" "Tommy do you see the grass?" He said, "YES!" She said, "Tommy do you see the teacher?" He said, "YES!" And then she said, "Tommy do you see the teacher's brain?" He said, "No!" [pause for congregation laughter] The little girl said, "Well, Tommy, based on what we learned today she doesn't have one." And so... [more laughter] there are issues of injury and of attack and of assault, certainly of much more serious nature than what I've just mentioned to you, but the reality is, is that we are living in days where we need to know our faith and we need to be confident in our faith and we need to expect to be criticized for our faith.

If you'll open your Bible to Mark 14, as I mentioned to you just a few minutes ago, tonight is gonna conclude what has been about 7 weeks of study in the gospel of Mark, looking at the references to the gospel in this wonderful a..., biography of a life of Christ, a...an action packed a..., book of the Bible. It's as though we see the life of Christ in snapshots, quick frames as we move through and there's action and movement and motion, but tonight we come to the chapter that really begins the process toward the cross. It is in this chapter that we learn about where Jesus

would celebrate Passover and would deal with The Last Supper. It was here that He would be betrayed by Judas, but at the outset of this chapter beginning in chapter 14 in verse 3 we read these words:

³And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard, and she broke the flask and poured it on His head. ⁴And there were some who were indignant among themselves, who said, "Why is this fragrant oil wasted? ⁵For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they criticized her sharply.

What this woman did there in that day in Bethany in the presence of Jesus was something that brought sharp and harsh criticism in her expression to Christ. But Jesus said in verse 6:

⁶... *"Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. ⁷You have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. ⁸She has done what she could. She has come before hand to anoint My body for burial."*

That is the unfolding of the final moments, moving toward the passion and the signature event that would unfold, *The Passion Of The Christ* and He said here's where it all begins with this anointing. And then He said this down in verse 9:

"Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this..."

What? Let's say that together.

"...wherever this gospel is preached through the whole world, what this woman did will also be spoken of as a memorial to her."

Now friends again, what is the gospel? It is the message of the death, the burial and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And so He associated what this woman did as a part of the defining moment in His life as He moved toward the fulfillment and the completion of His mission on earth the fulfillment of the gospel. And it is in the ~~w~~...life of this woman whose life was criticized that we begin to see something that we need to learn tonight about what we should do in the face of criticism. If I share the gospel I'm going to be criticized. If I'm faithful to Jesus I'm going to be criticized so what should I do? Well, let me give you 3 simple suggestions of what you need to do, 3 points of guidance in your life as to **HOW YOU NEED TO HANDLE THE ISSUE OF CRITICISM IN YOUR LIFE.**

First and foremost **EXPECT IT**...expect it! I think this is the over statement of the obvious, but it's the obvious that I have to state and that is that every one of us needs to expect that we are going to face criticism. There are no exceptions in the teaching of Jesus that those who follow Him, those who are true to Him are indeed going to be criticized. Faith, living Bible faith brings conflict in this world and so we need to see and to understand that. Now, that does not mean that we ever have permission to

be rude, to be belligerent, to somehow be disrespectful to others, but we must recognize that witness and witnessing for Christ is not a social grace and it's something that when we do it other people are not necessarily going to applaud it and going to approve of it, not the religious crowd and not the irreligious crowd because witnessing for Jesus is seen as something that is foolish and something that is offensive. But it was again here in the gospel of Mark chapter 8 and verse 38 that Jesus Christ himself said:

"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words before this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

So what I'm trying to say to you is don't let anything or anyone keep you from being obedient to Jesus Christ. Expect it, you're going to be criticized.

But there's a second thing that I want to go back and touch when we are criticized and that is something that associates what I talked to you about last week and that is that we need to **EXAMINE IT**. When I am criticized, I not only need to expect the fact that it's gonna happen but I need to examine the criticism that comes. Last week I did a whole message on how to handle objection and the different types of ~~injee...~~ objections that you might face in sharing the gospel and at that time I told you that we needed to look carefully at ways to respond to our critics for the sake of the gospel. Now, the woman here who broke this alabaster box, was **criticized for what she did**. She was seen as doing something that was foolish, something that was out of step and out of character. In fact really what was being said is what you did was wasteful, you threw this away, you're throwing your life away and there are people who will see a true and sincere Christian as being a wasteful person, wasting their time, wasting their money, wasting their service for Jesus Christ. But it was a young missionary Jim Elliott who wrote these words in his journal years ago before he gave his life as a martyr for Christ, a brilliant young man, a wonderful loving young husband, who he along with another group of people had it in their hearts to penetrate the _____ Indian tribe in Ecuador and were willing to risk their lives and in his journal, though killed before his 30th birthday he wrote these words:

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot loose."

And that was the life message of this woman with this box. But not only is it true that we will be criticized for what we do for Christ. The bigger issue is that you and I are gonna be **criticized for what we believe** about Jesus Christ, that what we're going to face is criticism over what we believe and many people object to the gospel and many times they don't even know why. They're looking at the wrong thing, they're focusing on the wrong issues and sometimes we need to examine the criticism and see if we can help to give a sense of understanding and of credibility to their mind and their thoughts to help them to understand the evidences for the gospel

because people focus on the wrong things.

It's sort of like a little boy I heard about, he was riding down the road in a car with his mom, it was a hot summer day and they were following a car that was a convertible in front of them. The car got to a stop light and when the car stopped, someone in the convertible in front of them stood and began to wave their arms and the mother who was driving behind this car looked up and she realized that the person standing there was buck naked. She was aghast, she didn't know what to do, she didn't know what to say, but about that time her little boy who was in the back seat, 5-years-of-age said, "Look mom, she's not wearin a seatbelt." [pause for congregation laughter] You see sometimes in children it's wonderful to focus on the wrong thing. But in the lives in so many adults they focus on the wrong thing because they do not have a sense of understanding, of what matters and what is important and what they need to see when it comes to the issue of the gospel of Christ. And so tonight I wanna just talk to you a few more minutes about how do we respond to our critics and what are some of the common criticisms that we face? In a world filled with doubters and we are believers what are the things that we face and what are the issues that come up, and we need to be able to confront the issues of our day with a sense of reason and reasonableness. Now let me quickly say reason in and of itself will not every ~~win~~ win anybody to Jesus Christ. People cannot be saved by reason. There are reasons to believe and to be saved, but reason in and of itself will never take a man, a woman, a person to Christ. Only that person who has been moved and ~~who has been~~ ~~equ~~ who has been quickened by the Spirit of God and who has been brought to a place where they see their sin and understand that they need to be born again can ultimately confess Jesus Christ and believe on the message of Christ. Jesus saves, not human reason! But there are reasons to believe and there are reasons that we face that are under attack. Now what are some of the issues, what are some of the basic criticisms that we face in ~~sharing our face a...~~ sharing our faith?

Well, one of the basic reasons, actually there're 4, I'm gonna give you **4 BASIC CRITICISMS** that you will face when you share your faith and a..., the first of those is **THE CONTENT OF THE BIBLE**. If you share your faith one of the things you're gonna face is that people are gonna say to you, I don't believe the Bible, or how can you put faith in a book that's filled with errors? And so one of the common categories of...of criticism and conflict with sharing our faith has to do with the content of the Bible. The issue here is that if you can remove the source of authority, you can discredit the message and so many people simply say, I don't believe the Bible or it's a book of myth, it's a book of legends. Let me suggest to you some things that you need to say when someone says that to you.

#1 You just simply need to ask them this question...**Oh have you read the Bible?** You don't need to debate them you just need to just simply ask, oh have you read the Bible? Now some people will say, well yeah, I...I've read the Bible, and many times that means they've picked it up or flipped through it or heard somethin about it. Now maybe indeed they have read the Bible, maybe they've read it through more than you've read it through. So

be sure that you're aware of that.

But then you ask them a second question and that is...**What part of the Bible do you find difficult?** Open the door, let them talk to you. What is the area of the Bible that you find difficult? Literally, show me some of your errors that are causing you problems and indeed they may pick up something that you don't know, are not aware of, and you sure don't to act...act like a little a..., mini PHD as though you've got some response to give them, you just simply need to say, you know I don't know the answer to that but I'll be glad to find out, I'll be glad to investigate it with you. And so ask them the question what part of the Bible do you find difficult?

And then ask them the question, and this is a positive question...**Have you considered evidences for the accuracy of the Bible?** Ask them, have you considered evidences for the accuracy of the Bible? I believe this book because I believe there are some evidences that va...validate the book that I hold and the book that I read and the book that I believe and I'm just wondering have you considered the evidences for the Bible? John Stott, the English Theologian said this:

"We cannot pander to a man's intellectual arrogance, but we must cater to his intellectual integrity."

He's literally saying, while we don't want to feed arrogance, we do want to address legitimate intellectual issues. And so we wanna help people to see the evidences of what we believe. So you wanna know why I believe the Bible? Let me give you A-B-C.

A—ARCHEOLOGY...Archeology! Whenever we look at history past we find that archeology confirms and underscores the validity of the book called the Bible. Now that's true all the way back as we studied the issue of manuscripts and all those things. That's another whole issue, but I simply would quote to you tonight Dr. Nelsen Glueck, who was a Jewish Archeologist and said:

"No archeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference."

What he was saying is that the more we study archeology, it's not that we find that there are more flaws and errors in the Bible, archeology confirms the Bible for us and so we look at archeology as being something. Certainly in our day and our time, just in the last century there was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, one of the biggest archeological discoveries ever. We found, as though it were, in the caves of Qumran a entire set of Old Testament manuscripts in tact, preserved over a hundred years before the coming of Christ, no doctoring of the text, to adjust and to fit the coming of Christ, it was already in tact and already preserved. You study the ancient peoples of the Old Testament, you know if you've ever tried to read through the Bible you don't get very far until you find that you meet the name of all these peoples. There are the Jebusites and the Canaanites and the Amalekites and the Hittites and the chigger-bites and every kind of ite and bite you can imagine and you know that before

long your reading all these names and you're thinkin boy I don't know anything about these people and do you know that for over 3000 years we didn't know anything else about em either outside of the Bible. So even as recently as 150 years ago in the most learned institutions in America and around the world it was said that nobody really validates the historicity of the Bible because there's no evidence that any of these people even existed that is until the discovery at the turn of the last century in which they discovered on a piece of pottery a reference to a group of people called the Hittites. And did you know that today at the University of Chicago you can get a PHD in Hittite studies? You see far from being something that was a myth and a mystery and has been dispelled; in fact archeology has done more to confirm and to underscore the validity of the Bible and the Bible I would remind you has never been revised. Not only is there the issue of archeology, there's the issue of biblical prophecy that's the...

B—BIBLICAL PROPHECY! The Bible is a book that foretells the future. Now we live in an age and a day where you have all sorts of people who want to be astrologists and fortunetellers and all these things but most of the time they're wrong. The Bible on the other hand is a book that is always right and there are some incredible references in the Bible to the issue of fulfilled prophecy, biblical prophecy that validate what we know and understand to be true in the Bible. If we look in the ancient text of the Bible we read in the book of Ezekiel an incredible prophecy about the destruction of a great city of the ancient world, the city of Tyre. In Ezekiel chapter 24 ~~and beginning in verse or excuse me~~ 26 beginning in verse 4 the Bible says that the prophet declared:

*⁴'And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers; I will also scrape her ~~from...her~~ dust from her, and make her top like a rock.
⁵It shall be a place for spreading nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken,' says the Lord God; 'it shall become plunder for the nations.'*

In the ancient world God said that the ancient city of Tyre, a towering city on the shores of the Mediterranean would absolutely be obliterated. Ezekiel made the prophecy and for 13 years nothing happened until Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian leader began to assault the city of Tyre and after a period of time sieging the city he finally was able to break through and they went in and they ransacked the city and they left it in ruins and so Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city of Tyre. But the prophecy wasn't fulfilled because while the city had been destroyed, portions of the walls and the towers were still standing and then Ezekiel had said that God said that it would literally be wiped clean. 250 years later Alexander The Great made his conquest to control the world and in the process of so doing he began to try to deal with a group of Persians who had run and fled and they had moved to the new city of Tyre. Old Tyre was left, as though it were, in ruins, but out off shore you could go by boat to the new city of Tyre and Alexander and his army tried for a period of time to destroy that ancient city, but they couldn't get to it. So guess what he did? He mobilized a group of people to take all the rubble and all the ruin from the ancient city of Tyre, throw it... **< turn tape >** ...and to

build a bridge, a causeway out to the new city of Tyre and so the slate was wiped clean long after Ezekiel was no longer breathing his breath. And did you note that even today because of it's location on the shores of the Mediterranean the fishermen bring their fishing nets to the open foundation of the stones of ancient Tyre and that's where they dry their nets. Now that's an ancient prophecy that is true and ~~ven~~...validated, it's seen in history and it is known today. Certainly there is the issue of the modern day Jerusalem and the issues of the Middle East. Jesus Christ our Savior during His ministry in the height of the rule of Rome said that not one stone would be left standing on the temple and in 70AD, 40 years after the death of Jesus Christ, Titus the Roman general marched into Jerusalem and destroyed the city of Jerusalem and scattered the people and for 2000 years there was no Jerusalem, there was no temple, but just as Jesus had said that it would be destroyed, the prophets of God had said that it would be rebuilt and in the life span of some who are in this room, you saw in 1947 when Israel became a state again and people began to re-gather and to rebuild and an ancient language began to be spoken and here's the issue, you will never understand the issues of the Middle East unless you understand the message of the Bible, because it's all about biblical prophecy. So there's archeology, biblical prophecy and then there's the issue of the...

C-CONSISTENCY of the Bible, the consistency; wherever the Bible speaks on a subject the Bible speaks with authority and consistency. The Bible clearly said in the book of Leviticus that the life of the flesh is in the blood. We know that even in our day and our age, that is in modern era, that is in the founding of this nation that some of our leaders were bled to death because they were blood letting as a medical practice. But the Bible said the life of the flesh is in the blood. The Bible tells us in the book of Isaiah that God sits upon the circle of the earth. The Bible told us that the earth was round, not that it was flat. The Bible would be invalid if it had told us that...that the earth was simply some sort of a...a platter floating on the back of a turtle swimming in a sea and that's what some of the ancient mythology said about the earth, but the Bible never said that. You see the Bible is consistent and again it has never been revised. Therefore when you share with someone about the Bible and when you talk about the Bible you can speak with a sense of confidence, but more than that it's important to say to someone, don't you think that it would be unwise to just miss the world's most important book without ever having understood clearly it's main message. Wouldn't it be unwise to just dismiss the world's most important book without ever having clearly understood it's message. There is the content of the Bible, that is one of the primary you're gonna face by critics.

Secondly you're going to face **THE CHARACTER OF GOD**. All kinds of questions and all kinds of issues about who God is and what God is like and really that's the debate about God, it's the issue of His existence, i.e. atheism, agnosticism. Atheism says there is no God. Agnosticism says if there is you can't know Him. But the idea of the existence of God and then very closely akin to that is the issue, as though it were, of the character and the nature of God. Now when it comes to the issue of the

existence of God one of the simplest things that you can do if you speak with someone who says I just don't believe in God, is to simple point them to the sphere of total knowledge. That is, just take a pen and a piece of paper and draw yourself a circle on a page and just say, let's assume that this is the sphere of total knowledge, that all knowledge in all the world is in this sphere, what portion of this knowledge do you think you have? And just hand them a pen, ask them to fill it in. Heh! You know, even the most brilliant people are not gonna act as though they have a quarter or a half of the knowledge in the world. In fact, if you were to say what percentage of the knowledge do you think you have, and the question is outside of what you know do you think there's the possibility, the possibility that there could be the reality of God? Is it possible at some percentage level beyond what you have in your grasp that there is the reality of the existence of God? Well, that's another issue that could be addressed and we could focus on but it simply reminds us of the fact that God is so much bigger and so much greater than what the mind of man can begin to perceive and comprehend. Now, I believe in the existence of God and I believe that God has revealed His existence to us in 3 specific ways. Within the total sphere of knowledge there are 3 incredible evidences of the reality of God.

The creation of the universe.

The conscience of man.

And the person of Jesus Christ.

The creation, the wonder, the marvel, the symmetry, the organization, the complexity of creation does not leave us to logically conclude that this is just pure randomness, but that there is something that has been designed and of course there's a massive movement today of intelligent design that begs the question; can this all just be one big fatality or is it indeed a creative plan of God?

Then there's conscience, there's the fact that in me and you there's a sense of knowing that there's a right and a wrong and...and within us a desire to understand it and to comprehend it. C. S. Lewis was a Cambridge scholar who was an atheist an...and was antagonistic in his pursuit of his knowledge and...and towards his students who were people of faith. But C. S. Lewis in another generation became a believer and a follower of Jesus Christ and in his book *Mere Christianity*, he wrote these words:

"My argument against God was that the universe seems so cruel and unjust, but how had I gotten the idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?"

And then he went on to say:

"Of course I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own, but if I did that then my argument against God collapsed too. For the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my

~~private fantasy or my private fancy.~~ Thus in the very act of trying to prove that God did not exist; in other words that the whole of reality was senseless I found that I was forced to assume that one part of reality, namely my idea of justice was full of sense. Consequently atheism turns out to be too simple. If the whole universe has no meaning we should never have found out that it have no meaning...~~no meaning~~; just as if there were no light in the universe there would be no creatures with eyes, we should never know it was dark. Dark would be without meaning."

He simply said that everything in me that calls for good and bad, right and wrong is a sense of consciousness and even that becomes an evidence within me of the reality of God.

And then there's the issue of Christ. Jesus Christ, stepping into history, changing history, transforming history and ~~changeforming~~...transforming the lives of people who follow Him. You see when it comes to the issue of the character of God the big issue is, is that God cannot be known, that's one thing. Then in the issue is well God must not be good because there's so much evil in our world and yet that's where Lewis said hey I had to deal with the fact that my sense of good and evil literally came from ~~I have~~...the fact that I had to acknowledge a God. And yet the same people who will accuse God of evil are the very same people who will adjust and accommodate their own choices of evil and call it good. I love Ravi Zacharias; he's an incredible biblical apologist. A number of his articles and a number the articles that I have gleaned information from that I'm sharing with you tonight come from the website there on the front of your worship guide called a..., www.reasons.org it's a wonderful resource on the whole issue of apologetics and moral issues and all those kinds of things. But Ravi Zacharias talks about the fact that so often when he goes to speak at a university that somebody will stand up and say the problem is that you tell me I have to believe in God and God must be evil if He allows evil to exist in this world and they often pose ~~pres~~...questions to Ravi about how that if there's evil than God must be evil and Ravi said:

"I often use the very significant, contemporary illustration to defend my position on who God is and what God is like"

He said:

"So often a person will say to me, okay so a plane crashes, 30 people die, 20 people live, what kind of God would arbitrarily choose to let some people live and some people die? You want me to believe in that kind of God?"

And Ravi said:

"But then I continue and I say, but you know it's interesting while we want to accuse God of doing wrong in a moment like this, we choose to play God when we determine whether a child within a mother's womb should live. We argue that it is a moral right, so when humans...human beings given the privilege of playing God can choose to exterminate a child in the womb it

can be a moral right, but when God plays God it's called an immoral act. Help me to reconcile these two."

You see the issue is that we have to deal with the fact that there are things we don't know, can't understand, can't explain, never will about suffering and evil and those things in the world, except that we do have an explanation. The explanation that we live in a fallen world that is under the persuasion and the power of the prince of the power of the air and that every person has been corrupted and impacted by sin and therefore suffering and so there are issues that we have to deal with when it comes to the matter of dealing with the character of God. So we have the issue of the content of the Bible, we have the issue of the character of God.

We have the issue of **THE CONFLICT OF RELIGIONS**...the conflict of religions, that is that we have all these different religions in the world and who can know that any of these religions are right? If you're an atheist you basically have to assume that all religion is wrong because all religion acknowledges the existence of a supreme being. So that's a difficult position and because all of history reflects that mankind worships and all of history reflects the fact that though mankind worships, animal kingdom doesn't and so isn't it interesting that the highest form of anything that exists and lives on planet earth wants to acknowledge something more and greater and beyond and so you deal with this whole issue of religion and different types of religions. Ken Samples on that website www.reasons.org has an article called do all religions lead to God? And he talks about the fact that we have a trend today towards, and you hear this word all the time, I know it's a big word, it's a philosophical word, "pluralism." Pluralism is basically the idea that many exist as one. When we speak of pluralism in religion that we have ~~many~~ ~~ex~~...many religions existing all at one time, all in the same way, but what's happening in our world is not just that we have many all at one time. We also now have the idea that all of them have the same value and the same proof and so there's a lot of argument today about the fact that there are many ways to God and that all religions are basically the same. Now, it's certainly true that all religions have within them some sense of value, virtue, some moral characteristics that are espoused and that are lifted and some that are put down. But there's something very distinctive about Christianity and that is that Christianity doesn't just espouse moral values, Christianity begins with the issue of sin, salvation and the need for redemption. There is a specific message, not about man improving himself, but man being worse off than he ever imagined and that apart from a Deliverer, a Redeemer that there's no hope for him and therefore it is important for us to understand that Christianity will not conform to the religions of the world and though there is a movement towards conformity, to ever really study a religion is to realize that logic won't let them all conform. You have to violate the principles of logic to try to make all religions one big bowl of spiritual soup. That's why Geisler & Brooks in their book said:

"Even those who claim logic does not apply to God, use logic in that very statement."

To try to say logic doesn't apply to God and we can't have a logical sequence in dealing with religion is to use logic to try to defend it. Let me read Ravi Zacharias one more time:

"Today sensitivities are at an all time high and rightfully so, tolerance of different races and religions have been lacking over the years, but pluralism, many as one in existence, has given way to relativism, all the same in essence. Here's the rub; while the average secular person will believe something without subjecting it to rational critique, he disbelieves things on the basis that he or she says they are rationally inadmissible, so he critically attacks Christian assumptions using principles of logic that he doesn't himself hold to."

There an issue when we deal with religion and that is that Christianity won't conform with religion and you either have to accept that or you have to deny that, but Christianity is very specific among religions. And so that brings me to the 4th and the final of the things that we need to examine and that is not only that we need to examine the criticisms that come to you and that the critic will bring to us the issue of the content of the Bible, the character of God, the conflict of religions but ultimately it is this issue..

THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST! The most offensive thing about our faith is the issue of the cross. People are willing to let the cross be a symbol as long as it is sentimental, but the Bible will not allow us to present the cross as a sentimental symbol. Jesus is not just a way to God. The Bible is specific and the message of the Christian faith is exclusive and everyone hears that and they say, that is arrogant; it's arrogant for people to say that there's only one way to be saved. And yet I appreciate what Stephen Evans the philosopher has said:

"It is an essential part of the Christian faith that Jesus is God in a unique and exclusive way. It follows from this that all religions cannot be equally true. If all religions are equally true than Christianity is false and therefore not all religions are true."

Heh! You see you have to decide who Jesus is. Is He a moral teacher? Is He just one of many prophets? Is He just a religious fanatic? Is He just a myth being propagated by His followers today? Or is Jesus Christ who He claimed to be? The Bible is very specific about Jesus. If anyone ever asks you if there's only one way to be saved you need to be very specific in what you know about that question. 1 Timothy 2 and verse 5 says this:

...there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for us all, to be testified in due time,

The work of Jesus is not spiritual, it is not philosophical, it is moral and judicial and the only way that anyone ever can be freed from sin, forgiven and made right with God is in the full finished work of Jesus Christ. So you gotta decide who you think Jesus is. Is He Lord? Is He

liar? Is He lunatic? What is He? You gotta put Him in one of those 3 categories because the message of the cross will not allow for anything else. I love what Bill Bright suggests, he said:

"If someone is unwilling to embrace the issue of Christ and who Christ is..."

He said:

"What I always encourage them to do is to take a 30 day experiment."

He said:

"I always ask them would you be willing to consider a 30 day experiment and simply read the gospel of John for the next 30 days and then we'll get together and talk about it."

You see Bill Bright learned a long time ago that the Word of God could do with it's authority what many people cannot do with their arguments and sometimes if you'll just get people to the Bible and get em to Jesus and get them to read it's amazing what God will do in their lives because it's all bout Him. It's all about His work. It's all about His grace.

Well, we have come a long way from Bethany haven't we, huh? Where Mary broke the box and put it there on the feet and the head of Jesus. What did I say we need to do when we face criticisms? We need to expect it. We need to examine it. We need to really examine it and expect it when it comes that we're gonna have to deal with it in a variety of ways. But let me just go back to that scene and let me just remind you that the way that handle it is that whenever you're criticized you need to **EXTOL IT**. To extol, is to glorify, to magnify, to lift up and when I'm criticized as a follower of Jesus Christ I need to extol that criticism, not for my glory, but for the glory of Jesus Christ. The wonder of that moment there in Bethany is that when...when this woman was being criticized, look who took up her defense, Jesus did. Jesus said she has done a good work and not only has she done a good work but wherever the gospel is preached, this message...this message of this woman and this work is gonna be shared. Do you know I fulfilled that tonight? I did, by talking about her tonight I did exactly what Jesus said and I can't tell you have many other people have done that throughout history, sharing the power of the message of Christ. It was from that moment as you'll read in verse 10 that Judas Iscariot stood up and betrayed Jesus and yet it was from that moment that Jesus stood up and went to the cross. Listen to what the Bible tells us about criticism: [1 Peter 4:16, 19]

...if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

Extol God in this matter!

...let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to

Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

Did Peter have this woman and that event in mind do you think? If you get criticized you commit yourself to a faithful Creator because there's never anything that you will do in obedience that you will do in witness or that you will do in love for Jesus that He will overlook. Are people gonna applaud you? Maybe not, but let me tell you God will approve of you and the approval that I seek in life beyond all others is the approval of the audience of One that Jesus would be able to say of me and to say of you.

[Matthew 25:21]

"...Well, done good and faithful servant;..."