

AN APOLOGIST

The Disciple's Answer

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear"
(1 Peter 3:15)

The epistle of First Peter was written to help Christians who were about to undergo an immense amount of suffering and persecution (4:12). As these Christians maintained their faith in the face of such trials, it would only be natural for some unbelievers to ask why they were remaining faithful. What was it about their faith that made it worth losing their life? Peter told these Christians they needed to be ready to answer these kinds of questions.

An Apologist

The apostle Peter said they were to be ready to give a "defense" (or an answer – KJV). The word "defense" is translated from the Greek word **apologian**, from which we get our English word "apology." This Greek word, however, does not convey the idea that Christians are to apologize for their faith. It means to give a verbal defense, or a speech in one's defense, as in court. This Greek term is also found in our English word "apologetics," which is a branch of theology devoted to defending the evidence that supports Christianity.

The apostle Paul was set for the defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:16-17). Acts 17:2-3 says Paul went into a synagogue of the Jews, "and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and **giving evidence** that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ'" (NASV, emphasis mine – HR).

This work of defending the gospel is not just given to the apostles. The Bible teaches that all disciples are to be ready to defend the faith. Jude calls upon his readers (and all disciples today) to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The word "contend" means to fight or struggle for something as a combatant. "Earnestly" is translated from an athletic term which means to agonize,

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describing the extent to which we must go in our efforts to defend the truth. People mock, twist, and pervert the truth of God's word. When they do, disciples are to be ready to stand up and give a defense.

Peter's admonition applies to us today. Although we may not be facing fiery trials for our faith, we are asked questions about our beliefs and practices, and every disciple needs to be ready with answers to such questions. In this lesson, we will study 1 Peter 3:15 and determine what is involved in being an apologist.

Sanctify the Lord God In Your Hearts

The first step in being ready to defend our faith is sanctifying the Lord God in our hearts. To sanctify means "to consecrate or set apart." The New American Standard Version renders this phrase: "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts." We are to set aside Christ from all others, and set Him above all others in our heart. He is to be given the position of Lord and Master (which is a part of being a disciple). With Jesus seated upon the throne of our heart, we will respond to Him in obedience (John 14:15) and confidence (Heb. 13:5-6), believing that His teaching is worth defending.

Always Be Ready

The apostles were told not to give any thought as to how they would answer (Matt. 10:19, Mark 13:11). The Holy Spirit would speak through them. However, no such instruction is given to us. Instead, we are told to be ready with an answer.

Readiness requires preparation on our part, which is achieved in different ways. We are to study the Word of God so we will be prepared to explain and defend our beliefs (2 Tim. 2:15, 2 Pet. 3:18, Heb. 5:12-14). In addition to studying the Bible on our own, we are to prepare for Bible classes and attend every worship service. Gospel meetings provide additional opportunities to hear the Word of God. We can read debates and other literature which places an emphasis upon defending the truth of the gospel. There are no short-cuts to preparing ourselves to be ready with answers.

The time we spend in such efforts is helpful in several ways. First, it gives us confidence by strengthening our faith (Rom. 10:17) and removing our doubts (Eph. 4:14). Our confidence helps other disciples to have confidence (Phil. 1:14). Finally, our confidence helps those who are lost. Those who are searching

for the truth are not only looking for answers to their religious questions, but they are also looking for people who are confident in their beliefs.

To Give A Defense

Peter tells us to be ready with a defense. As we have already pointed out, this term is translated from the Greek word **apologian**, from which we get the English word "apology." "Apology, as used in this context, does not mean 'saying you are sorry,' but rather a 'formal defense' of what you believe. Peter was urging Christians to be ready to give a reasoned, intelligent explanation of their faith to anyone who might ask about what Christians believed and practiced" (King 16).

The only proper defense for our faith is the Word of God. Matters of right and wrong are not determined by a disciple's ideas, opinions, or personal experiences. Those who challenge our faith and practices have their own opinions and experiences as well. Saying things like, "Well, I think..." or "My preacher says..." are not adequate answers. Truth is defended by going to the source of truth – the Word of God (Ps. 119:160; John 17:17).

To Everyone Who Asks You

Peter said that we must always be ready. We must have an answer whenever the occasion presents itself. We are not to be annoyed or offended when people ask us questions about our beliefs. Instead, we are to welcome and appreciate the opportunities to defend the gospel and to help others come to a knowledge of the truth.

While it is true we must always be ready with an answer to everyone, we must recognize the fact that the Scriptures elsewhere teach there are some questions which are not deserving of our time, as well as some people who are not deserving of our attention (1 Tim. 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:16-18; Titus 3:10-11; Matt. 7:6). Wisdom must be exercised in knowing when one is sincerely looking for the truth or when one is looking for an opportunity to argue and quarrel.

A Reason For The Hope That Is In You

Some unbelievers were amazed as they watched Christians willingly suffer and even die for their faith. When approached by such people, Christians needed to be able to explain their hope was in Heaven and was firmly established in the mercy of God and the resurrection of His Son (1 Pet. 1:3).

While we may not be called upon to explain why we are willing to suffer for Christ, we need to be ready to explain what we believe and why we believe it. How many disciples of Christ are prepared to give a defense for their most basic beliefs and practices? Among these would be...

- The existence of God
- The deity of Christ and the validity of His resurrection
- The inspiration of the Bible
- Why we believe in Heaven and Hell

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- What one must do in order to be saved
- The purpose and method of baptism
- Why we reject denominationalism
- Why we do not use instrumental music
- Why we partake of the Lord's Supper every Sunday

Disciples of Christ are to have a good grasp of the basis of their faith and a thorough knowledge of the basic doctrines of the New Testament (Heb. 5:12-6:2).

With The Proper Attitude

Not only are we to be ready with a proper answer or defense, but we are to present it in the proper way. The way we handle ourselves as we give our defense is an important part of our defense. Peter said that we must do so with meekness, fear, and a good conscience (vv. 15-16).

Meekness: This admonition has reference to our attitude towards those who are asking for the reason for our hope. We are not to be arrogant or resentful in our answer. We are to be meek.

"The word meaning 'gentleness' or 'meekness' is rendered 'strength under control.' It is used to describe horses who are broken to the bit and bridle, and so are disciplined enough to be useful. The meaning is therefore that we are to bring our emotions, especially anger and malice, under complete control, so that they do not spoil the effectiveness of our presentation" (King 16-17).

The apostle Paul said, "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). He admonished the Colossians to "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Col. 4:6). It is important we remember such admonitions, not only as we answer people verbally, but as we engage in written exchanges. It can be difficult to defend the truth in writing without appearing harsh and hateful.

Fear: This admonition has to do with our attitude toward God. A deep reverence and respect for God needs to be shown in the way we give our defense. Unbelievers need to see we take God, His Word, and His ways seriously. Also, we need to remember that we will give an account for the way we respond to such opportunities (Rom. 14:12).

A Good Conscience: Suffering for our faith does not give us a license to sin. Not only are people looking for confidence, they are also looking for consistency. Hypocrisy has a devastating effect upon our influence. Our life must back up our profession of faith.

Conclusion

This command to give a defense is not optional. If we are followers of Christ, we are also defenders of His teachings. In our first lesson, we noted the fact that a disciple of Christ is more than a student of the Lord's teachings. A disciple is a follower and a supporter of Christ. When the truth is attacked, disciples are to be ready with a defense. When our faith is questioned and challenged personally, we are to be ready with a defense. We cannot be

ready to do so until we have sanctified Christ as Lord in our hearts, devoted ourselves to a study of His word, and determined that we will meet every challenge and opportunity with the right attitude.

References:

King, Dan. "Ready Always To Give A Defense." *Truth Magazine*. 20 March 1997:16-17. Print.

Questions

1. What does Peter tell suffering Christians to be ready to do (1 Pet. 3:15)? _____

2. What is Paul appointed to do (Phil. 1:16-17)? _____
3. What do the words "earnestly contend" mean (Jude 3)? _____

4. What does it mean to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts? _____

5. Referring to the previous question, why is this the first step in preparing ourselves to give an answer for our faith? _____

6. What problem is addressed in Hebrews 5:12-14? _____

7. What kinds of things can we do to prepare ourselves to defend our faith (2 Tim. 2:15)? _____

8. How should we harmonize the instructions in 1 Peter 3:15 with passages like 1 Timothy 6:3-5, 2 Timothy 2:16-18, and Matthew 7:6? _____

9. What is meekness, and why is it important when giving a defense of our faith? _____

10. What instructions does Paul give in Colossians 4:6? _____

11. Why is it important that disciples of Christ maintain a good conscience? _____
