

Sermon: An Apology for the Gospel

Text: I Peter 3:15-22

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Introduction: As Christians the Apostle Peter tells us we are to be always ready to give an answer (Greek: *apologia*) for our faith. There is a branch of theology which is called “Apologetics.” An apology is a defense or proof in this case for Christianity.

I Peter 3:15 (NIV) ¹⁵But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

Peter says we need to be ready. To always be ready we need:

I. Knowledge

Our text, especially verse 15 indicates that every serious Christian ought to be prepared to answer questions concerning Jesus and faith in Him.

The prophet Hosea (**Hosea 4:6-14**) says that there is equal responsibility for priests and people in the area of knowledge of God. Do not depend just on me or any other teacher for your knowledge of God or His Word. People do not perish for lack of good church music, comfortable pews or adequate parking, but they die from lack of knowledge.

A balanced look at knowledge is needed, however, that should not drive us toward cynicism. (Wade through this with me.)

“Ever since the Garden, we have been indiscriminate suckers for the enticement of omnipotence. We are cerebral voyeurs, unable to accept the idea that some knowledge may lie outside our legitimate purview. At its worst, this insatiable curiosity shows itself in our morbid love for trivialities—we are information junkies who cannot discern relevance from immediacy. But even in more respectable garb, we feed our prurient interests with a “godly” quest for apologetics. We have swallowed the lie that certainty requires exhaustive knowledge. We want to be able to “prove God” so that everyone can really know and quit worrying—especially us. God demands active faith; we seek irrefutable certainty. Nevertheless, knowledge is important!” -James Sennett in “The Wittenburg Door” (Aug./Sept. 1986). Christianity Today-Vol. 31, #7.

Look at verses 18-22 in our text:

I Peter 3:18-22 (NIV) ¹⁸For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, ¹⁹through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison ²⁰who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²²who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

There seems to be like a catechism or creed (dead, buried and raised) here. There is nothing wrong with formal confessions like the Apostle’s Creed as long as they agree with the Bible and are not meant as conditions of membership into Christ’s Church. The Bible alone is sufficient for faith. It is a by-product of the Holy Spirit and faithful followers of the past.

Catechisms will teach you answers to the questions that people have prepared, but should never be an excuse for not thinking. New questions may need to be asked.

There is a difference between knowing Jesus as Savior and knowing about Jesus. Or as William Barclay puts it: “Our faith must be a first-hand discovery, and not a second-hand story.”

In George Barna’s book: *Evangelism That Works*, he says, “One of the most important lessons derived from our conversations with those engaged in evangelism is that preparation is a key to effectiveness (which we hear in our text)....Almost 9 out of 10 people who shared the gospel (85 percent) said they would like to have been better prepared.” This was underscored by the fact that 9 out of 10 evangelizers (91 percent) said they generally shared their faith unexpectedly in response to concerns and interests raised by unbelievers.

When spiritual opportunity knocks, we need to be ready. But if our lives are a wreck in every way, most people will not be lining up to ask: “How do you do it?” What is needed is:

II. A Life-Example (long-term and victorious)

I Peter 3:15 (NIV) ¹⁵But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

A victorious life begins at one's baptism as that person is brought into the Kingdom as a joint-heir with Christ. Peter tells us that to be an example for others, we need to have:

Christ as Lord in your heart

We reverence God, keep our lives holy, and never intentionally do anything to dishonor or bring disrepute to His name.

Gentleness and respect is required (v. 15).

This approach must be used in engaging unbelievers and skeptics. We need to engage people in a proper manner. Nothing is ever gained by a holier-than-thou attitude. Rarely is a person convinced of the love of God by the contempt or ridicule of a well-intentioned evangelist. We should be noted for:

Good behavior is required (vv. 16-17).

I Peter 3:16-17 (NIV) ¹⁶keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Good behavior is shown by a:

clear conscience, i.e., know what is right and do it.

Good behavior will bring shame to those who would falsely accuse.

The early Christians were thought of by some to be politically subversive because of all the Lord, Savior, and King talk. They were accused of being cannibals because of language surrounding communion that was misunderstood.

In our culture today, evangelical Christians are made to look dangerous because of stands that may be taken in the area of:

**Pornography (sexual mores)
Family values**

**Pro-life questions
Social justice**

I do not think our commitments to Christ can be forced on the culture legally or otherwise, but if they watch us throughout our lives maybe they will be convinced of the only way to live life is with Jesus. When they see the hope we have, they may reconsider their direction.

Joe Aldrich wrote a book called: *Lifestyle Evangelism*. Listen to what he says:

“Unfortunately, most evangelism courses focus on teaching the individual how to say the words of the gospel. Not many zero in on how to play the music. And the verbal message of the gospel without the music loses much of its impact. The Bible blends both together.”

Our understanding of God and faith must be more than head-knowledge and also more than emotionalism or sentimentality. Heart and head (both) need to be converted. Peter says, “Always be prepared to give an answer [words] to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope [music] that you have.”

Here are the key points of Aldrich’s evangelistic method:

- 1. The Christian must have a demonstrably different lifestyle - this does not mean weird. It means the person should demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit.**
- 2. The person to whom they are witnessing must feel loved. Invest in others.**
- 3. When the appropriate time comes, we must try to persuade the person to accept Christ. We have to ask!**

Lifestyle evangelism is one critical method to bring people to the Lord. It must, however, be accompanied by the Word.

III. The Holy Spirit Works through His Word.

The Gospel (God’s Word) is confrontational. It calls a person to follow Christ, to die to self, to give up everything if necessary for the Kingdom ~. to put God FIRST!

It is through sharing the Word that we can carry out the GREAT COMMISSION of Jesus which is recorded in Matthew’s gospel. Listen to what Jesus tells us.

Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV) ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

God always works through His Word. Reading through the New Testament (esp. Acts), it is always as a response to the gospel that baptism is performed. It is never offered to those without understanding as would be the case with infants.

I Peter 3:21-22 (NIV) ²¹and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²²who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

God’s Word - His message will always get out -even if he has to change messengers or methods.

Luke 3:7-8 (NIV) ⁷John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

Luke 19:37-40 (NIV) ³⁷When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: ³⁸“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” ³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” ⁴⁰“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

Philippians 1 demonstrates that the Word will work independently of human credentials and character. The gospel stands on its own. Its credentials are independent of the speaker or hearer for that matter. Truth is truth in anyone’s mouth. Personal motive has nothing to do with anything. God’s Word does not return to Him void or without results no matter what.

Philippians 1:15-18 (NIV) ¹⁵It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am

in chains. ¹⁸But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,

For those who want to witness both in deed and word, Jesus has promised in many passages to be with us always and reward us.

Conclusion: There are good people who are going to go to hell because they did not accept Jesus. As Christians we need to have an apology for the gospel. Sometimes we literally do need to defend our faith to a hostile culture, BUT most of the time we just need to live the Christian life.

Love your neighbors and be prepared to give an answer to the questions that most assuredly will come from the unbelieving world. Jesus says:

John 3:3 (NIV) ... “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

Jesus goes on to say:

John 3:5 (NIV) “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

All around us there are opportunities to tell others about Jesus by the way we live *and* with words.

In just a few weeks we will have an opportunity to share the gospel when the community is invited here on a Sunday, November 16th to see Gerbert and to see that we care about them and their children. Are you ready?