

Sermon: An Apology for the Gospel

Text: **I Peter 3:15-22 ESV**

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Introduction: As Christians, the Apostle Peter tells us we are to be always ready to give an answer (NIV) (Greek, *apologia*) for our faith. The ESV reads slightly different: **I Peter 3:15 ESV** ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

There is a branch of theology that is called “Apologetics.” An apology is a defense or proof, in this case, for Christianity - and gives reasons to believe what the church believes, is true.

Peter says we need to be ready (prepared). To be prepared we need:

I. Knowledge - There is no substitute for knowledge. The Holy Spirit works *with* the Word of God. Our text, especially **verse 15** indicates that every serious Christian ought to be prepared to answer questions concerning Jesus and our faith in Him.

The prophet Hosea 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 do die from lack of knowledge.

Hosea 4:6-14 ESV ⁶ **My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge**; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest (**comment**) to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children. ⁷ The more they increased, the more they sinned against me; I will change their glory into shame. ⁸ They feed on the sin of my people; they are greedy for their iniquity. ⁹ And it shall be like people, like priest; I will punish them for their ways and repay them for their deeds. ¹⁰ They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore, but not multiply, because they have forsaken the Lord to cherish ¹¹ whoredom, wine, and new wine, which take away the understanding. ¹² My people inquire of a piece of wood, and their walking staff gives them oracles. For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray, and they have left their God to play the whore. ¹³ They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar, and terebinth, because their shade is good. Therefore your daughters play the whore, and your brides commit adultery. ¹⁴ I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore, nor your brides when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go aside with prostitutes and sacrifice with cult prostitutes, and **a people without understanding shall come to ruin.**

A balanced look at knowledge is needed, however, and that should not drive us toward cynicism where we question everything. Wade through this with me:

PROPHECY: “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 verse 18-22 in our main text: **I Peter 3:18-22 ESV** ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

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

There is a difference between knowing Jesus as Savior and knowing about Jesus. The Greek has two different words that can mean different ways of “knowing” (γινωσκω and οίδα). William Barclay says it this way: Our faith must be a first-hand discovery, and not a second-hand story.” - like heresay....

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%) said they would like to have been better prepared.” This was underscored by the fact that 9 out of 10 evangelizers (91%) 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 (one that is both long-term and victorious)

I Peter 3:15 ESV ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it 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:

A. Christ as Lord in your heart (v.15)

We reverence God, keeping our lives holy (dedicated to Him), and never *intentionally* doing anything to dishonor or bring disrepute to His name or His Church.

B. Gentleness and respect are required (v. 15).

This approach must be used in our engaging unbelievers and skeptics. We need to interact with 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 apologist. We should be noted instead for:

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

I Peter 3:16-17 ESV ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

Good behavior is shown by a clear conscience, i.e., know what is right and then do it. Good behavior will bring shame to those who would falsely accuse you.

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 the language surrounding communion that was misunderstood.

In our culture today, evangelical Christians are made to look dangerous because of stands that may be take in the area of: pornograpghy (sexual ethics), pro-life stands, family values and even 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 reasonable way to live life is: with Jesus. When they see the hope and joy we have, they may reconsider their life direction.

Joe Aldrich wrote a book called: *Lifestyle Evangelism*. Listen to what he wrote: “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 emotion or sentiment. Both heart and head need to be converted. Peter says, “always being prepared *to make a defense* (words) to anyone who asks you for a reason for the *hope* (music) that is in you.”

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 will show the fruit of the Spirit in his/her life.
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 must ask for a decision!

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

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 we hear in Matthew’s gospel. **Matthew 28:19-20 ESV** ¹⁹ Go **(lit. as you go)** therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in[a] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

God always works through His Word. Reading through the New Testament (esp. Acts), you will notice 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 ESV ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

God's Word - His message will always get out - even if he has to change the messengers or methods (I am an interim minister). **Luke 3:7-8 ESV** ⁷ He (John) said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

Luke 19:37-40 ESV ³⁷ As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, ³⁸ saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" ³⁹ And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." ⁴⁰ He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

The unregenerate world want us to shut up, we cannot and dare not!

Philippians 1 demonstrates that the Word will even, if necessary, work independently of human agents or even good character. The gospel stands on its own. Truth is truth in anyone's mouth. Personal motive has nothing to do with anything if God so chooses. God's word will not return to him void or without results no matter what!

Philippians 1:15-18 ESV ¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶ The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

Yes, and I will rejoice,

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

Conclusion: There are good people who will be going to hell because they did not accept and submit to Jesus. As Christians we need to have a defense of our faith, but also good news for the lost. We need to defend our faith and at the same time live the Christian life.

Love your neighbors and be prepared to give an answer to the questions that most assuredly will come from unbelievers.

Jesus said to Nicodemus: **John 3:3 ESV** ...“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again [**or from above**] he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Jesus goes on to say: **John 3:5 ESV** 5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

All around us there are opportunities to tell others about Jesus by the way we live *and* with words. Let’s do everything we can to be true to Jesus’ call on our lives.

With regard to lifestyle evangelism - and a little aside from Philip Yancey’s book *What’s So Amazing about Grace*: “C.S. Lewis observed that almost all crimes of Christian history have come about when religion is confused with politics... (a paraphrase of *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, Vol 3)

The apostle Paul had much to say about immorality of individual church members, but little to say about the immorality of pagan Rome. He rarely railed against the abuses in Rome regarding slavery, idolatry, violent games, political oppression, greed and the such, even though such abuses surely offended Christians of that day as much as our deteriorating society is offensive to us.

“How will we feel if historians of the future look back on the Evangelical church...and declare, ‘They fought bravely on the moral fronts of abortion and homosexual rights,’ while at the same time reporting that they did little to fulfill the Great Commission, and we did little to spread the aroma of grace in the world?” - C. S. Lewis

(Mention Ernie Valdespino and his thank you for leading him to Jesus over 30 years ago.) **We need to return to our mission.**