

## INTRODUCTION

How many of you have ever attended a professional football game? If you have, you've probably witnessed this. Two fans stand up next to each other. The one on the left holds up a big "D" and the one on the right holds up a cut out or drawing of a fence. The meaning is "defense." The fans are urging their team to make a defense. Well, that's exactly what Peter does, figuratively, in 1 Peter 3:13-16. He urges us to make a defense and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

## GIVE AN ACCOUNT

Let's start with verse 15 and the words *"the hope that is in you."* That refers to the things that we believe about God and His gospel. We believe, for instance, that God is triune, one being with three persons. We believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. That is just one of the hundreds of beliefs we have about God and His gospel.

Now look at the word "everyone" in verse 15. That refers to non-Christians. Stop and think about it for a minute, all the contacts we have with non-Christians – family members, friends, neighbors, classmates, teammates, co-workers, waitresses, check out clerks, the people in the seat next to us and so on.

Whoever the non-Christians are, notice what verse 15 says that some of them will eventually do. They'll ask us to give an account for the hope that is in us. They'll ask or challenge us about God and His gospel.

Some of those who do so are sincere. They ask us to give an account because they do want to understand God and His gospel. They do want to learn from us what we believe. Knowing that I am a Christian, a non-Christian law student once asked me why the Bible teaches retaliation, alluding to the "eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" principle. *"I have real problems with that,"* he said. He was sincere and truly wanted to understand.

But some non-Christians are hostile, as Peter makes clear in verses

and 14. The ones that he describes here disrespect Christianity and Christians. They ask us to give an account because they want to discredit God and His gospel, not understand it. I once talked with a skeptical attorney who tried to expose what she thought was a contradiction in my beliefs. *“How can you possibly believe in a loving God and hell at the same time?”*, she sarcastically asked. She was hostile and wanted to discredit God and His gospel.

Whatever their motivations are, you can be sure of one thing. Sooner or later, in one way or another, non-Christians are going to ask us to give an account for the hope that is in us.

## **MAKE A DEFENSE**

So what should we do when they ask that? Peter tells us in verse 15. We should make a defense. That is our call. When non-Christians are sincere, we need to answer their questions. When they're hostile, we need to turn back their objections. In either case, we need to articulate God and His gospel clearly to them. We need to make a defense.

I can't impress upon you enough the urgency of doing this. Consider something. The non-Christians who ask us to give an account will never be the same. What we tell them will move them either closer to hell and further from heaven or closer to heaven and further from hell. So we need to make our defense and we need to make it well.

The question is “Can we?” Can we competently make a defense and give an account for the hope that is in us? Let's see if we can. Listen to the following real life questions that non-Christians have asked me or objections that they have raised to me over the years: (1) Why is the Old Testament centrist; (2) Is hell really fire; (3) It's egocentric of God to demand that people praise Him; (4) If God loves me, why am I having so many problems; (5) The Christians I know aren't really any different than the rest of us; (6) It's arrogant to say that your religion is right and everyone else's is wrong; and (7) Where did God come from. Those are just a few of the questions and objections that non-Christians raise.

The issue is, are we able to intelligently answer the questions and turn back the objections? Or would we have to say, *"I'll get the preacher."* To ask it another way, are we ready, willing, and able to make a defense? I hope so because that is our call.

## **LEARN ABOUT GOD AND HIS GOSPEL**

That's our call and there's something that we have to do to answer it - learn as much as we can about God and His gospel. That's what *"always being ready"* in verse 15 requires. We can only defend what we know and we can only know what we learn.

The first way to learn is through our own study of the Bible. The primary purpose of Bible study is to transform us. But another purpose is to inform us. We study to know and what we know we can defend.

Mormons, as you may know, believe that Jesus isn't God - that God created Him. Several years ago, a Christian I know talked with a Mormon who challenged the deity of Jesus by quoting Colossians 1:15. That verse says that He is *"the firstborn of all creation"* and, according to the Mormon, proves that He was created. The Christian wasn't able to turn back the challenge and could only reply, *"I'll ask my preacher."*

Is Jesus God and if He is, how would I know that and be able to prove it? The answer is to study and learn. When I study the Bible at night and come across a verse that teaches the deity of Jesus, I write it down in the back of my Bible. I have over 20 such verses listed. If anyone challenges the deity of Jesus, I can take him or her to each of those and explain what it teaches. We ourselves must study and learn the Bible.

There's a second way to learn - through the Christian education ministry of the church. Christian education is the essential activity in making disciples of Jesus and we do it well. Our Sunday school program, for instance, is second to none. So take advantage of the educational opportunities we offer to you. You will learn and know if you do.

Let's go back to the verse that the Mormon challenged that Christian

with, Colossians 1:15. We had a Sunday school class last year that discussed that very verse and explained the idiomatic meaning of *"firstborn."* Anyone who attended that class, understood what was said, and remembered it, could intelligently meet the Mormon's objection.

Anyway, that's what we have to do to answer Peter's call in verse 15. We learn as much as we possibly can about God and His kingdom. We'll be able to make a defense if we do. We'll be able to answer the questions and turn back the objections of non-Christians.

## HOW WE SAY IT

Peter not only tells us to make a defense, he also tells us how to do that. He mentions three things here that impact our effectiveness in that regard. Let's take a brief look at each of those.

The first thing that impacts our effectiveness is how we say it. We see that in verse 15 and the words, *"Yet with gentleness and reverence."* Say what we have to say with gentleness. That means speak the truth graciously. Also, say what we have to say with reverence. That means speak the truth respectfully, humbly. Be forceful and firm but gentle. Be confident and convinced but reverent.

Here's why. A new preacher came to town and everybody at the Baptist Church was talking about him – how great he was and how much better he was than the old one. So the town skeptic tried to figure out why. He asked one of the deacons, *"What did the old minister preach?"* The deacon answered, *"He told us we were all lost sinners and were all going to hell unless we repented."* The skeptic then asked, *"Well, what does the new minister preach?"* The deacon replied, *"He tells us we are all lost sinners and are going to hell unless we repent."* With that, the puzzled skeptic scratched his head and declared, *"Well I'll be darned if I can tell the difference."* *"Oh, there's a big difference,"* the deacon said, *"This one says it with tears in his eyes."*

The moral of the story is that people respond not only to what we

say but how we say it as well. How we say it is just as important as what we say. So defend the gospel and give an account gently and reverently.

## HOW WE LIVE

The second thing that impacts the effectiveness of our defense is how we live. Notice what Peter commands us to have in verse 16, a good conscience and good behavior. There's something we've all heard more times than we probably want to. Don't just talk the walk; walk the walk as well. I fear we've heard that so much that it's lost its impact on us. But it's true. It's vital that we walk the way that we talk.

The reason is that non-Christians respond not only to what we say and how we say it but also to how we live it. We may wish that wasn't true but it is. We'd like non-Christians to judge the gospel on its own merits but most won't do that. They'll also judge it on how well we ourselves live it out. Ironically, renowned philosopher and atheist Frederick Nietzsche understood that as well as anyone. He once commented that if it weren't for Christians, there would be a lot more Christians.

You get the implication of that. Good behavior reinforces our defense of the gospel. Bad behavior weakens it. Bible commentator William Barclay said it well, *"A saint is someone whose life makes it easier to believe in God."* That's a penetrating insight. Our good behavior makes it easier for non-Christians to believe what we say. Our bad behavior makes it more difficult for them to believe what we say.

The bottom line is that it's impossible to defend God and the gospel effectively unless we live it out. How we live is just as important as what we say and how we say it.

## WHAT WE ARE

There's a third thing that impacts the effectiveness of our defense - what we are. Look at verse 15. Peter exhorts us to *"sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts."* According to the Tyndale commentary on 1 Peter, sanctifying Christ in our hearts means having inner communion with Him,

experiencing His indwelling presence in the depths of our soul, having contact with Him at the very core of our personality.

Well, experiencing Jesus that way dramatically impacts our defense of God and His gospel. That's because His presence empowers us spiritually. And when we're empowered, we have something special going for us. Our very being communicates the soft, sweet, overpowering presence of Jesus. Something goes out of us that touches non-Christians in a way that words never can. They sense something winsome, something gracious, within us and are drawn to the words that we speak.

Tony Campolo tells about a new boy who moved to his neighborhood when he was growing up. He was a deeply spiritual boy because the nuns at his Mexican convent had taught him how to be. Campolo says that he had an unexplainable serenity about him. And when he walked to school with Campolo's friends and him, something unusual happened to them. They were a bit subdued and felt they needed to behave. Campolo was a Christian and had told his friends many times before how their filthy language and dirty jokes offended him – but they never stopped. When they were with this Mexican boy though, they did. His very presence compelled them to. Listen to what Campolo concluded about that: *“This strange Mexican boy was able to influence them for good in a way that none of us could understand. What he was had far more impact than what I said or did.”* Catch that last line again.

The moral of the story is clear. What we are on the inside speaks as powerfully to non-Christians as what we say and do on the outside does.

## **CONCLUSION**

That then is how we make a defense. #1 – learn as much as we can about God and His gospel. #2 – speak about God and His gospel gently and reverently. #3 – live out the gospel. And #4 – be spiritual. Do those four things. We'll always be ready to make a defense if we do. We'll be the Steel Curtain, the Purple People Eaters, and the Fearsome Foursome of God and His gospel if we do.