

The Biblical Mandate to Defend the Gospel



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BULLETIN ARTICLES

We must defend God and His Word with reason via logically sound arguments because God has provided legitimate reasons for believing in Him, and likewise has commanded us to present those same reasons to others. The apostle Peter wrote: “But sanctify the Lord God in your heart, 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, emp. added). Peter not only provides a good reason to defend the Gospel rationally (i.e. because God commanded it), but also gives us a set of guidelines to follow in our defense of that Gospel.

First, in order to defend the Word properly, we must sanctify the Lord in our hearts. As the ASV says, “sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord.” Jesus Christ must sit upon the throne of our hearts, and our every thought must be under obedience to His authority. He must reign in our hearts as King of kings and Lord of lords, having no competition as the Sovereign of our lives. “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other” (Matthew 6:24). Before any one of us sets his mind on the defense of the Gospel, he first must run a “systems check” on his heart to make sure that he has taken up his cross to follow the Messiah. “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. Do you not know yourselves that **Jesus Christ is in you?**—unless indeed you are disqualified” (2 Corinthians 13:5, emp. added). When the Lord assumes His rightful place in our hearts—separate from everything else, and more respected and honored than anyone or anything else—then and only then will we be prepared to defend His cause!

Second, we must be **ready** to give a defense. We do not live in an age when we can take no thought as to how we should answer critics of the Cross. The Holy Spirit will not lay on our hearts what we should say, because He has laid it in our hands. The Bible is the perfect Law of Liberty that was “once and for all delivered” to the saints (Jude 3). It has been given by God and “is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16). In order to **defend** the Word, we must **know** the Word. We must study to show ourselves approved (2 Timothy 2:15), and give attention to the reading of it (Acts 17:11). If a person thinks that he can defend Christianity without having studied diligently God’s Word, he is sorely mistaken. The following anecdotal account illustrates this point.

One of the foremost biophysicists of the day lectured all over the world. He gave the same lecture every place he went. His faithful chauffeur sat in on every lecture and listened intently. One day, the chauffeur grew tired of hearing the same lecture over and over again, so he made a challenge to the biophysicist. The chauffeur said that he had heard the same speech so many times that he could give it just as well as the biophysicist. In fact, he boasted that he could give it even more eloquently than his boss. The scientist was interested to see if his chauffeur could make good on his claim. So, since the people at the next stop never had seen the scientist in person, he and the chauffeur swapped clothes, with the scientist assuming the driver's position and the chauffeur assuming the scientist's position. That night, the chauffeur gave the speech—better than the scientist had ever given it! However, after the speech, a man in the audience raised his hand to ask a question. The question was filled with polysyllabic scientific jargon the likes of which the chauffeur-turned-orator never had heard. He paused briefly, and then said confidently: "That is undoubtedly the simplest question I have ever heard in my life. In fact, it is **so** simple that I'm going to let my chauffeur, who is sitting on the back row, answer it!"

The chauffeur could proclaim the correct message, yet when it came time to defend that message, he found himself woefully unprepared. Paul described certain people who were exactly like the chauffeur. In 1 Timothy 1:5-7, he wrote: "Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, having turned aside to idle talk, **desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm**" (emp. added). These people likely could recite various rituals and customs of the law such as tithing or honoring the Sabbath. Yet they did not understand that the whole purpose of the law was to produce love from a pure heart. To employ a popular adage, "they could not see the forest for the trees."

Third, we must be ready to give a **defense**. In order to defend something, we first must acknowledge that an attacker threatens. The battlefield upon which we make our defense is not a fanciful gaming board or a plastic-soldier playground. Our feet have been planted in the bloodiest trench the world has ever known. The devil, our adversary, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). He sinks his teeth into the world through atheism, evolution, egotism, materialism, selfishness, and a host of other vicious vices. Once his teeth are embedded firmly, he rips and tears human souls away from their Creator, leaving fang-holes that fester and infect everything around them. He is real, he is malicious, and he is determined. Every child beaten, every woman raped, every baby aborted, every foul word uttered—is the result of his offensive tactics. Yet, fortunately, we are not ignorant of his devices. We have been placed on the defensive by the supreme menace of mankind. As we **defend** what is right and good, we **offend** all that is wrong and evil. Until we recognized that Satan and his cohorts have initiated a battle that jeopardizes the souls of all mankind, we never will be ready, nor able, to defend the Lord's cause.

Fourth, we **always** should be ready to give a defense to **everyone** who asks. How easy it is to preach against drunkenness when we stand amidst a group of teetotalers. How easy it is to declare that the Lord our God is one God, when monotheists surround us. How easy it is to affirm that the Lord made

the heavens and Earth, when only creationists compose the audience. The difficulty arises when a teenager condemns drinking among his peers who urge him to drink, or when the preacher condemns greed in a room full of rich, stingy materialists. Giving a ready defense is not terribly difficult, but always being ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you—whether friend or foe—is challenging indeed.

Make no mistake about it, Christianity in the twenty-first century will demand as much courage as it did in the first century when deadly persecutions plagued the church. No, in America we do not have secret police kicking in our doors and murdering our families because of our Christian beliefs. We are not brought before courts and forced, upon penalty of death, to offer a pinch of incense on a pagan altar to a pagan god. However, even though the challenges of a righteous life may be different today, they are real nonetheless. The scientist who defends Creation endures haughty jeers from his erudite peers. The teenage girl who refuses to engage in premarital sex endures the brunt of jokes from the boys in her class. The successful businessman or businesswoman fights the consuming plague of materialism. The learned Bible scholar crosses swords in a battle against conceit. Every retired preacher, elder, or church member wrestles with the enemies of apathy and laziness. And, although materialism, conceit, apathy, and laziness are not as physically bloody as being burned at the stake or crucified on the cross, they nevertheless hold the same dangers and eternal consequences as any weapon the Deceiver has ever used against the children of God. Thus, to answer everyone—anytime and anywhere—demands the courage of a true soldier of the Cross.

Finally, we are to give our answer with **meekness** and **fear**. The meekness and fear mentioned in 1 Peter 3:15 were described earlier in verses 3-4. Peter spoke to women and said: “Do not let your beauty be that outward adorning of arranging the hair, or wearing gold, or of putting on fine apparel; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ornament of a **gentle** and **quiet** spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.” But the gentle, quite, **meek** spirit is not a **weak** spirit. Rather, the idea is one of a huge war stallion dressed in ornate battle regalia, with steamy breath billowing from his nostrils and powerful muscles rippling through his body, yet with all his power and force brought under control by the bit in his mouth. He is strength under control, force with direction and reserve, guided power coupled with might. Such is the meek and quite person. His strength and courage shine forth like the rays of the Sun. He is wise, knows the Scriptures, and is ready to give an answer for his hope. Yet he does not scream and yell; nor does he bully his opponents by his magnificent strength (although he is quite capable of doing so). Rather, he controls his tongue and his temper, and answers clearly and concisely. And although he knows the truthfulness of his statements, he shows no arrogance or haughtiness of spirit, but instead exhibits only true concern for the soul of the querist. Fearing the Lord and not men, he gives full credit to his God and humbly, yet tactfully, defends the truth—only to be answered by the quiet astonishment and respect proffered him by his enemy as well as his ally. He is power under control as was the Lion of Judah when He was led as a lamb to the slaughter.

In conclusion, apologetics is not reserved for a group of elite, erudite scholars who study 16 hours a day. Apologetics is for farmers and pharmacists, preachers and plumbers, biochemists and

bricklayers. The sixth-grade boy who explains to his friend why cursing is wrong, the office worker who explains the importance of baptism to her colleague, and the microbiologist who debates evolutionists on the campuses of state colleges all drink from the fountain of apologetics. Apologetics, then, is the reasonable defense of New Testament Christianity anytime, anywhere, to anyone, using whatever material is suitable for the occasion.

Published December 31, 2000



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