

Why Would They Ask

And let's open our Bibles to the first epistle of Peter, chapter 3. The sermon is going to be on verse 15, but I'm going to read 1 Peter 3, 8 to 17, so you have context. This is the Word of God. Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another.

Love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous, not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, blessing. Knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For he who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit.

Let him turn away from evil and do good and let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayers, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you are blessed.

And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled, 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. Having a good conscience that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better if it is the will of God to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this text that we have this evening and we ask that you would open it to us. It would help us to understand what it is Peter's saying and be challenged in our lives by it.

We ask this in Jesus name. Amen. Okay, the text is 1 Peter 3.15 and it is considered to be the Bible text for what's known as apologetics, the defense of the faith.

And the verse, let me hear it again, 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. That verse breaks down into three parts. First part is sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.

The second part is always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you. And the third part is with meekness and fear. Now, when Christians consider this verse, the focus is usually on always be ready to give a defense.

Wait a minute. What defense? What's the defense? What does it mean to always be ready? Well, the word defense in the Greek is apologia. It's a word from the legal world.

It's most often used in the legal world in Greek to respond to an accusation made. So it's not something that's off the cuff. It is something that's thought about, prepared.

And Greg Bonson's book, which I must have left in my briefcase over there, I apologize. I was going to hold it up and say Greg Bonson's book, Always Be Ready, series of essays that Greg had written, compiled by Randy Booth. On page 151, he says, engaging in apologetics is a moral necessity for every believer.

We must be always ready to offer an answer for the hope within us. Then he says, that was point one. Point two, apologetics is not pugnacious or arrogant.

It's rather in meekness and fear. It's not a matter of persuasion. We don't persuade.

The Holy Spirit does that. And it's not based on a different ultimate authority than that which we have in theology, the word of God. Many people, when they get into apologetics, start saying, well, this is what the unbelievers say.

So based on that, no, you rest on the word of God. So Bonson then, though, goes on to give, those are two points. He goes to give another 13 points on how to do apologetics focusing on methodology.

Because we always love methodology. For those of you that don't know, I'm on the board of the Aquila Report. And one of the most popular articles that they were, when we publish, we publish articles every day, except Sunday.

One of the most popular format is 10 ways, seven things. Some numerical approach like that. Our readers in the tens of thousands eat that stuff up.

So Bonson gives 15 points on apologetics. Well, Peter does say, be ready to give a defense. And so that gets our focus.

As Bonson's suggesting, you've got to be always ready to give this defense. What's the content? So he writes books. Books are sick on how was the content of the defense and how do you prepare to give the defense? You know, what will you say? Where can we prepare? What can we memorize? What should we recite? We focus on methodology.

We read books, we study. That is an emphasis. Always be ready to give a defense.

Now another emphasis in 1 Peter 3.15 is on the who is responsible. Bonson, as I just quoted, says it's the moral responsibility of every believer. It's known as the general office of believer.

We're all responsible to be some sort of expert in what it is that is the content of our defense so that we can respond to somebody when they ask us. Pastor Mathis, you've heard, for example, has pointed out that the primary responsibility in scripture in the New Testament for this is the office of pastor. Yes, every believer, the general office, every believer, if asked, should be prepared to give some a response.

But we don't believe necessarily that your job is to go by, let's go by, you know, 8 to 10 inches of books so that we can read and study to prepare for this. So one emphasis is the defense and always being ready. Another is who's responsible.

Many commentators also focus, as Bob did in his sermon this morning when he mentioned this text, on that we do this with meekness and fear. That suggests that perhaps Christians have always had a problem with being pushy and abrasive and arrogant in how we interact

with unbelievers. Few commentators, this is interesting, I think, few commentators make more than a passing reference to what it means to sanctify the Lord in your hearts.

That's going to be our third point tonight. Now, Peter says we're to give this defense when asked. And few commentators focus on what does this mean? Well, somebody asked you a question.

It's obvious, isn't it? Maybe. But why would anybody ask you about the hope that is in you? What would cause an unbeliever to go out of his way to ask you, what's this hope that you have? So we're going to look at three points this evening quickly.

What is “the hope”?

The first point is, what is the hope? The second is, is your hope visible? And the third point is, are you different? So what is the hope? We're to give an answer for the hope that is within us.

Well, Peter talks about this concept in his letter. So I'm just going to read you what he says. 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 3 to 5, Peter states, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.

A few verses later in chapter 1 verses 7 to 8, Peter continues, Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love, though now you do not see him, yet believing you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls. In chapter 2 verses 9 and 10, Peter writes, speaking of believers, but you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light, who once were not a people, but now are the people of God, who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. Chapter 4, Peter's bringing up the fact that there's a judgment coming, and in verse 5 he speaks of the Gentiles, they will give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

Part of what is our hope is knowing that we are facing judgment. So the hope that is within us, it's different than the defense, the apologia that we make when asked. Do you get that? I mean, you're supposed to be ready to say something when somebody asks you a question, and the question they're going to ask you is, well, I see you're carrying 20 pages around in a loose leaf notebook all the time, what's in that? No, they're going to say there's something about you that is characterized in their minds as they look at you and me as hope, and they're asking why do you have this? That hope, as Peter's stated, is the hope of the gospel.

It makes us different than an unbeliever. We're sinners condemned before God. Judgment is coming, but we have been saved from this judgment by Jesus Christ who died for us, was raised for us.

We have now an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled that does not fade away, reserved in heaven. Brothers and sisters, that's some hope, and that hope ought to lead us, Peter says, to rejoice with joy, to proclaim his praises, to live differently than those around us who do not have that hope. So what is the hope? The hope is the gospel and its effect in our lives, and it should be visible enough that somebody is going to say, gee, could you explain this? Now, they may not use the right words, that's fine, but it makes you different enough that they're going to ask you a question.

Is Your Hope Visible?

So my second point tonight is, is your hope visible? Now, I'm in an evangelistic, I guess what you call a chat group. I'm an old guy, so they have these groups get together. I don't know what the proper titles for them are, but we're studying biblical evangelism today.

And last month, we meet once a month for an hour and a half, and last month, 1 Peter 3.15 came up, and one of the pastors, this group is pastors, a few ruling elders, mostly from the OPC. One of the pastors said, you realize that in 1 Peter 3.15, somebody's supposed to ask your members, your parishioners, your congregants something. And that got me to thinking, well, why would somebody ask us? Why would they ask about the hopes within us? It means our hope has to be visible.

So we want to spend some time, and in the outline in your bulletin, that's the longest section, because this is the longest section of the sermon. So I gave you more room for notes there. Again, let's look to see what Peter says.

1 Peter 1.13-15, Peter states, therefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober. Rest your hope fully on the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts as in your ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct. Your life should be different from what it was before you came to know Jesus Christ.

Now, I'll just use myself as an example. I was what people in college, I graduated college in 72. I became a believer in the fall of 72 after I graduated college.

I was a goody two shoes. I didn't smoke. I didn't drink at all.

I didn't do drugs ever. Still today, it's beyond comprehension to me. I'm too much of a control freak, I guess.

I'm not about to try and lose control of myself. And when I became a believer, several people wrote letters to each other. Tripp's changed.

He's really weird now. I wrote a letter to a young lady that I was, who I thought was special. And I shared the gospel.

And the word that came back was that she thought I'd lost my mind. Your life should be different after you become a believer from what it was before you came to know Christ. In

chapter 1, 18 to 19, Peter says, knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver or gold.

Gosh, everybody wants to tell you about how silver and gold are not corruptible. They're tangible assets. You should buy them, et cetera, et cetera.

To Peter, they're corruptible things from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ as a lamb without blemish and without spot. So your morality and life goals before salvation came from the tradition of your fathers. They came from your culture.

And that makes sense. You grew up with your peers. You grew up being taught by your parents and your family.

You grew up in whatever activities you were. You could have been on a sports team, whatever. And that's where you developed your concept of morality, right and wrong, how you ought to act.

Now, Peter says, he calls that, by the way, aimless conduct. But now, your morality and life goal should come from a focus on the hope within you, the salvation you've received from God. First Peter 2.1, Peter says to Christians, therefore laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking.

So these are attributes common to the world. They ought not to be common to you. Go through Peter, read what he says.

Later on in chapter 2, verses 11 to 12. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. So your lives are not to be characterized by fleshly lusts.

Your conduct is to be so honorable that it's considered honorable by the unbelievers around you, which is rare. And you may be persecuted for that. But in the day of judgment, even your persecutors will admit that you had good works.

First Peter 2.15 to 16. For this is the will of God that by doing good, you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bond servants of God. You are to be one that does good.

Goodness, righteousness, honesty, truth should characterize your life. It's getting to the point where I can almost say, find me somebody in politics who embodies any of those traits. But don't use your theology, Christian liberty, as a cloak for vice.

It doesn't matter. I'm going to be saved. Doesn't matter what I do.

So I can go sin because I'm saved. I've been saved. Once you're saved, you can't lose it.

No, that's, you don't use your liberty as a cloak for vice. Chapter three, Peter turns to husbands and wives. And in the section on wives, he says in verses one to two, wives likewise be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they without a word may be won by the conduct of their wives when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.

Now, just an aside, there has been around since the 70s, at least, this concept that somehow I don't have to share content verbally or somehow with words to evangelize. I can just sort of live my life. Poppycock, balderdash, pick whatever word you want.

And this is the verse often used for that, that without a word, they may be won by the conduct of their wives. If you go through the context, the husbands understand their wives are believers. They don't necessarily like that, but they do see something in the way their wives' conduct is chaste.

Now, chaste conduct may refer to avoiding sexual sins, but it's broader. And I'm going to read not the next, but the next, but one passage that I read in chapter four is going to give us some concept from the other side of what unchaste conduct might be. So while it's aimed at wives there, the concept is that all believers, though, should have a morality that's chaste.

First Peter three, eight to nine. Peter says to you, finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another, love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous, not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. I wanted to bring this point up because the conduct that Peter's calling us to, all this is going to make us different.

Not only is how we are perceived outside the church by unbelievers, but it's how we act within the church, believer to believer. Not only ought your life among and around unbelievers be different, but how you interact with your brothers and sisters in Christ is also a testimony to the hope that is in you. First Peter four, verses two to four.

This is giving, if you will, a list of some of unchaste conduct beyond and wider than just sexual. That he, speaking about the Christian, no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles when we walked in, here you go, lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.

In regard to these, they, the unbelievers who are your friends, think it's strange you don't run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil about you. I've seen that happen too. You were with your friends, you did what your friends did.

You become a believer. A couple of things happen. You have a whole new group of people of which you are part of the same family, the family of God.

They start taking up your time, but you no longer have the desire to go do that which you did before. Your unbelieving friends don't understand that. Occasionally, they will say, well, I think he's lost his mind.

He's just really weird. They're going to speak against you to themselves, because they're looking to justify their conduct. You become an affront.

You become a prod to their conscience that this is what they do. Hey, Harry used to do it. Now, Harry doesn't.

1 Peter 4, verse 10. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Again, between believers, you're to minister to each other.

Use the gifts with which God's gifted you. This is all part of working out the hope that is in you. It makes you different.

And 1 Peter 4, verse 15. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Peter also talks about the suffering that comes to believers.

It's part of the background of the letter which he's writing. And in it, he says that we ought to expect to suffer as Christ suffered. But he lists some lifestyles here in verse 15 that ought not to characterize any believer.

Let none of you, murderers, thieves, evildoers, broad term, busybodies. Churches don't preach about gossip as much as they used to 40, 50 years ago. Gossip's on a number of the lists of really heinous sins.

Here, Peter uses the concept of being a busybody. So, as a believer, you have a hope that is in you. It's God's salvation from his wrath through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you're to turn from the world, its morality, its lifestyles. Hey, if you're just pleasant to people, that will get you noticed. But the hope within you needs to be as visible to those around you.

How you act, how you act differently, as just being pleasant. And if your hope is visible, then they may ask you. They're not going to probably say, well, you know, tell me about the hope that is within you.

But they're going to ask why you're different, why you don't do this. For example, well, let me, I'll come back to that point in a minute. I do want to offer a note here.

For unbelievers to notice your life and that it's different, wait for this. You have to be around unbelievers. Back in the 70s, Christians started getting into the holy huddle.

We cut out all of our non-Christian friends. Why? I'd much rather be with my brothers and sisters in Christ. You cannot obey Jesus and cut yourself off from the world.

Indeed, Jesus sent us into the world. Here is what Jesus says in John 17, the high priestly prayer, verses 14 to 17. Praying to God about you and me.

I have given them your word and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

Sanctify them by your truth. Thy word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

Question to ask yourself, how many non-Christians do I know? Or do I have a chance to interact with? Think of the past week, maybe the past month. You do have opportunities. Sometimes you just have to think about it.

For example, most of us have never worked. I have, but I've also worked in a normal business world where I'm surrounded by unbelievers all the time. You go to the grocery store.

You go to the doctor's office. You go to the gas station, the auto repair shop. You have opportunities to act in such a way that the fact that you have a hope that leads you to act differently is visible.

For those of you in the business world or wherever you are, here's a simple thing that I've done for years. Somebody curses or swears, and I ask them, excuse me, would you please not do that? I use the F word every other word. Yes, and I'm asking you if you please might change that.

And particularly when you say you take the Lord's name in vain, you're not being too pushy, but you're showing a difference that's reflective of the hope that is within you. So if you do that, be ready to ask why you're different. So the third point of the sermon tonight is a question for self-reflection.

Are You Different?

I put it in the second person. You might want to rephrase it in the first person. Are you different? Or ask yourself, am I different? Why would somebody who's an unbeliever ask me about the hope that is within me? They first have to see that I'm different.

They have to see that in such a way that it makes sense to them that I'm not like them. Now, they may just turn around and go in another direction, let them. But if the hope that is within you is visible, then you're different.

And you may, through the Holy Spirit's leading, have someone come and ask you why. Peter gives us a single phrase that describes this in 1 Peter 3.15. Notice how the verse is structured. The very first part of the verse, but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and always be ready.

There's a structure here. Sanctifying the Lord is what's necessary before you need to worry about always being ready. And what does that mean? It means you follow Jesus.

It means you obey his commands, not the world's. Pastor Mathis is going through and will return next Sunday morning to the Sunday school class on the plan of salvation. Or sorry, plan of sanctification.

In our Sunday school, dying to the world, its lusts, its desires, its treasures. You are called to do that. You're called to live righteously, to act righteously.

Again, 1 Peter 5.6-9. Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon him, for he cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the devil, walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

And 1 Peter 3.15. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and your lives. The heart is not a motion, it affects your lives. It's the seat of all that you are.

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. Sanctify the Lord God in your lives. Be sanctified.

As you grow in sanctification, this affects how you live. Understand the hope that is in you, the gospel of salvation through the work of Jesus Christ. And always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you why you're different.

What is this hope that you have? Why do you rejoice when everybody else is miserable? Why aren't you committing suicide when suicide rates are just ballooning? In our culture. And when you do respond to a question, do so with meekness and fear. Don't be pugnacious or arrogant.

Why will they ask you? Because they see you as different than themselves. So I ask you to reflect upon this question. Are you different? Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word and this challenge from the Apostle Peter. Indeed, the entire first epistle of Peter is focused on what it means to be a Christian and how that affects how we live our lives. Lord, may we be those who are not Christians in name only, not Christians 75% of the time in action.

But may your Holy Spirit be working in our sanctification that we would be more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ, that we would turn from who we used to be and rejoice and sing praises for who we are now. And because of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who died that we might now be saved. So help us, Father, to be different as you would have us to be different.

And to bring you glory. Amen.