

HOPEFUL DEFENSE

“But in your hearts revere 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” (1 Peter 3:15).

In the above verse, we hear the apostle Peter instruct all Christians to be ready to give an answer to those who ask concerning the hope that is within them. I am inclined to believe that right now, living in the tumultuous times we find ourselves in, this section of Scripture offers some of the best advice regarding how we are to conduct ourselves. For one of the things we Christians struggle with the most is how to talk to others about our faith, and the current state of affairs only compounds our fears and apprehensions. It is one thing to believe in Christ, but it’s a whole other thing to talk about our particular belief in a meaningful way, which is not off-putting and offensive. Consider, on the one hand, how talking about our faith is part and parcel of what it means to live as a Christian in this fallen world. Yet, on the other hand, we don’t want to come off as being too preachy; as someone who is always trying to cram his/her own thoughts and beliefs down others’ throats. The only way we are ever going to find the happy balance and reach a level of comfort with sharing our faith with others is by heeding Peter’s advice this morning. So let us parse his sentiments.

First, Peter tells us we should always be *ready*. To be ready to give an answer demands that preparation be made. For no person ever becomes skillful at a task without prior preparation and practice. Therefore, we must study the Word of God in order to be prepared to explain and defend what we believe. How sad it is to me that so many Christians are illiterate when it comes to the Bible. The simple stories and facts of the Bible elude them. The Bible is one of God’s greatest gifts to mankind. It is His very Word to the nations. And yet His Word is often neglected by those who claim to believe in it the most. The situation is certainly made worse when a Christian has the opportunity to speak the truth in love, but is incapable of doing so due to a lack of knowledge regarding the history of salvation. Peter instructs us to be ready. We prepare ourselves by going to the source. By reading, marking, learning, and inwardly digesting God’s Word. By doing so, God Himself prepares us to make a solid defense when the opportune time presents itself.

Second, Peter tells us that we will know when that opportune time comes because we will be asked to give a *defense*. This is solid advice and worth following. To avoid being preachy it's best to wait until you are asked. This is harder for some than others, I know. But no one likes a show off. Our Lord calls us to be humble and there is no place for arrogance in the Kingdom of God. By waiting till others ask you, you have a better chance of their hearts and minds being receptive to the truth. The book of Ecclesiastes tells us that there is "A time to keep silence, and a time to speak". Knowing the distinction is crucial. Consider how Jesus stood silent as others mocked Him. He did not defend Himself. There are times when we too should endure in silence. It's not easy to stand idly by while our faith is ridiculed. It must have been torturous for Jesus, who knows the heart of every human being, to stand and listen to the empty rants and abuse. But in so doing, He taught us endurance and patience are virtues worth cultivating. God cannot be mocked. God needs no defense.

And even when you do answer, remember the best answers aren't always verbal. The key to a good defense is sometimes a strong offense. Peter tells us that a good defense can be good words, but it can also be a good conscience or good conduct or good actions. Any and all are employed by God to call others to the faith. Actions speak louder than words. Sometimes, we give witness to our faith in ways we don't even know. In my opinion, this is the best kind of evangelization. People are rarely convinced of God's existence by an eloquent argument. More often, people come to faith by means of witnessing beauty and goodness in action. In fact, flowery arguments about God's existence have a tendency to come across as prideful attempts to outwit others and intellectualize God's essence. A lived-godliness (witness without awareness) places all the glory upon God, and removes any temptation to boastfulness.

Sometimes words are called for, and in such moments let us frame our dialogue within the parameters of the Gospel not the Law. Peter tells us to speak about *the hope within us*, which means the centerpiece of our conversation should be Christ and Him crucified. Gospel-oriented. The hope we have, of course, is the certain hope of the resurrection and the life of the world to come. By living with our eyes on the Cross, we demonstrate this world holds no sway over us, and true and lasting peace cannot be found in anything other than God

Himself. Christians must constantly be looking for open doors to speak the Word of Truth. However, we must recognize not everyone wants the Truth. There are some who are content to trade the Truth for the lie; to worship and serve created matter rather than the Creator Himself. We are called to speak the Word of Christ with humility. Our job is not to make people believe. No one can do that save God Himself. You cannot argue anyone into the Kingdom. We simply preach the Word in season and out of season and leave the rest to God.

To that end, some sow, some water, but it is God who gives the growth. We must practice meekness so as not to turn God's Word into something that it's not. The Bible is not meant to be a living document wherein we read into it our old and customary world. It is instead a Living Word, which contains a new world, the dawning new world of God. Therefore, the Word of God is not simply right human thoughts about God, but rather right Divine thoughts about men. Through the Word of God, God speaks. God is the free subject, not the object of human speculation. He is His own "I", an active and speaking "I" an eternal "I". Far from being our own creature, He is Himself the one who created us, who addresses us, who communicates with us, who makes those who are addressed, who are hearers of His Word and who thus know and acknowledge Him. Through His Word, it is God who sets Himself in relationship to us.

Let us conclude this morning by thinking of what is our hopeful defense in these uncertain times. I can think of no better example than the example set forth by the prophet Jeremiah. I shall let him have the final word this morning. For Jeremiah's entire world had been razed. He had seen the worst of human depravity. He had witnessed with his own eyes the destructive forces of nature and mankind. His hopes and dreams had been dashed against the unrelenting rocks of man's foolish ambitions to supplant God. But far from losing hope, Jeremiah found it in the ashes of civilization. The world Jeremiah inhabited was bleak. The inhabitants of Israel had been killed or deported. The temple of God was in ruins. God Himself felt more like an alien and an enemy to the people of Israel. And yet, Jeremiah praised the irrevocable goodness of the God of creation. Jeremiah hoped. He hoped against all odds. And so he gave a defense of the hope that was within him (Lamentations 3:1-26):

¹I am the man who has seen affliction
by the rod of the LORD's wrath.
²He has driven me away and made me walk
in darkness rather than light;
³indeed, he has turned his hand against me
again and again, all day long.
⁴He has made my skin and my flesh grow old
and has broken my bones.
⁵He has besieged me and surrounded me
with bitterness and hardship.
⁶He has made me dwell in darkness
like those long dead.
⁷He has walled me in so I cannot escape;
he has weighed me down with chains.
⁸Even when I call out or cry for help,
he shuts out my prayer.
⁹He has barred my way with blocks of stone;
he has made my paths crooked.
¹⁰Like a bear lying in wait,
like a lion in hiding,
¹¹he dragged me from the path and mangled me
and left me without help.
¹²He drew his bow
and made me the target for his arrows.
¹³He pierced my heart
with arrows from his quiver.
¹⁴I became the laughingstock of all my people;
they mock me in song all day long.
¹⁵He has filled me with bitter herbs
and given me gall to drink.
¹⁶He has broken my teeth with gravel;
he has trampled me in the dust.
¹⁷I have been deprived of peace;
I have forgotten what prosperity is.
¹⁸So I say, "My splendor is gone
and all that I had hoped from the LORD."
¹⁹I remember my affliction and my wandering,
the bitterness and the gall.
²⁰I well remember them,
and my soul is downcast within me.

*²¹ Yet this I call to mind
and therefore I have HOPE:
²² Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
²³ They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*

*²⁴ I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."*

*²⁵ The LORD is good to those whose HOPE is in him,
to the one who seeks him;*

*²⁶ it is good to wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.*

Short Order of Meditation

L. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
C. Amen.

L. O Lord, open my lips,
C. and my mouth will declare Your praise.

L. Make haste, O God, to deliver me;
C. make haste to help me, O Lord.

All: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

A Reading from Holy Scripture:

⁸ Finally, all *of you be* of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, *be* tenderhearted, *be* courteous; ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ For “He who would love life and see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit.

¹¹ Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it.

¹² 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.”

¹³ And who *is* he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, *you are* blessed. “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.” ¹⁵ 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; ¹⁶ having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. ¹⁷ For *it is* better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

L. This is the Word of the Lord.
C. Thanks be to God.

L. O Lord, C. have mercy.
L. O Christ, C. have mercy.
L. O Lord, C. have mercy.

Lord's Prayer

C Our Father who art in heaven,
 hallowed be Thy name,
 Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Creed

C I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen

*Sermon Hopeful Defense *See Attached*

PRAYERS

L In peace let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

L For the gift of divine peace and of pardon, with all our heart and with all our mind, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

L For the holy Christian Church, here and scattered throughout the world, and for the proclamation of the Gospel and the calling of all to faith, let us pray to the Lord:

C **Lord, have mercy.**
L For this nation, for our cities and communities, and for the common welfare of us all, let us pray to the Lord:
C **Lord, have mercy.**
L For seasonable weather and for the fruitfulness of the earth, let us pray to the Lord:
C **Lord, have mercy.**
L For those who labor, for those whose work is difficult or dangerous, and for all who travel, let us pray to the Lord:
C **Lord, have mercy.**
L For all those in need, for the hungry and homeless, for the widowed and orphaned, and for all those in prison, let us pray to the Lord:
C **Lord, have mercy.**
L For the sick and dying and for all those who care for them, let us pray to the Lord:
C **Lord, have mercy.**
L For . . . [*additional bids for prayer may be inserted here*] . . . let us pray to the Lord:
C **Lord, have mercy.**
L Finally, for these and for all our needs of body and soul, let us pray to the Lord:
C **Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.**

Collect

L. Almighty God, merciful Father, who created and completed all things, on this day when the work of our calling begins anew, we implore You to create its beginning, direct its continuance, and bless its end, that our doings may be preserved from sin, our life sanctified, and our work this day be well pleasing to You, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C. **Amen.**

Luther's Morning Prayer

C. I thank you, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

L. Let us bless the Lord

C. **Thanks be to God.**

L. The Lord bless us, defend us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

C. **Amen.**