

## Make A Case For Your Faith

### 1 Peter 3:13-18

**Introduction:** Some years ago a book on Christian apologetics was released with the provocative title, *What's the Least I Can Believe and Still Be a Christian? A Guide to What Matters Most* (Westminster John Knox, 2013). Its author, a United Methodist Pastor Martin Thielen, attempts to “confront fundamentalist with 10 things Christians don’t need to believe.” Those 10 items?

- 1) God causes cancer, car wrecks, and other catastrophes
- 2) Good Christians don’t doubt
- 3) True Christians can’t believe in evolution
- 4) Women can’t be preachers and must submit to men
- 5) God cares about saving souls but not about saving trees
- 6) Bad people will be “left behind” and then fry in hell
- 7) Jews won’t make it to heaven
- 8) Everything in the Bible should be taken literally
- 9) God loves straight people but not gay people
- 10) It’s ok for Christians to be judgmental and obnoxious

The 168 page book comes with a 66 page study guide for a 7 week small group study in the local church. Now, how should we respond to a book that invites us to

take the Bible seriously but not literally and lays out the theological playing field in this rather unique manner? Several observations can be made.

- 1) I called it a book on apologetics because that is what the author believes he is doing. He believes he is presenting a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of Christianity that provides “a compelling faith story to tell.” Thielen, a former Southern Baptist, who served for 4 years as a national worship and preaching editor and consultant for the Southern Baptist Convention is convinced he is presenting an authentic Christianity that provides a necessary alternative that “will be a help to seekers as well as a comfort to believers who may find themselves questioning some of the assumptions they grew up with” (Thoughtful Christian website, “Product Summary”).
- 2) However, what he actually provides is: 1) a false caricature of historic, evangelical Christianity, 2) a false and inaccurate portrayal of biblical truth and therefore 3) not a book that defends true Christianity, but one that actually distorts true Christianity. Ultimately, it is destructive of true Christianity and what the Bible teaches.

And yet, we should not too quickly dismiss his thesis. The sad fact is Christians are often their own worst enemy. Further, non-Christians often view us in a negative light not because they are offended by the gospel, but because they are offended by us! Making a case for our faith in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a challenge,

but it is one we must make speaking the truth, but speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Like Jesus, we need to be full of both grace and truth (John 1:14). A helpful and faithful approach to apologetics, to “making a case for your faith,” is found in 1 Peter 3:13-18. The apostle Peter was acutely aware that Christians would continually face the challenge “to give a defense (*apologia*)...for the hope that is in you” (3:15). He knew we must be able to explain and defend both what we believe and why we believe. You see our assignment is not new. The circumstances and context may be different, but Christians have been defending the faith since the first century against those outside and inside the church and we will continue to do so until Christ comes again.

In a book written to Christians who were facing opposition and suffering, Peter challenges them to be good apologist, to be well prepared defenders of the faith. He provides a 3-fold strategy that is applicable any place and at any time. It is indeed a divinely inspired strategy for how to “make a case for your faith.”

### **I. Be ready for action.**

### **3:13-14**

Peter, in the immediate context, has challenged us to be: 1) like-minded, 2) sympathetic, 3) loving, 4) compassionate and 5) humble (v. 8). He says “don’t pay back evil for evil or “insult with insult”, but instead bless those who treat you badly and insult you (v. 9). Why? Because 1) we were called

to this when we came to Jesus and 2) we will be blessed by God. He continues by citing Psalm 34:12-16 telling us to 1) guard our tongue (v. 10) and 2) do good (v. 11) because the Lord sees all of this and He hears our prayers when we tell Him what is going on (v. 12). Further, “the face of the Lord is against those who do what is evil.” God is on our side and he is with us no matter what is going on in our lives.

With such divine preparation and promise, we are now ready for action in defending our faith.

1) Be zealous for what is right. 3:13

Peter begins with a rhetorical question in v. 13: Who then will harm you (really harm, inflict permanent damage) if you are devoted to (zealously, eagerly, passionately doing) what is good (for the glory of God)? Answer: no one! This is similar to Paul’s statement in Romans 8:31, “If God is for us, who is against us?” (Schreiner, *1 Peter*, 170).

So:

- Hold the truth with conviction and humility.
- Pursue what is right with firmness and grace.
- Do what is right and in the right way! Vaughn & Lea put it well and also show how v. 13 prepares us for v. 14, “When believers are whole

heartedly devoted to the good they are beyond the reach of “harm” but not beyond the reach of suffering” (*1 Cor.* BSC, 86).

2) Realize you may suffer. 3:14

Peter does not want us to misunderstand what he just said. Suffering for the gospel and the truth is always a possibility as v. 14 makes clear. In a secularized culture or a hostile environment (religious or secular) to Christianity, you may “suffer for righteousness sake.” You may be called narrow minded, a religious bigot, a closed-minded fundamentalist, a neanderthal. It is even possible you could lose your job, be denied a promotion, have friendships come to an end, be cut off from family. You may even suffer physical persecution or even die for King Jesus. Many brothers and sisters around the world are suffering like this. So, how do we respond: Realize there is good in it. “You are blessed.” Suffering provides an opportunity to learn what it means to be true disciples of Jesus.

Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 5:10-12: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness; for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For this is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Peter Davids is right, “some people are so twisted that they will persecute a person just because he or she is righteous, for that righteousness infuriates them”. (*The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT, 130). However, be encouraged! God sees. God knows. And, God will bless, if not in this life, then in the life to come (see 5:10).

3) Fear God not man. 3:14

All of us fear someone or something. To deny this is to be dishonest with ourselves. The key is knowing and fearing the right one! Peter says concerning those who may persecute you, “Do not fear them, or be intimidated (*ESV*, “troubled”).” Eugene Peterson in *The Message* paraphrases it, “Don’t give the opposition a second thought.” Why? Because you fear God more than you fear man!

Peter’s words are not some superficial pep talk or pre-game motivational speech. It is a profound and deeply meaningful alternative to how so many live today. I will fear God more than man or what man can do to me. I will determine to follow a simple but basic conviction all my life: “All that matters in life is that I please God.” I will trust my Savior and believe he has a purpose in my suffering. I will believe it is for my good and for his glory (see Rom. 8:28).

**II. Be prepared with a defense. 3:15**

John Piper helps us see the close connection between v. 14 and v. 15 when he writes, “So put your hope in his promise (v. 14a) [you will be blessed], be fearless before men (v. 14b), and the result will be that you will sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart – you will show that Christ is valuable above all this world. Hallow him by hoping in him – fearlessly (“Christ Is Hallowed In Us When We Hope In Him,” 9-18-94).

With spiritual, godly and personal readiness and preparation, I will be able to bear a “faithful witness” to those I meet and witness to. I will be ready to share with clarity and conviction the gospel of Jesus Christ that, as 1 Peter 1:3 says, “has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

1) Honor Christ as Lord in your heart.

There is a right way and a wrong way to make a case for your faith. The right way:

- “But in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy” (*CSB*)
- “In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.” (*NIV*)
- “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.” (*NASV*)
- “In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy.” (*ESV*)

- “Keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Master.” (*The Message*)

Honoring Christ as Lord in your life is honoring Him as God and King in your life, not someone or something else. It is, as Paul says in Col. 1:18, seeing “that he might come to have first place in everything.”

Honor Christ as Lord in your hearts and you will slay the idols of the heart.

Honor Christ as Lord in your hearts and you will not fear men but hope in

Him. Honor Christ as Lord in your hearts and you will always be ready to

make a case for your faith. Peter in grounding his argument in Isaiah 8:12-

13, where the prophet said in v. 13, “The Lord Almighty is the one you are

to regard as holy; he is the one you are to fear; he is the one you are to

dread” (*NIV*). Context (v. 14) again is critical! Always regard displeasing

God as more fearful and dreadful than displeasing any man or woman.

“Regard him [Christ] as unique, one of a kind, without peer or rival in

purity, rectitude and goodness” (Piper).

To fear man is to doubt and distrust Christ! And, since unbelief is what

displeases Him most, honoring Him as Lord and as holy means trusting Him

and His promises with all our heart no matter what. The wonderful Baptist

preacher of London, Charles Spurgeon, says it well: “God is too wise to err,

too good to be unkind; leave off doubting him, and begin to trust him, for in



so doing, thou wilt put a crown on his head, but in doubting him thou dost trample his crown beneath thy feet.” (Vol. 3:1857, Sermon 156, “Fear Not”).

2) Be able to give a well-defended hope.

Making a case for your faith means being “ready at any time to give a defense (*apologia*, provide an apologetic) to anyone who ask you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” You do not have to be a Ph.D, scholar or genius “to give a defense of your hope.” First Peter was written to common people, many of whom were illiterate! So, what is the key to giving a compelling apologetic? The person and work of Christ on our behalf. Verse 18 speaks to this, “For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.”

Listen again to how Dr. Piper puts it. It is lengthy but I cannot improve on it: “The reason we aren’t more free and natural in testifying to our neighbors and associates about the reality of our hope in Christ is that we don’t feel very hopeful. And if our hearts are not full of hope in the promises of Christ, then here is what happens when an occasion arrives to make a case for our hope: we sense it as a duty to defend doctrine instead of a delight to tell somebody why we are so hopeful. I saw, like I had never seen before, that witnessing will always be a burdensome duty to defend a doctrine as

long as Christianity means for us simply accepting certain doctrines as true and keeping a certain list of do's and don'ts. So many people in the church have simply inherited the motions of church life and outward morality and piety, but the heartfelt reality of Christ and joyful hope in his promises are foreign to their experience. Such people can always make a case for doctrine, but they cannot make a case for the hope within them, because they don't feel any hope brimming up within their hearts.

What this means, then, just as the text says, is that the way to get ready to make a case for your hope is to get hopeful. That is what was so exciting. It simplified matters. Don't meditate beforehand on how to answer somebody else's questions. Apply yourself to settling the questions of your own heart. We have to find for ourselves reason enough to get over our fear of men and have a lively hope. If our own hope does not spring from something Christ did and said, then it is a mere sham to try to make a case for anyone else to hope in Christ. But if we search out the promises of Christ and meditate on his character and work for the sake of banishing our own fear and kindling our own hope, then this very act of reverencing Christ for ourselves will be the best preparation for making a case for our hope to others...so then our primary activity in preparing to witness is to keep our own hearts happy in God. Morning by morning we have to go to the Word, not to anxiously

amass arguments for every possible rebuttal somebody might have...No, we go to the Word because we are so desperately needy, our own hope wanes. We have fears that need to be overcome by the promises of God. We have doubts that need to be answered. The fight of faith is waged on our knees with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, and prayer. And when we emerge from that encounter with God with a renewed and lively hope in his promises, we will be ready to make a case for our hope. For God only calls us to tell others the reasons which that very day are making us hopeful in Christ.” (“Make a Case For Your Hope,” 10-19-80).

Why do you hope in Christ above all else? Why do you love Him and treasure Him above all else? Your answer may be grounded in the incomparable greatness of His person and work, that as Charles Wesley said, “Amazing grace how can it be, that thou my God did should die for me.” Your answer may have to do with the Bible’s divine inspiration and the trustworthiness of eyewitness authors in the New Testament. It may come from the evidences of fulfilled prophecy, the empty-tomb and resurrection, the power of changed lives including your own, and the fact that the Grand Redemptive story of the Bible (creation → fall → redemption → new creation) fits and makes sense of the world we find ourselves in. Add to all of this the insight of Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), the brilliant Christian

French mathematician, physicist, inventor, writer and philosopher who said in *Pensées* 423, “The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of,” and you are on the way to “always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” Side note: Do you misunderstand Pascal’s meaning. Peter Kreeft is certainly correct, “This, the most famous of Pascal’s sayings...is *not* sentimentalism or irrationalism. Pascal does not oppose the heart to reason or demean reason by exalting the heart. On the contrary, he says the heart has its *reasons*. The heart does not only feel, it sees. The heart has an eye in it” (*Christianity for Modern Pagans*, 231-32). In other words, it is one thing to know Jesus as an object of scholarly interest and popular perception. It is altogether different to know Him as “the lover of my soul.”

C.S. Lewis said it so well: “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a

kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same” (*Mere Christianity*, 136-37).

### III. **Be active in doing good.** **3:15-17**

I will often give the following advice when I do premarital counsel:

“Strive to do the right thing for the right reason in the right way and at the right time if at all possible.” Why? Because:

- Doing the wrong thing in the wrong way at the wrong time leads to disaster.
- Doing the right thing in the wrong way at the wrong time leads to resistance.
- Doing the right thing in the right way at the right time leads to success.

Peter knew this when it came to giving a defense, an apologetic. A gracious and wise witness will more likely receive a positive and receptive hearing. He closes his argument providing four basic principles to guide us.

- 1) Be gracious in attitude. **3:15**

When you tell someone why you love Jesus and worship Him as your God and King do it “with gentleness and reverence (*ESV*, “respect”).

*The Message* says “always with the utmost courtesy.”

An overbearing personality, a superiority complex, a know it all attitude that is arrogant and rude dishonors Christ, misrepresent the gospel, and will effectively ruin any witness for Christ you may wish to give.

It is never right to be rude. It is never right to “hate on” others. Take the statement “God loves straight people but not gay people.” Why do so many people believe that is what Christians think? Have we willingly, or unwillingly, provided the evidence for this judgment? Don’t misrepresent the love of God. We must love others like we have been loved by Jesus.

2) Cultivate a clear conscience. 3:16

Keeping or having a good or “clear conscience before God” means you are free from guilt and have nothing to hide. You live a transparent life of honesty, truthfulness and integrity. It is not a perfect life, but it is one that seeks to follow Christ (1 Cor. 11:1) and is growing in His likeness as the gospel works itself out in your life.

Such a life will silence and put to shame those who misrepresent and insult you, who “accuse and disparage your good conduct in Christ.” The phrase “in Christ” is important. The idea is our union with Christ is the energizing source and power of the beauty, excellence and attractiveness of our Christian behavior. Christ really alters and transforms the way we think, feel, speak and act! A clear conscience that leads to “good conduct in Christ” will enhance and beautify your witness.

3) Be known for good behavior. 3:17

Peter returns to “suffering for doing good” (v. 11, 13, 16, and 17). It is as if he is saying don’t be surprised if and when it happens.

Giving a defense is not a passive calling. It is an active one, a controlled and consistent one. As we do good it is Christ who is in it, behind it, over it and for it! Sometimes he leads us into the lion’s den (Dan. 6) or the fiery furnace (Dan. 3) where our good deeds shine all the more brightly for His glory.

You see sometimes Christians are the greatest enemy and obstacle to authentic Christianity: both in attitude and action. When attacked, it is tempting to strike back, especially if you are good at it. Is there another approach? A better model? Oh yes! Look at 1 Peter 2:19-24!

“For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”

4) Trust in the will of God no matter what.      3:17

God’s will is good as Rom. 12:2 makes clear. In fact, it is perfect. But, it is not easy and it is not always safe. God’s will is not necessarily free from suffering. Peter’s point is simple and clear: you would not be suffering if it was not God’s will. Indeed, it is one of God’s most effective evangelistic secret weapons! The first century Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus (AD 55-120) records how God put His precious children on glorious display before the eyes of a pagan world through horrible and painful suffering under the crazed emperor



named Nero (A.D. 54-88). He wrote, “covered with the skins of beasts, [Christians] were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.” These, and millions of others, suffered and have suffered in a way that captured the eyes, the ears, the imagination, and the hearts of an unbelieving world. Their witness could not be denied. Their testimony for Jesus they could not escape. No wonder they turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). So, even when you do nothing but good, you may still suffer and it be the will of God. You ask, “How do you know that?!” Again we find the answer in verse 18! Christ suffered for doing good. Christ suffered and it was God’s will. If it is true for Him, then it may also be true for me and you. It may provide the perfect opportunity for us to “make a case for our faith.”

**Conclusion:** In the song “Living Life Upside Down,” Gary Driskell and Karley Worley capture well the world in which we find ourselves truly:

*“Living Life Upside Down”*

Some say we’ve risen to a new age of truth...  
 We have a program for saving the earth  
 While unborn children are denied their right to birth.  
 One baby’s blessed, another one cursed.  
 Well, you tell me, have we made this world better or worse  
 Now that the life of a tree comes first.

And you say we've risen to a new age of light,  
You're telling me what used to be wrong is now right,  
But I say – What if we're living life upside down?

The world in which we live is indeed an upside down one. The need for making a case for our faith, with gentleness and respect, has never been greater. My hero in the faith, pastor Adrian Rogers, provides a fitting and final word: “It is better to be divided by truth than to be united in error. It is better to speak the truth that hurts and then heals, than falsehood that comforts and then kills. It is not love and it is not friendship if we fail to declare the whole counsel of God. It is better to be hated for telling the truth than to be loved for telling a lie. It is impossible to find anyone in the Bible who was a power for God who did not have enemies and was not hated. It's better to stand alone with the truth than to be wrong with a multitude. It is better to ultimately succeed with the truth than to temporarily succeed with a lie.” Pastor Adrian Rogers quoted in *The Berean Call*, Dec. 1996. p. 3. The gospel of Jesus Christ, shared with gentleness and respect, will make the case for your faith. It is the truth and it has power. Go and tell it and see what God does.