

NOTES ON 1 PETER 3:15

* * * **READY ALWAYS TO GIVE AN ANSWER** * * *

S.L.H.
Soli Deo Gloria!

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."

1 Peter 3:15

CONTEXT: The immediate context (1Pet3:13-17) in which 1 Peter 3:15 occurs is a discussion of Christian suffering under persecution; remember that the epistle of 1 Peter was written to Jewish believers (1Pet1:1-2) about 65 AD, a time when the Neronian persecutions were most intense. Peter anticipates that the behavior of Christians, while suffering "for righteousness sake" (v14), will be noticed by onlookers and considered to be unexpected and inexplicable (within their unbelieving worldview), prompting them to ask the believer for an explanation of their behavior.

CHAPTER 3

AN APOLOGETIC APPROACH THAT HONORS GOD

[15] It is a duty incumbent on all believers to be ready at all times to respond to the questions of unbelievers regarding the "hope" (i.e., our convictions and expectations regarding Biblical faith) that we have. In this verse, it is regarded as a defensive activity rather than an offensive one. In fact, the word translated "answer" is from the Greek **ἀπολογία**, which means 'a formal, verbal, reasoned defense' as one would give in a courtroom setting¹.

The last clause in this verse makes clear that this activity is to be conducted "with meekness and fear". We are not to be prideful or obnoxious in our personal interactions with the unbeliever. Peter asserted earlier in this epistle that the gospel itself would be an offense to the natural man (1Pet2:8), but we should not be (2Cor6:3).

It is the implications of the first clause in this verse that are most often overlooked. Before we begin our "answer", and at all times during our interaction with the unbeliever, we are to "sanctify the Lord God in [our] hearts"². As Christians, we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and all that is revealed in Scripture, and at no time are we to set aside these convictions. We are not to assume a position of (so-called) neutrality in which we entertain, along with the unbeliever, the possibility that God's

¹ It is from this Greek word that we get *apologetics*, by which we mean a defense of the Christian faith.

² The English word *heart* tends to be associated with a person's emotions, distinct from the intellectual life. The Greek word for *heart* (**καρδία**), however, is defined in BAGD as the "seat of physical, spiritual and mental life . . . center and source of the whole inner life, with its thinking, feeling and volition."

revelation to man is a proposition that is unclear and in need of proof.

Our "answer" (i.e., defense) must come from God's revelation to all humanity, which is the absolute standard of truth, and which is preserved in His written Word (Jn17:17). We must begin with, and at no point compromise on, the existence of the One true God of the Bible and His revelation to man in His written Word. These are not uncertain propositions to be proven to the unbeliever's satisfaction³, but declared as truths he already knows in his heart because God has clearly revealed it to him (Rom1:19-20), but which he has "suppressed [this] truth in unrighteousness"⁴ (Rom1:18).

How to Answer a Fool. The Bible labels one who denies the existence of God or the truth of His Word a "fool" (Ps14:1; 53:1; 1Cor2:14). On the surface, Proverbs 26:4-5 appears to give contradictory imperatives on answering a fool. The instructions, however, are not contradictory, but complementary. Verse 4 is a warning against indiscriminately accepting as valid the questions of the unbeliever, for they almost always come loaded with unbelieving presuppositions; any attempt to "answer" such questions is "folly", since the nature of the question itself makes a valid answer impossible. Verse 5 is a charge to expose the logical fallacies inherent in the unbeliever's question (i.e., worldview) in order to reveal the "folly" of it. It is impossible to construct valid Christian answers atop a foundation of unbelieving presuppositions. The unbelieving foundation must be destroyed and replaced with a foundation of Biblical presuppositions; only then can valid and self-consistent answers be provided.

AN ILLUSTRATION: The so-called "problem of evil" is often used to challenge a Christian's belief in the God of the Bible. It goes something like this: "How can you believe in God, who you say is both all-powerful and all-good, when we live in a world filled with evil. If God exists, and he really is all-powerful and all-good, he ought to have put an end to this evil. Since he hasn't, he must not exist." Admittedly, this is a complex question that involves a multitude of issues. But before the Christian attempts an answer, he should note that the unbeliever has already pre-loaded the question itself with unbelieving (anti-Biblical) presuppositions.

- 1) The unbeliever, independent of God and His revelation, has defined "good" and "evil". He has provided no justification of his definitions. But the Bible asserts that God alone is good (Ps14:1; Matt19:17). Goodness is not a virtue that has meaning independent of God; it is the very nature of God that defines goodness.

³ The problem with offering the unbeliever 'evidences' for the existence of God is two-fold: 1) it implicitly accepts his assertion that God's revelation to him in all of creation and his own conscience is ambiguous or unclear, which Scripture denies (Rom1:19-20; 2:14-15); and 2) it puts the unbeliever on the bench and God in the dock, so that a creature sits in judgment over God and His Word; this is a repetition of the scenario in the Garden of Eden that resulted in mankind's original sin (Gen3:1-6).

⁴ Romans 1:20 declares that the unbeliever (when he stands before his Creator on the Day of Judgment) will have no "excuse" (Lit., no **ἀπολογία**) for his suppression of the clearly revealed truth regarding the existence and power of God.

- 2) The unbeliever, independent of God and His revelation, has presumed there can be no valid reason, consistent with his definition of goodness, for God to permit evil to persist for a period of time. But if justice and mercy are attributes of God that are "good", which He wishes to demonstrate to the world (Rom9:22-23), how can He do so without permitting creature sin (for a finite period of time)?
- 3) The unbeliever, independent of God and His revelation, has asserted that God *ought* to do something He hasn't. But "ought" reveals the unbeliever is making a moral judgment. In an unbelieving, naturalistic worldview in which everything in the universe has slowly arisen over billions of years in an entirely unguided way, purely by chance, how can one particular morality be justified over any other?

None of these issues are answers to the unbeliever's question. But unbelieving presuppositions exposed by these issues, already built into the question itself, make it impossible to answer the question as it stands (Prov26:4).