

HOW TO BE READY TO GIVE AN ANSWER

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About the author...

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Introduction

The Scriptures plainly teach that Christianity is a taught religion (Luke 8:11-15; Romans 1:16; 10:13-17) and that the responsibility for this teaching lies at the feet of every child of God (Matthew 28:18-20; Hebrews 5:12). As such it is essential that we as God's children be diligent in learning the "art" of giving an answer to others regarding spiritual matters. This lesson will seek to encourage and strengthen each of us as to how we can accomplish this most important task.

The Command Given

*For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; **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:** Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. (1 Peter 3:10-16 — emp. JHW).*

As we look to this command (and it is a command!) we find that the readiness to give an answer is set in opposition to the alternatives: evil, guile, terror, troubled (10-14). In the face of certain persecution (cf. 2 Timothy 3:12) the apostle Peter gives assurance of the value and fruit of a life of being a follower of "that which is good" (vs 13). It is in this context of encouragement in the midst of persecution that God gives the great charge to — "be ready always to given an answer... ."

The Charge Explained

If we are to understand the "how" of being ready to give an answer, we must first of all

understand the “what” of the charge. If we look to the word “answer” we find that it is a translation of the Greek word *apologia*. While this would cause us to think of the English word “apology,” we are not speaking of the idea of “back-peddling” which to some the word apology means — the concept of giving an excuse for something as if it were wrong. We speak rather of giving a “verbal defense, a speech in defense” (Vine 29) of godly living and hope that others see. The word is sometimes, as in the text of 1 Peter 3:15, translated as “answer” (Acts 25:16; 1 Corinthians 9:3; 2 Timothy 4:16), but other times with the more familiar phrase for us, “defense” (Acts 22:1; Philippians 1:7, 17). In 2 Corinthians 7:11 it is translated as “clearing” in reference to the godly sorrow that wrought repentance which allowed the Corinthians to “clear themselves.” Thus when Peter speaks of being ready to give an “answer,” he is telling us to stand ready in defense, to stand ready to clear ourselves. When we follow that which is good (vs 13) there will be questions that will be asked, charges that will be made, and we need to be ready to defend the life and hope that others see in us. This *does not* mean that we are to have an answer for any question of which others can conceive! Sometimes people are intent to dwell on “foolish and unlearned questions... that ... gender strifes” (2 Timothy 2:23). “*Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him*” (Proverbs 26:4). We need to realize also that there are some things God has not revealed to mankind (Deuteronomy 29:29), none of which pertain to eternal life (2 Peter 1:3).

The Charge Exemplified

Sometimes one of the easiest ways to understand a matter is to see it in action. In God’s Word we find numerous examples of those set for the defense, ready to give an answer. For example, what of:

- C **Noah** - In a world filled with wickedness so great that God determined to destroy the world (Genesis 6:5-7), Noah found grace in God’s eyes because he followed good, doing “all that God commanded him” (Genesis 6:22; 7:5). For over one hundred years, as he prepared the ark according to God’s commands, he was a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5)!
- C **Moses** - Having chosen to forsake the riches of Egypt in order to follow the righteousness of God (Hebrews 11:24-30), he was chosen of God to return and instill hope and faith in the persecuted children of God (Exodus 3-4).
- C **Joshua** - He began his work of “giving an answer” in Numbers 14 as he and Caleb stood against the multitudes, exhorting them to take the land which God had given them. After wandering with the children of God for 40 years, it was he who was chosen of God to lead the people as they took the land of Canaan. His crowning defense to the people is found in Joshua 24:1-15 as he proclaims his decision to serve God and exhorts others to do likewise.
- C **Ezra** - A “ready scribe in the law of Moses” (Ezra 7:6), Ezra was sent instill hope and zeal in the hearts of the people who had been in captivity for seventy years and to lead them in rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. Thus we read of him that he “had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments” (Ezra 7:10).
- C **Stephen** - When called upon to give a reason for his actions, Stephen spoke boldly in defense of his life and teaching — a defense that cost him his physical life, yet opened a view

of heaven to him (Acts 7).

- C **Paul** - In the jailhouse (Acts 16:25ff), on Mars hill (Acts 17:22ff), on a staircase in Jerusalem (Acts 21:30ff), before the council (Acts 23:1ff), before Felix (Acts 24:1ff); before Festus (Acts 25:1ff), before king Agrippa (Acts 26:1ff), as a prisoner on a ship about to be destroyed by a storm (Acts 27:1ff), in prison in Rome (Acts 28:16ff) — these are some of the instances in which the great apostle Paul zealously gave an answer for the hope he lived.

What God desires of us is that we dare to be such as these men were. The need and opportunity for such still abound!

How Can I Be Ready To Give An Answer?

We know the command. We know what it requires of us. We have seen it in action in the lives of godly men of old. But the question still must be asked, “How can *I* do this?” In order to answer this question we can look to some lessons from the lives of the exemplary men listed above.

- C **Noah** is said by the writer of Hebrews to have “moved with fear” (reverence, awe) and realized the value of his own family (Hebrews 11:7).
- C **Moses** is said to have made the choice of the things of God rather than the riches of the world (Hebrews 11:27).
- C **Joshua** realized the certainty of victory if God be with us (Numbers 14:6-10).
- C **Ezra** realized the necessity of learning and doing the will of God (Ezra 7:10).
- C **Stephen** had a compassion for the souls of others that lasted through his dying moments (Acts 7:60).
- C **Paul** had given himself totally to God (Galatians 2:20) and had an undying belief that if God said it, that settled it (Acts 27:25; 2 Timothy 1:12).

Reverence, realizing the value of the souls of all men, especially family, focusing on heaven rather than the earth, trusting God for victory, taking God at his word — all of these characteristics are “doable” by each of us!

We can also learn much by an examination of the text of our passage. In it we find that if we are to be able to give an answer, we must...

- C **Be CONVERTED** — *“sanctify the Lord God in your hearts”*
We have far too many who “honk if they love Jesus” rather than setting up a throne for Him in their hearts! Only when we have true conversion, make Christ Lord in our life, will we be able to give an answer.
- C **STUDY** — *“be ready always”*
Paul admonishes us to study (2 Timothy 2:15). It is impossible to communicate to others that which we ourselves do not know (2 Timothy 2:2)! The Psalmist said that as we trust in the Word we *“shall have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me”* (Psalm 119:42). One old preacher, a scholar in the Word of God, was approached by a woman who said, “I would give my life to be able to know the Word like you do!” The preacher simply replied, “Ma’am, that

is just what I have done.”

C Have BOLDNESS — *“to give an answer”*

We cannot be afraid to speak up! Our answer is to be God’s truth spoken in the proper spirit (Ephesians 4:15; cf. 1 Peter 3:8-9). Such boldness comes from compassion for others (1 Peter 3:8), a compassion which makes the word “as a burning fire shut up in my bones” (Jeremiah 20:9). Until we have a consuming passion for the souls of men we will never have the needed boldness to give an answer.

C LIVE EXEMPLARY — *“to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you”*

Clearly no one will ask about that which they do not see! Remember that Peter was speaking to those who had chosen to follow the good way of God rather than the ways of the world (13-14; 16-17). One of the most tragic things in life is the hypocritical life of one who proclaims “do as I say, not as I do” (cf. Romans 2:1-3,21). Peter even emphasizes that one fit to give an answer has “a good conscience” that puts to shame false charges as he has a “good conversation in Christ” (1 Peter 3:16). It is notable too, that the one who answers is to be “in Christ!”

C Have PROPER ESTIMATION OF SELF AND GOD — *“with meekness and fear”*

Meekness is not, as some think, weakness. It is rather power under control, a willingness to be under and abiding by the will of God. Such an attitude naturally comes when we recognize God for who He is. The American Standard Version of the Bible translates 1 Peter 3:15 to read, “*sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord.*” Recognition of the Lordship of Christ will compel us to have this proper estimation of self and God — *“meekness and fear.”*

Conclusion

Why do so many fail to be *“be ready always to give an answer to every man that asket you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear”*?

C It is not because God has not commanded such

C It is not because God has not given examples we can mark and follow

C It is not because God has not given us an understandable Word

C It is not because God had not given us the needed and attainable personal characteristics

What is it then? Perhaps the answer is found in one word in the text of our lesson — “hope.” It has always amazed me how many people DO NOT have hope. Hope is not a wish or whim, but is a confident expectation. One who has hope will proclaim as did the apostle Paul, “I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Timothy 2:12). If we are in Christ and “walk in the light, as he is in the light” (1 John 1:7) we will have a confident expectation (hope) that will manifest itself in our daily lives. Others will see this hope and ask the reason of it. We will be ready, even zealous, in giving an answer to any man who asks. Are you ready?

Works Cited

Vine, W.E. *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers (n.d.).