

Defend Your Faith

Lesson 1

IS FAITH REASONABLE?

“but sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord: being ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15)

I. INTRODUCTION.

A. The Importance of This Question.

1. We live in a world of increasing unbelief. More and more attacks are being made upon God and the Bible in our educational institutions, the media, and even in some religious circles.
2. Christians raised at home to believe, but unprepared to deal with these attacks, will often lose their faith. We live in a questioning age and Christians unprepared to answer these questions may lose their faith.
3. The Christian must know *what* he believes, *why* he believes it, and *how* to defend what he believes. We must be able say with confidence, “I believe because...”

B. What is Apologetics?

1. An “apology” (not to be confused with saying, “I’m sorry”) is a verbal answer or defense against an attack or argument.
2. Apologetics is the study of giving a verbal defense for one’s faith or belief. Apologetics answers the question, “Is Christianity rationally or reasonably defensible”? The answer of course, is “Yes.” Apologists give a reasonable defense of historic, biblical Christianity.
3. Apologetics is from the Greek word *apologia* meaning, “answer” or “defense”. This Greek word is found eight times in the New Testament (Acts 22:1; 25:16; 1 Corinthians 9:3; 2 Corinthians 7:11; Philippians 1:7,16; 2 Timothy 4:16; 1 Peter 3:15).
4. God does not *need* our defense, but he most certainly *wants* our defense (1 Peter 3:15).
5. Our series is called “Defend Your Faith” because as a Christian apologist, the only faith worth having is a faith worth defending.
6. The goal of apologetics is (1) to defend the truths of Christianity against all attacks and misunderstandings, and (2) to communicate the truths of Christianity in such a way that the unbeliever will listen and be led to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Apologists set forth proofs for their beliefs (evidence that establishes the truth or validity of someone or something).

C. What Kind of Apologetics Do We Use?

1. Pre-suppositional apologetics assumes that (1) God exists and that (2) the Scriptures are the word of God. Paul used this type of apologetics when reasoning with Jewish audiences who were already believers in God (Acts 17:2-3; 19:8; 22:1; 25:16; 26:1,22,26).

2. Evidential apologetics offers evidence for God through extra-biblical evidence (nature). Paul used this type of apologetics when reasoning with Gentile audiences who were unbelievers in God (Acts 14:17; 17:16-31; Romans 1:19-21,25; see also Psalm 19:1 and Hebrews 11:3).

D. Who Engages in Apologetics?

1. God was an apologist in the Old Testament (Isaiah 1:18; 41:21-24) and in the New Testament (Mark 16:20; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; Hebrews 2:4).
2. Jesus was an apologist (Matthew 11:2-6; John 5:30-47; 10:38; 20:24-31; Acts 1:3).
3. The Apostles were apologists (Luke 1:1-4; John 21:24; Acts 2:22-32; 17:2-3; 1 Corinthians 10:15; 15:1-9; Philippians 1:9,17; 1 John 1:1-4).
4. All Christians, not just preachers or debaters, are to be apologists (1 Peter 3:15; see also Philippians 1:27; Jude 3). Christians defend and “contend” for the faith without being obnoxious, rude, or unkind (Ephesians 4:15; Colossians 4:6).

E. Why Engage in Apologetics?

1. Defending your faith glorifies God and exonerates Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:15).
2. Defending your faith strengthens believers (Luke 17:5).
3. Defending your faith makes Christianity relevant today (1 Peter 4:16).
4. Defending your faith evangelizes the lost (Acts 2:14ff; 1 Peter 3:15).
5. Defending your faith helps us to decide what is true and it challenges the truth-claims of other world views and religions (1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1).

II. PRESENTING YOUR CASE.

A. What Faith Is.

1. “Faith” is often misunderstood. Some say, “Religion is a matter of faith, but science is a matter of fact,” or, “We base our beliefs on facts, not on faith.” Others say, “If you have faith, you are not acting reasonably or rationally.” Sometimes we use the word “believe” or “faith” to mean “I think.” For example, “I believe [I think] that it is going to rain today.” This is not the kind of “faith” discussed in the Bible.
2. Faith is necessary to be saved (Hebrews 11:6), but, it is also necessary to understand what faith really is (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is both an *act of faith* and an *object of faith*. Faith is a belief or a trust (an inward act) in the truth of something or someone (an outward object). We must have “faith” (an inward act) in “the faith” (an outward object). Faith (an inward act) is founded on facts (an outward object) and grounded in evidence (Hebrews 11:1-3,6).
3. Three dimensions of biblical faith:
 - a) Intellectual: faith is a belief in a set of propositions (truths). I must have an *understanding* of what I claim to believe. I must have *reason* for what I believe.
 - b) Emotional: faith is a *feeling* of assurance, trust, confidence, and hope in a person. I must accept as true what I believe, agree with the truth, and side with the truth.
 - c) Volitional: faith is an *act* of the will, a commitment to obey. I must *act* according to my stated belief in *obedience* to God’s word. A *dead faith* (James 2:14-18) and a *demonic faith* (James 2:19) are no good. I must have a *dynamic faith* (James 2:20-26).
4. Faith is...
 - a) “Faith” (Gr. *pistis* and *pistuo*) is a firm persuasion, a confidence, a trust, or a conviction.

- b) "Faith" is the opposite of doubt (Matthew 21:21) and fear (Mark 4:40; 5:36).
- 5. The basic definition of faith is found in Hebrews 11:1 (KJV).
 - a) Faith is "substance," from the Gr. *hypostasis*, meaning "a standing under."
 - b) Faith is "evidence," from the Gr. *elegmos*, meaning "proof; that by which a thing is proved or tested."

B. What Faith Is Not.

- 1. Faith is not "blind faith;" that is, faith that has no evidence to back it up. Faith is not accepting unreasonable claims without proof. Faith does not believe something in the absence of evidence. The charge that Christians have a "blind faith" is false and misleading.
- 2. It is true that there are things Christians believe in that cannot be seen such as heaven, hell, God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:8). But, the Christian's faith in these things is not without evidence. Faith is not blind and gullible (2 Peter 1:16).
 - a) Faith is improperly defined in the *American Heritage Dictionary* as: "belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence".
 - b) Some think that faith is opposed to reason and fact. They call faith, "blind faith" or a "leap of faith." There are even members of mainline, liberal denominations who say that faith has no rational basis. One simply believes without compelling reason for doing so. This is faith or belief based upon a whim.
 - c) H.L. Mencken defined faith as "an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable." One boy in Sunday school defined faith as "believing something you know isn't true."
- 3. Faith is not irrational and unreasonable. Faith is not being gullible. Faith does not believe something you know isn't true. Faith is not a whim, a think-so, or a nebulous hope.

C. Faith Is Built Upon Evidence.

- 1. In the first century, the faith of individuals was not based upon mere unproven words alone, but upon evidence; what was heard *and* what was seen (Matthew 11:2-6; Mark 16:20; John 10:38; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; Hebrews 2:1-4). Compare this with the alleged revelations of Mohammed (in the Quran) and Joseph Smith (in the Book of Mormon) where no miracles of confirmation are present.
- 2. Faith is built upon evidence.
 - a) Luke said that faith is built upon evidence (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3).
 - b) John said that faith is built upon evidence (John 20:31; 21:24; 1 John 1:1; 4:1).
 - c) Paul said that faith is built upon evidence (1 Corinthians 15:4-5).
 - d) Peter said that faith is built upon evidence (2 Peter 1:16-21).
- 3. We do not have firsthand evidence today (1 Peter 1:7-8), but we have evidence nonetheless. We believe in God and Jesus Christ, just like we believe Columbus sailed to the Americas and George Washington was our first president. These are proven facts of history.
- 4. Remember, faith is not believing something in the absence of evidence; it is believing *because there is evidence!*

D. Faith Comes From Weighing the Evidence.

1. Faith is rational and reasonable. Faith is rooted in truth, and truth is objective and rational. The evidence of truth is based upon “witnesses”.
 - a) The witness of men (Luke 1:1-4; John 19:35-37,41; 1 Corinthians 15:3ff; 2 Peter 1:16; 1 John 1:1ff).
 - b) The witness of scripture (John 17:14,20; 20:30-31; Acts 14:1; 15:7; 17:11-12; 18:8; Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 3:5; 15:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16).
 - c) The witness of nature (Psalm 19:1; Acts 14:17; Romans 1:20).
 - d) The witness of miracles (Mark 16:20; John 10:38; 20:31; 21:24; Hebrews 2:3-4).
2. Evidence does not cancel out faith. True, Bible faith is based upon evidence. Do you believe that Christopher Columbus or George Washington lived? Why? You believe the historical evidence presented for their existence.

E. Faith Leads to Trust and Obedience.

1. Sometimes we say, “I believe that Kroger has the better deals.” By that we mean, “I think (I have an opinion)...” Or we say, “I believe it will rain today.”
2. Bible faith is different. With Bible faith we must...
 - a) *Understand* what we claim to believe (Acts 8:30-31; 17:22-31). We don’t have to understand what God did not reveal to us, but, we do have to understand what God has revealed to us (Deuteronomy 29:29; Isaiah 55:8-9; 1 Peter 1:7-8).
 - b) Be ready to *act* according to what we believe (James 2:26; Hebrews 11:6).
 - c) Have a *reason* for what we believe (1 Peter 3:15).
3. God wants us to know *what* we believe, *why* we believe it, and be committed to *acting* according to our belief.

F. What is Reason?

1. Like faith, reason is both an *act of reason* and an *object of reason*. The *act of reason* is the act of knowing, discovering, proving, and understanding truth. The *object of reason* is the body of truth that can be known, discovered, and understood. Paul “reasoned” with others using the Scriptures (Acts 17:2,17; 18:4,19; 24:25).
2. God gives us a mind to think reasonably and logically. The Greek word *logikos* (logic) is found only twice in the New Testament (Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2:2). Our service to God is to come from our intelligence.

G. What is the Relationship Between Reason and Faith?

1. Some like Tertullian, and later Karl Barth, set forth the idea of faith without reason. Others like Immanuel Kant set forth the idea of reason without faith. Thomas Aquinas said that faith is supported by reason and Augustine taught that reason is dependent on faith. But, what does the Bible say?
2. Paul’s “reasoning” from the scriptures often led the audience to be “persuaded” (Acts 17:4,11-12; 18:4; 19:8).
3. Some things can never be known by reason and faith, but, all things revealed by God (in nature and in Scripture) can be known by faith and reason. We will not understand all there is to understand about God – including all the “whys” we might have (Isaiah 55:8-9) – but we can and must understand what he has revealed to us and be persuaded to obey (Deuteronomy 29:29; Ephesians 5:17).

III. ANSWERING OBJECTIONS.

A. Objection #1: Faith Lacks Evidence and Is Simply A Blind Leap in the Dark.

1. Sadly, many people today think faith believes something to be true without the evidence to support it. They think faith is “believing something you know isn’t true.” They view faith as a belief based upon un-provable assumptions. This is not biblical faith. Faith does not believe something in the absence of evidence. It believes because of the presence of evidence and then it acts accordingly.
2. Those who say faith is a “blind leap in the dark” often quote 2 Corinthians 5:7: “*we walk by faith, not by sight...*” However, in the context of this passage, Paul writes about focusing on heaven (“we walk by faith”) and not on earthly things (“not by sight”). Read the whole section from 2 Corinthians 4:16 to 5:10. Paul is not intending to convey the idea that faith is blind. The contrast here is between walking by faith in “eternal” things vs. walking by sight in “temporal” things. The contrast is not between faith (lack of evidence) and sight (evidence).
3. Biblical faith is grounded upon reason and rationale.
 - a) Jesus said so (Mark 16:9-14; John 20:30-31).
 - b) Peter said so (2 Peter 1:16-21).
 - c) John said so (John 19:35; 21:24-25; 1 John 1:1-4).
 - d) Be careful to avoid two extremes:
 - (1) The anti-intellectual approach. This approach to life ignores all reason and evidence. This kind of faith is based upon feelings, a mere whim, or a hunch. Remember, we must use the mind that God gave us. Our service to God is “reasonable” and logical (Romans 12:1-2; 1 Peter 2:2). Faith is not a leap in the dark, but a step in the light of truth (2 Peter 1:19).
 - (2) The human-reasoning-alone approach. This approach to life relies solely upon human reasoning or rationalization (Proverbs 14:12; Jeremiah 10:23). Many read a Bible verse such as Acts 2:38, and say, “That just doesn’t make sense.” Remember, human intellect and reason is God-given, but it must be guided by God’s word.

B. Objection #2: Many Intelligent and Educated People Do Not Believe in Christianity Because There Is No Evidence to Believe It.

1. When intelligent people refuse to believe, it is not because of a lack of evidence, but rather a lack of *honesty* and *integrity* (John 5:39; 7:17; 9:40-41; Acts 17:32; Romans 1:25; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).
2. Some have said when you become a Christian you kiss your brains good bye, or, when you come into the church building leave your brains at the door. Absolutely not! Some ask, “Why don’t more educated people become Christians?” Answer: for the same reason more uneducated people don’t become Christians. Accepting God and the Bible forces them to change their life. Conversion has nothing to do with a supposed lack of reason or evidence, but it has everything to do with a lack of will (John 6:36,40). If you will to believe you can (John 5:40; 7:17).
3. Some intelligent people refuse Christianity for the same reason as unintelligent people; they don’t *want* to believe the evidence presented to them. It is not a matter of the *mind*, but rather a matter of the *will*. Illus. You give your child a \$100 to buy some clothes and he says he doesn’t have enough money to go shopping. He wants to dictate the amount and determine what is “enough”.

C. Objection #3: Unbelievers Rely Upon Facts (Evidence) and Believers Rely Upon Faith (No Evidence).

1. Both rely upon facts *and* faith.
2. For example, the non-believer has faith in the Big Bang and that physical matter has always existed. The believer has faith in God and that spirit has always existed. Everyone believes (has faith) in someone or something. It is not a matter of having faith, but *in what and in whom* will one's faith be placed.

D. Objection #4: Faith Saves, Not Reason.

1. Yes, faith saves (Luke 7:50; Ephesians 2:8; James 2:14), but faith includes reason because faith is based upon knowledge, and knowledge requires a use of reason (John 4:42; 20:30-31; Romans 10:14-17). A person is not *coerced* into believing Jesus, he is led to make an *informed* decision for the Lord (Acts 2:37,41).
2. God gives us a mind (reason, rationale, sense) and he expects us to use it to serve him (Mark 12:30; Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2:2). We don't leave our brains at the door when we enter the church building! For example, we must use critical thinking (testing) to "prove all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21) and "prove the spirits" (1 John 4:1).
3. Paul's warning against "philosophy" (Colossians 2:8), is not a warning against the proper use of reasoning or thinking. Paul is not saying, "Thou shalt not think."

IV. CONCLUSION.

- A. The Faith of a Believer is Based Upon Truth and Truth is Objective and Rational. Faith is the Reasonable and Rational Response to All the Evidences That God Has Given to Mankind, Both in Nature and in Scripture.
- B. Actually, Belief (Faith) is More Reasonable and Rational Than Unbelief.
- C. For Example, There is Rational and Reasonable Evidence to Believe in the Existence of God, to Believe That the Bible is the Word of God, to Believe That Jesus is the Son of God, Etc.
- D. We Don't Want to Live Without a Faith That Gives Us Hope in This Life (Ephesians 2:12; 1 Thessalonians 4:13). Faith in God and His Word Gives Us Reason to Live. It Makes the Day Brighter, Our Life Sweeter, and Everything More Meaningful.
- E. Do You Have the Will to Believe Today (John 7:17)?