But in your hearts set apart 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. But do this with gentleness and respect… - 1 Peter 3:15

“Always Be Prepared to Make a Defense…”
1 Peter 3:13-17

I. The word translated “give an answer” (15, NIV) is from the Greek ἀπολογία, (“Apologia”), and is better translated “make a defense” (ESV). The defense of our faith is the subject of Apologetics.

II. We need to defend our faith:
   1) From the attacks of the world (John 15:18, 17:14; 1 John 3:13)
   2) From false teaching in the visible church (Acts 20:30; 1 Timothy 4:16)
   3) To any individual who asks for the reason for the hope that you have (15b)

III. In defending your faith you must:
   1) In your heart set apart (sanctify) Christ as Lord (15a), meaning that you rest in His power as revealed in Scripture and not evidence of your own making
   2) Answer with gentleness, respect and a clear conscience (15d, 16a)
   3) Accept that you may be slandered, reviled, and suffer for your faith (14, 16-17)
Pastor Ted Gray

“Always Be Prepared to Make a Defense…”
1 Peter 3:13-17

As noted in the bulletin, this morning we are beginning a mini series on Apologetics before we return to our study of Matthew. The text that we read from, 1 Peter 3:13-17, is one of the many biblical passages from which we get the concept of Apologetics. In verse 15 the word translated in the NIV as “give an answer” is from the Greek word “Apologia” (ἀπολογία), and is better translated as the ESV translates it, “make a defense.” The study of Apologetics is the study of how to defend our faith.

Apologetics and Evangelism are linked. Evangelism is the offense while apologetics is the defense. Just as in football or basketball you need both a good offense and a good defense, so too, as people who are the light of the world, ambassadors for Christ, witnesses for Him on earth, we need both the offense – as we have seen stressed during our mission emphasis week, - and the defense of our faith which is the subject of Apologetics.

There has always been a need to defend the faith, to uphold and defend the truths of Scripture, for our world has always been opposed to the truths of God’s Word. As 1 John 3:13 says, Do not be surprised my brothers if the world hates you...

The Animosity of the World

The early church had to defend herself against the many attacks from the world. For instance, many Christians were martyred because they were accused of cannibalism since their leader said that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood. – “Throw the cannibals to the lions!”

Others were martyred because they were accused of incest. – After all, don’t Christians speak about love between brothers and sisters in Christ? What really goes on in the Christian community anyway? Still others were martyred under the accusation that they were atheists. There were no images of Roman gods in their homes or places of worship, so they must be atheists, right? - So “Burn them at the stake!” the people shouted.

In addition, the Word of God was attacked. Christian leaders, Apologists such as Justin Martyr, Origen, Ireneaus and many others, spoke up in defense of the Word of God and pointed out that the charges against the Word were inaccurate charges meant to lead people astray. Many of those apologists were martyred because of their defense of the faith. For instance, Justin was known just as “Justin” until he was beheaded around the year 165. Ever since he has been known as “Justin Martyr.”

Now, more than 20 centuries later, have things changed much? Has the world become less hostile to the truths of the gospel? Aren’t people more accepting of other views than they used to be?
Around the world more Christians were martyred in the last century than in all the centuries preceding the 20th century combined. At this very moment, many Christians are facing violent persecution because they have stood firm in their defense of their faith in Jesus Christ.

And here in our own country, the lead article on Yahoo News a week ago from last Friday, - in the midst of a government shut down, as politicians argued over the debt ceiling and it became increasingly apparent to people with common sense that our nation cannot continue to print money to pay for debts that wise politicians would have never incurred in the first place – as all this news should have been front and center stage, what was the main headline, Friday, October 11? The number one headline on Yahoo news had this lengthy title: Self-Professed ‘Bible Scholar’ Makes Explosive Allegation About Jesus That He Believes Could Rock the Christian Faith to Its Core.

The article described the allegation of Joseph Atwill that the Romans invented the idea of Jesus Christ in order to gain control over the Jews. Atwill is reported in the article as saying, “Although Christianity can be a comfort to some, it can also be very damaging and repressive, an insidious form of mind control that has led to blind acceptance of serfdom, poverty, and war throughout history.”

That headline is just one of many which shows the direction of our culture. While some areas of the world have seen spiritual revival and a great hunger and thirst for the Word of God, nations as diverse and separate from each other as Uganda and South Korea among many others, our nation has gone the opposite direction. There is a growing animosity in our nation against the gospel, against the Bible and against people who are deemed foolish enough to believe the claims of the Bible.

**The Mindset of Our Culture**

Dr. Peter Jones, a professor at Westminster Seminary in California has written an excellent book on apologetics entitled, *One or Two*. Dr. Jones grew up in England and attended grade school with none other than John Lennon, famous for his part with the Beatles. Peter Jones describes how he and John Lennon both came to the United States in 1964, but with very different goals. The Beatles, of course, were sweeping the music charts with music which would have a lasting negative impact on our culture. Consider a song like *Imagine* written by Lennon (in 1971) in which he writes:

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Imagine there is no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today
Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
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Nothing to kill or die for  
And no religion, too…

That was the ideal world in the mind set of Lennon: no heaven, no hell, no religion, just imagine everyone living in peace. But that will never happen without the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. He holds the key to heaven, as the Way the Truth and the Life. And He holds the key to hell, as the judge of the living and the dead.

In contrast to John Lennon, Peter Jones came to study here in America and also met, in God’s providence, his wife, Rebecca Clowney. He studied here for 10 years, then moved to France for 17 years where he taught in a Reformed Seminary and raised his family. He returned to the US in 1991. He writes in the preface to his book:

“When I returned to the US in 1991, culture shock knocked me flat. I had never seen or even read such radical changes as those I saw. The “Christian” America of my 1960s student days had become not only post-Christian, but anti-Christian. When I first set foot on American soil, I discovered a nation so Christian I thought I had died and gone to heaven…” (You have to remember, he was comparing it to his youth in Liverpool, England where he played music with, and played hooky from school with John Lennon).

He goes on to write:

“... I feel like a historical artifact, someone who has seen these momentous events from their beginning to their contemporary fulfillment. How could America, the great sending nation of the missionary enterprise of the twentieth century, become the incubator and exporter of the most toxic anti-Christian ideology the modern world has ever seen – all in my lifetime? On the answer to this question hangs the survival of our faith and especially that of our children and grandchildren.” (Pg. 9, 10).

Do you see how important the defense of our faith – apologetics – really is? It’s not an abstract, philosophical series of arguments to present to unbelievers, but a crucial, biblical defense of Christianity that is desperately needed today, in our culture, for us, for our neighbors, and for our children, grandchildren and great grand children.

False Teaching in the Church

A second crucial area of apologetics is the defense of our faith from the false teaching that has taken over the visible church.

In biblical times, both Old Testament and New, there were a whole host of insidious false teachers. False teachers in the church are always more dangerous than false teachers in the world, because people don’t expect to see false teachers in the church, though they should. False teachers in the church prove the accuracy of the Scriptures which warn repeatedly against wolves in sheep’s clothing. As Paul warned the Ephesian elders even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. (Acts 20:30).
Peter Jones, in his book on apologetics, also points out the need to defend ourselves against the false teaching which has pervaded the visible church. He writes about the way religious and sexual norms have been radically and quickly changed in our American culture, giving this example:

One event illustrates … progress in transforming both sexual and religious norms. At the invitation of the President-Elect Obama, an openly homosexual bishop prayed at the Presidential inaugural ceremonies. This choice reflected the new administration’s acceptance of homosexual behavior, while the bishop used the limelight to announce biblical apostasy. He declared that his prayer would not be Christian, because he was “horrified” at how “specifically and aggressively Christian” previous inaugural prayers had been. (Ibid. Pg. 26)

We really have seen radical changes in our lifetime, haven’t we? Even those my age and those younger than I am have seen radical change, not just in our culture, but unfortunately we have seen a radical change in the message of the church. Most of the visible church no longer has a message of sin, salvation and then a life of service. Or of guilt, grace and gratitude, the other key words to describe the sections of our Heidelberg Catechism as it summarizes the Christian experience. Those biblical doctrines, faithfully expressed in our catechism and confessions, are considered by many in the church as obsolete and irrelevant.

Worship that is reverent, God-centered, and respectful - worship which realizes the truth of Hebrews 12:28 that we must *worship God acceptably with reverence and awe* - is described by many in the visible church as “boring.” In its place an effort is made to make church an entertaining place where everyone has “fun.”

The message of the church, which is described in 1 Timothy 3:15 as *the pillar and foundation of the truth*, has been radically changed. That’s one reason why we are a United Reformed congregation. We desire to be a part of a federation of churches that commits themselves to the faithful preaching and living out of the Word of God regardless of what the world or other professing Christians think of us.

Do you see the importance of apologetics? We need to defend the truth of Scripture, not just in the world, but in the visible church as well. We need to defend not just against the radical homosexual bishops, like Bishop Robinson, selected by President Obama for the inaugural prayer, but we also have to guard and defend ourselves - and others - from unbiblical practices that creep into the church, under the guise of wise and effective strategies for “winning” people to Christ, but are actually a deterrent to the gospel.

Whether in evangelism, apologetics or any other area of life, we must always follow the teaching of the Word of God. When we substitute our own ideas, whether in worship, evangelism, or apologetics we are trying to be wiser than God. We need to take to heart Paul’s injunction to young Timothy, “*Watch your life, - and your doctrine - closely*” (1 Timothy 4:16).
While apologetics involves defense against the accusations of the world and the false teaching of much of the visible church, it also involves, thirdly, a defense of what we believe to any individual who asks for the reason for the hope that you have (1 Peter 3:15b).

**The Witness of Our Daily Life**

In order for someone to ask you for the reason for the hope that you have you need to live a life that shows that you truly have hope – i.e. faith – in Jesus Christ. It has often been pointed out that one of the most effective witnesses we have, and one of the best defenses for the faith, apologetics, is the life that is lived in faithful obedience to the Word of God. That’s why the apostle Paul told the Corinthians, and tells us, that we are letters from Christ, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. (2 Corinthians 3:3).

If your life doesn’t show that you are a letter from Christ, if your life is no different from the life of an unbeliever, no one will ever ask you about the hope that is within you. But if you are a doer of the Word, and not a hearer only – if you endeavor to live as a Christian ought to live, others will notice that you are different. You won’t fit the pattern of the world. And eventually they will ask about that. And when they do, you need to be prepared with an answer.

It can be a simple answer. In fact, a simple answer is usually better than a complicated one. An example of a simple answer that any of us could give is in those three words that summarize the catechism. Sin, salvation, service. We have hope within us because although we are sinners, we have salvation through faith in Jesus, thus we live a life of joyful service and obedience. Just three words: Sin, salvation and service can be an effective outline to summarize your life and explain to others why you have a blessed and joyous hope that is alien to the world.

But as you give a response to whoever asks you for the hope that is within you, you must do so, the Scripture tells us, with gentleness, respect and a clear conscience. That is, you can’t defend the faith, or for that matter evangelize, with a holier than thou attitude. Nor can you effectively defend the gospel if you are filled with fear as you explain your faith.

And the way to overcome fear, as well as to overcome a haughty attitude, is to set apart - more accurately, - sanctify Christ as Lord (15a), meaning that you rest in His power as revealed in Scripture and not some evidence of your own making.

**The Reality of Persecution**

And then, thirdly, accept the fact that you may be slandered, reviled, and suffer for your faith. After all, the One in whom you believe was slandered, reviled and suffered greatly for you. And He said, “If they persecute Me, they will persecute you.”

Apologetics isn’t about always winning the argument with an unbeliever. It’s about being faithful to the Scriptures and to the Lord and leaving the results of that faithfulness with the Holy Spirit.
In the coming weeks we will look more closely at how to defend our faith using some of these points Peter gives us in verses 14-17. We will also look at the link between apologetics and evangelism, so that by God’s sanctifying Spirit within us, we may always prepared to give an answer - a defense - to everyone who asks (us) to give the reason for the hope that (we) have. Amen.