

Liberty Commentary January 21, 2010

“Be ready always to give an answer of the hope that is in you”

I had the opportunity this past summer of attending the swearing in ceremony at the Federal Courthouse in Des Moines, where immigrants were taking an oath to become citizens of the United States. After the swearing in ceremony the Federal Judge gave a short speech where he began his speech by saying, “contrary to what you may have been told, the United States is not a Christian nation.” The president also has made similar comments where he has said the United States is no longer a Christian nation and lauded the “great” accomplishments of Islam. As we enter the postmodern and post Christian era in the United States, what should be the response of the Christian to these statements?

The Apostle Peter addresses this very subject in first Peter 3:15, “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.” “Sanctify” means to prepare, to purify by preparation. At the time that Peter wrote this there was great persecution and hostility to the Gospel. That same attitude is beginning to pervade our culture in the United States as well. Peter says you better prepare yourselves and equip yourselves to be able to give a defense of the Gospel in these times of hostility and persecution. The word “Lord” means one true living God. Being a Christian does not mean that Christianity is the best option among many religions. Christianity is based on the Biblical premise that Jesus alone is Lord and the only exclusive way to a relationship with God. There are some 22 major religions and some 200 minor or less known religions throughout the world, but according to the Bible only Christianity, only Christ will bring you to a right relationship with God. Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6) The word “always” means perpetually, constantly

being ready to share Jesus Christ with those around you. We are to be spiritual minutemen and women. Ready at a moments notice when God gives us an open door to share the hope that is within us. Being “ready” means to be armed. Paul talks about this in Ephesians chapter six, “wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God.” We must equip ourselves with all the spiritual armament if we are to be successful in presenting a defense of the hope that is within us. To give an “answer” is translated from the Greek word apologia from where we get the word apologetics, which is a defense of the Gospel. It means to present in a reasonable and coherent fashion why you have the hope within you and we are to do it with gentleness and reverence. We are to do it with humility toward men and not fearing men, but do it with a reverence and worship toward God. Apologetics of the Gospel is not something just a pastor does, but here in first Peter the Word of God is making it clear that giving a defense of the Gospel or making a presentation of the Gospel is something that every believer has a responsibility to do.

As we enter the post Christian era in the United States we will encounter people that view the Gospel in one of three ways. As a skeptic, as a critic, or as a cynic. A **skeptic** believes that no one has the right answers because religion was created by man. Many in higher education have adopted this perspective of believing only science has the answers. Only what can be proven in a test tube can be considered ultimate truth. A **critic** believes Christianity is wrong. Religions are just for weak people who need a crutch. All they ever do is ask for money and bilk unintelligent people out of their money. A **cynic** is someone who says everyone thinks they are correct and their religion is the right religion, but religion is just a big scam. It is going to be our task in this community and in this culture to present a defense or an explanation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a manner that answers and addresses these three overriding questions.

There are some seven objections to Christianity that we will encounter in some form or fashion. I will give one. 1) Some will object to Christianity on the basis that it does not matter what you believe as long as you are sincere. To be quite honest, I think perhaps many Christians have bought in to this perspective. It is sort of a politically correct approach to Christianity. If we are to be ready to give an answer of the hope that is in us we must point out that salvation has nothing to do with one being sincere about a set of religious standards. A sincere Baptist will die and spend eternity in hell if all that the Baptist has is a sincere belief system apart from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We need Jesus, not just sincerity. Christianity is about being like Jesus, not about being sincere. Those with this objection would say that all roads lead to the same place irrespective of which religion one chooses because as long as I am sincere God will accept me –no He won't.

In this post modern, post Christian era it is vital that each Christian know what they believe and why they believe it. We all have a different task in Gods work. Some plant, some water, some harvest, but when you see someone come to faith in Christ because of your willingness to give an answer of the hope you have within you, you will then realize that what you are doing does really matter and everything else is insignificant in comparison.

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