

## **Apologetics (I apologise but I don't say I'm sorry)**

British society is known for its politeness, we are a nation who are ready to apologise when we are in the wrong, but in terms of biblical theology we are told to apologise for being right. So what do we mean by this, what is biblical apologetics? The word apologetics comes from the Greek word *apologia*, which means to 'speak in return, defend oneself', and it was used as a formal defence in response to prosecution in a court of law. While theological apologetics sounds complicated, it is just the opposite, it is giving a defence of our faith. Paul writes on this subject in 1 Peter 3:13-17. So then, we are called to defend the gospel and give an account of what we believe and why we believe it to anyone who should ask, and in doing this we enter into theological apologetics. Paul also mentions this in 2 Cor 10:5 where he talks about "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ," Again in Phil 1:7 Paul says, that he was active "in the defence and confirmation of the gospel." and Acts 28:23 describes him in his last days in Rome as working from morning until evening, "attempting to convince them about Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the prophets." It is not only Paul but Jude also found it necessary to write to the church regarding this, in Vs. 3 of his letter he says, "Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints". He changed the subject matter of his letter to warn the church to 'contend for the faith'. There is an old proverb that says, 'if you fail to prepare, you prepare to fail' and this is true of us as Christians, if we fail to study the Scriptures in a prayerful way and cultivate a right relationship with the Holy Trinity, we will fail in every way to give an adequate defence of our faith. If we send untrained soldiers into battle they will come back injured or worse, likewise if we attempt to defend Scripture without knowing what we are talking about we will get slaughtered by our accusers and bring shame on the name of Jesus. This is the reason why many "christians" fall away from their faith, because at some point Satan will be aware of their lack of understanding and tie them in scriptural knots with his superior knowledge and they will listen to his lies and may even succumb to false teaching. This is evident throughout Scripture and should serve as a warning to us as it did to our predecessors. Listen to what Satan says in Gen.3:1, "Did God ACTUALLY say..." And his line of attack hasn't changed throughout the centuries, ever since that encounter with Eve his opening gambit is always based on your knowledge of Scripture. He even tried the same mode of attack on Jesus Himself, in Matt.4:1-11 (read). Here we read of the temptation of Jesus by Satan and we see immediately Satan is trying to cast doubt on the validity of God's Word when he says, "If you are the Son of God..." In other words, 'did God say'. Three times Satan uses his knowledge of Scripture to try and cause Jesus to fall from His mission and three times Jesus uses Scripture to defend Himself. Now you may think that Satan is being particularly naive in thinking that he could topple the living Word of God by using Scripture but it illustrates to us the power of God's Word and that power is not to be underestimated. Hebrews 4:12 says, For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Here we see that the Word of God can penetrate to the very core of our being, why? Paul answers this in his letter to Timothy in 2 Tim.3:16-17, when he says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work." This phrase 'breathed out' tells us that God Himself has spoken the Words of Scripture and therefore Scripture carries with it the authority of God. For us as Christians and followers of Jesus this means that we must view Sacred Scripture in the same way as we view the authority of God and the same way the early church at Thessalonica did of whom Paul said, "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers." (1 Thess. 2:13).

There is a commercial Christian slogan that says, 'God said it, I believe it, that settles it', now can you see what is wrong with this slogan? The middle part is redundant, if God said it that settles it whether I believe it or not, that it the authority of God's Word, it is absolute regardless of anyone's belief. We know that the spiritual life is not an easy one because we constantly struggle with the old nature we had before we were saved, this struggle is not unique to us, in fact Paul had to write to the church at Galatia regarding this, let's read what he writes in Galatians 5:16-17. This struggle is constant throughout the church yet it is a struggle in which we must learn to master the old nature and live as children of God, we must listen to the warning God gave Cain and overrule the desire for sin (Gen.4:7).

The best way to master sin is to immerse ourselves in the Word of God. A daily routine of bible study and prayer will give us not only a good defence against Satan but will enhance our right standing with God, or our righteousness before God. As we read God's Word and meditate on it throughout the day we will, over the course of time, agree with Jeremiah who says in chapter 15:16 of his book, Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts. Jeremiah here gives us another reason to read and understand God's Word, we are called by His name, we are His chosen people and we are His image bearers and as such it is our duty as His children to know our Father and what He says, when we understand the Scripture and come against people who may have a wrong view of Scripture we can speak with confidence just as Jesus did in Matt.22:29 when He told the Sadducees, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God". Also the writer of Hebrews tells us that when we defend the Scriptures, ... "the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us"; God has saved us to be His mouthpiece and tell people the good news and unless we understand the Scriptures and the truths of God then our witness will be of no effect. Among the many parables Jesus taught there are parables of stewardship, stewards who are both just and unjust and we are called to be good stewards of the gifts that God chooses to give us, whether those gifts are material goods, wealth, fame or whatever it might be, yet the one thing we are all given stewardship of is His Word and we must work while we are on this earth to give a full and definitive account of our faith in God and always be prepared to defend the gospel truth of Jesus. Thinking that our defence is a matter of our intelligence is a mistake, think of the apostle Paul who is said to have been one of the most educated men of his time yet his defence of the gospel was not one of intellect, it was one of intimacy with Jesus which is reflected in his writings to the church at Corinth. His letter of 1 Cor.2:1-5 says, "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God".

So then we are called to give a good account of our faith by way of our relationship with God, our faith is not just a case of what we know in our heads, it is what we know in our hearts. The way we live our lives says as much to people as what we say and the closer we are to God, the more we will understand, and the more we understand the more righteously we will live our lives and be, as James says, "doers of the word, and not hearers only". Ultimately, we will find that we can defend the gospel of God and we will be able to apologise without saying sorry!