

Living Here, Longing for Home: Reason for Hope

1 Peter 3:15

Read 1 Peter 3:13-17 together:

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

In verses 13-17 Peter encourages his readers to continue to hope even when hope is hard. He exhorts his readers to focus their hope on Jesus Christ. Their hope has a name and it is Jesus!

Let us return to this passage, focusing specifically on verse 15 today:

"...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..."

? What is Christian apologetics? Are you familiar with the term?

Peter challenges us to always be ready to defend our faith. We must do so with gentleness and respect. If the gospel offends (and it will) that is to be expected. But, our manner of defending the faith, the way we apologize for our faith, should never be the source of offense. This is NOT to say that we should be passive or weakly capitulate to the world. But we are to defend our faith with gentleness and respect.

Could anything be timelier for Christians today? We have never seen more resistance, more misrepresentation of Christians than we see right now. Our faith stands on truth and fact. But we can be intimidated by the attacks of the world. We can feel shaky in our faith. We need to be fortified. And, there is a world of skeptics (unbelievers) who need to hear the gospel.

So, as apologists, we need to be prepared to defend our faith to skeptics. How do we do that? There are four truths that believers and skeptics alike already believe. These universally accepted truths form a basis to defend our faith.

Cause: there must be a cause

Where did the world come from? How did it get here? These are questions for all phenomena. We can see what exists, but how can we find its origin? If you walk into the kitchen and smell the unmistakable smell of your favorite cookie, you know someone has baked cookies for you!

In much the same way, believers and skeptics alike understand the truth that this universe in which we live had to have a cause. It didn't simply appear out of nothing on its own.

? Does this fact prove the existence of God?

? How can this truth help to defend your faith?

Francis Collins, American physician-geneticist, Director of the National Institute of Health, and former leader of the Human Genome Project, said this, "The universe began with an unimaginably bright flash of energy for an infinitesimally small point. Before that there was nothing. I can't imagine how nature, could have created itself. . . it **had** to be outside nature."

This is no slam dunk, however. This fact does not prove the existence of God. But this is an inescapable dilemma for the skeptic and a major confirmation for believers.

? What do you believe?

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
Gen 1:1

Order: I can count on order

If you are holding a ball in your hand and release it, what happens? We all know that it will fall; gravity will pull it down to the ground. We understand this truth from a very young age!

If the world resulted from random chance, how could anything be predictable? Yet we can predict chemical reactions; we can predict solar and lunar eclipses 2000 years from now!

In his well-known work "Cosmos" Carl Sagan said, "To continue to survive, an earth-like world must also continue to be **lucky**. The role of something close to random chance in all this is striking...but in light of modern understanding there is no sign of divine guidance here, or at least nothing beyond physics and chemistry. The continued operation of a **mindless selective process can convert chaos into order**".

This brilliant man speaks of what no one can perceive. Without observation or scientific foundation, he claims that the universe, our very earth with its life-supporting atmosphere, is a design from randomness!

? Why? Why do you think this brilliant man, and so many others, choose to place their "faith" in randomness?

? What passage of Scripture comes to mind for you when you consider this sinful arrogance?

Interestingly, for many who believe so strongly in order, the laws of physics and science deny the existence of God because miracles violate their orthodoxy! They believe in order, but attribute so much to luck, randomness, and a "mindless selective process."

Purpose: my life has Purpose

There may be no question that humans have pondered in the quiet dark of a sleepless night than this, "Why am I here?" Are we here simply to pursue happiness, work, pleasure, family, or to do good? The challenge for the skeptic is this: if life is random the inescapable conclusion must be that there is no ultimate meaning or purpose in life!

? Thinking of unbelievers you know, how do they find purpose in life?

- ? How can we teach the beauty of the purpose of life to our children?
- ? How can we practically live out our belief in a life of purpose?

It requires deep personal integrity and honesty, but as believers, we need to consider carefully and prayerfully what our purpose is in light of God's revealed Word.

Story: I'm part of a larger Story

As believers, we already understand that we are part of a larger story. We need not live with randomness, trying to make sense of a deluge of information and history.

- ? What is this greater story of which we, as believers, are a part?

Indebted to the Holy Spirit, we have come to understand the greater story of Creation, the Fall, and Redemption! In creation, we see the first cause and the order of our world. In the fall, we understand the human condition, injustice, war, and death. And praise God in redemption we understand rescue from sin, guilt, and death!

Skeptics don't have to believe the biblical worldview. But they do believe in some life-defining truths: cause, order, purpose, and story. God, as revealed in Scripture, is consistent. In Him, we find the cause and the order of all things. He is the same God who reigns above the world, sin, death, and redemption. He is the ultimate explanation for the world as we find it: material and spiritual, dark and light, good and evil.

- ? How will the truths of cause, order, purpose, and story change the way you seek to share the gospel with those God lays on your heart?
- ? How will these truths aid you in your walk with God

Christianity requires faith: not blind trust incoherence. The compelling nature of revelation speaks, "God is there! He is not silent. He loves, He cares, He redeems!"