



HOW TO GIVE A READY ANSWER

In order to give someone an answer for the faith we hold (1Peter 3:15), there are several things that need to be considered as we prepare to do so.

Foundation

The first element is that you need to know what you believe – you can’t defend something that you don’t understand. The strongest faith is that which is built upon a sincere search for truth and a reasoned consideration of the evidences, as well as a consideration of the alternatives. Study the Bible in order to learn what it really teaches. Investigate tough questions and seek out evidences that support as well as accurately understand what the opposition is saying and why. Now, this kind of study is going to take time and hard work, but eternity is at stake here.

Worldview

All of us have some kind of a “worldview” – a set of presuppositions that we hold about reality that provide us with a foundation for understanding the world and our place in it. The West was guided by the Judeo-Christian worldview from 500-1700 A.D., but the West has experienced a shift over the last two centuries and is in “worldview turmoil” right now as a number of worldviews compete for control. Most of our conflicts have to do with the different worldview presuppositions held, with both sides arguing fairly reasonably from what they each assume and making no progress. If we could identify the basic assumptions being made and deal with them, our discussions might be more fruitful.

I believe the “worldview” approach will help us to understand much of what is going on in our current culture and we will look into this in a future article.

To give a sensible and adequate answer, you should keep several specific things in mind. First, try to know your audience, so that you speak to their needs and questions. Don’t ride your own “hobby-horse” and answer questions they are not asking.

Second, remember that “faith” and “facts” work together. Evidence and logic move us toward belief, but what we believe influences how we reason and interpret evidence. That’s why it is necessary to keep the “big picture” (worldview) issue in mind as we are trying to discuss details. In the synagogues, Paul offered evidence for what he was saying (Acts 17:2,3) and the “noble-minded” were willing to consider that evidence (Acts 17:11). Present your case and give people time to think about it.

Third, giving an answer for our faith can be an evangelistic action – explaining what and why we believe in the hope that this will aid the listener in seeing the validity of the faith for their own needs. “Giving an answer” is NOT trying to out-talk someone in order to “win the debate.” You have not convinced someone merely by out-talking them. Perhaps the best Biblical description of how to do this was written by Paul to Timothy,

But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2Timothy 2:23-26)

We also should know which issues/situations to avoid and be ready to patiently work with people over a period of time. When we emotionally blurt out our view and stomp off, we have failed to create a situation where an ongoing discussion can take place - bringing about a “worldview shift” in someone else is going to take some time. You may have to listen to find out what the issues are that need to be addressed - a serious misunderstanding on Biblical teaching or some opposing viewpoint. We need to remember Jesus’ admonition that we “love our enemies” (Matthew 5:43-45) and this means that we will need to learn to hold our own views with patience and kindness even towards those who bitterly disagree with us. That requires maturity.

Fourth, it is not our job to “defend” everything that has come to be labeled “Christian” or “Biblical.” There is false teaching and outright sin going on under the umbrella term “Christian” in our time and we are under no obligation to defend that. Instead, we should expose it and agree that these things are wrong and not a part of the faith.

Fifth, apologetics is not just for dealing with outsiders and unbelievers. The church, in general, would be stronger if more attention was paid to the “reasons” for the faith and why the Bible is credible in the areas of science and history. Some preachers and elders may have to get busy and do some serious study. Why should we surrender to the secularism of our age and their claim that evolutionary “science” alone deals with evidence, reason, facts, etc., while religion is “non-rational” and deals only with private feelings, spiritual meaning, irrationality, etc.? The Bible fits the facts better than most people know and the foundations of evolutionary “science” have a lot more philosophy mixed in than most of them realize! A number of seekers and believers DO want to know how the Bible fits with reality.

Sixth, try to be aware of what the current issues are. Don’t fight the battles of 50 years ago unless the same issues come up. Be open to new information and be ready to investigate challenges and claims from others. Seek out good resources for answers, take notes, and start a filing system for things you find in magazines and newspapers. A lot of useful information comes through public information channels.

If you are going to prepare yourself to give an answer for your faith – be ready to work, think, stretch yourself – in short, be ready to grow!