

VIII. Contending and Defending the Faith in Biblical Perspective
Contending and Contenders—Defending and Defenders
“The Composite Profile of an Effective Defender of the Faith”

I Peter 3:13–17

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September 28, 2014 – Evening Sermon

This is the Word of God. It’s the truth. I Peter 3:13-17 says [13] *Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? [14] But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, [15] 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, [16] having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. [17] For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

As we continue our study in contending and defending for the faith, realizing Satan’s two strategies of infiltration and intimidation, and realizing our apostolic call in handling these strategies, we are at this matter of defending the faith using this salient text that calls us to always be ready and give an account of the hope that is within us. I want to come back to this text revealing a composite profile of an effective defender of the faith that Peter lays out for us. To do that you have to remember the essential element of the defender of the faith and that is they sanctify Christ as Lord in their heart. This a dynamic of the Christian life where daily we make an intentional commitment by the power of the Holy Spirit because of the surpassing greatness of God’s work in our life that Christ is enthroned upon on heart. He is holy and He has no rivals. In other words, the Giver of our faith by grace is enthroned upon on our heart. The object of our faith by grace is enthroned upon on our heart.

Why are you a believer today? It is because God by His grace gave you faith. Ephesians 2:8-9 says [8] *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* He gave you your faith in order that He might become the object of your faith. The One who gave you faith by grace who is the object of your faith by grace then that One is now every day intentionally out of love to Him enthroned upon your heart. The throne room of your life has only one seat and you want Christ in it every single day. We are not speaking of the dynamic of your conversion when you repented of your autonomy against God and surrendered to Christ as Lord and Savior. We are talking about the dynamic of the life of sanctification, the life of holiness before God, and the pursuit of holiness by God’s grace where Christ is enthroned.

My first step every day should be to the closet of prayer and the Word. Then I want to prioritize the assembly of God’s people, the preaching, singing and fellowship of God’s Word. That then allows me to be encouraged in and living out the fact that Christ is to be Lord of my life. Even more simple than that before I get out of bed and get to my closet I want to just simply say to the Lord the first petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Hallowed by Thy Name! Lord, You know that I have a propensity to make everything

even salvation about me but I want to die, I want my treasonous sin to die and I want You to be seen in me. I thank You that you have given me the realization that without You I can do nothing but because You're with me and enthroned upon my heart I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

So with that work of grace moving and working in our lives now we can be effective defenders of the faith and sanctifying Christ enables a particular kind of life that I want to describe with ten features in this study and those ten features exhibit to the world that Christ is Lord in my life. About 75 years ago a new discipline arose in criminology and it was called the forensic sketch artist. With this they learned the science of asking certain questions to the witnesses of the crime about what they observed and sitting in the corner was a forensic sketch artist who was working the whole time the witnesses were being questioned. After he heard the articulation of the suspect from the witness he would come over and say to the witness "Does he look like this?" "Oh my goodness that's him!! That's the guy, go arrest him!" So they would get to who it was.

I think Peter has given us the information from this text to sketch out a composite profile of the effective defender of the faith. What is our object in contending and defending for the faith? It is two-fold. It is to win the day that the argument and the skepticism would become an embarrassment and then to win the opponent so that, that opponent becomes one who trusts in Christ as Lord and Savior. This Christian life is a supernatural deal because if you try to do this life in your own strength you'll either end up winning arguments and destroying people or you'll end up trying to win people but you won't give attention to the argument and other people will fall prey to those arguments because they are not shown as an embarrassment as the way they ought to be shown. So we have to ask God to give us the ability to do both of those things. It's not just one or the other but we need to win the person and win the day on the issue that is before us.

I want to remind you that Satan, whether its intimidation or infiltration, is always trying to attack the glory of God with a particular tactic. First, he does this by undermining the authority of God's Word. I have been in battles in seminaries, churches, colleges and denominations in battle after battle for the authority and reliability of God's Word. Recently I was in debate with a denomination that has had to step away from the church because of the latest heresy that has been embraced. They said 'We're sorry we have to take a stand on this issue' and I said 'the stand should have been taken when the denomination had set aside the authority of the infallible, inerrant Word of God' and now they have found a doctrine that they have perverted that can finally send you out. Once the church is entrusted with and built on the Word of God and when it denies the Word of God everything else will eventually collapse, always.

Satan knows that and that's why he said in the garden 'has God said? Can you really trust God?' and he does that with disguise and deceptiveness. He'll get to the authority of God's Word by cutting at the edges, snipping away. Then he'll attack what he wants to attack most of all and that is the Gospel because he is a murderer, a liar and he wants to obscure and distort the Gospel. There are two distortions. One is legalism which is God saved me through and what I do that allows Him to save me instead of God saving me by grace which allows me to do what I do.

The second distortion is libertinism and since I'm not saved by what I do but by what God does then it doesn't matter what I do. I can sign peace treaties with sin in my life instead of we who assassinated God's glory has now been called to assassinate sin. If you don't kill it, it will kill you, your marriage, family, your witness and your testimony. You can't put on until you put off and therefore we put off in order to put on through the strength which God supplies. That's why Paul says how can we who die to sin still live in it. I don't live in it so what do I do now. I kill it so I can embrace Jesus who has embraced me and allowed me to serve Him and exalt Him.

Now I'd like to go through these ten features. The first one is the effective defender is zealous for the good and the righteous. I Peter 3:13 says *[13] Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?* In the original language of this text it reads 'Now who is there to harm you if for the good you are zealous?' Notice that we don't just happen into doing good things. If you go through the text you'll see that he refers six times to doing good, actively, intentionally and we don't start off in neutral. We start off as sinners saved by grace. I can't put on until I put off. I can't live that which is honoring to the Lord until I kill that which is dishonoring to the Lord. I have to put off in order to put on and that has to happen in my life. So when one has been zealous for the good they have also been zealous to kill that which is dishonoring to the Lord in their life.

Lord, in thought, word, and deed would You allow me to remove anything that would raise up a standard against You because You are Lord in my heart. Because of Your love for me I want to love You and be zealous to keep Your commandments. Please do not fall prey to this notion that intentionality in the Christian life is a sign of not depending upon God's grace. If you're depending on God's grace it will give you intentionality in the Christian life. We have this constant dynamic in our life that if I am zealous for what is good then I must be a legalist or I must be self-reliant. I can't be zealous for what is good unless the Lord allows me by His strength, mercy and motivates me with the multiple motivations that are given to us in the Christian life. Passivity is not the sign of trusting in the power of God's grace. It is dependent upon Him.

I love the vows parents take when we do baptism here at Briarwood. When we do baptism I ask the couples who are coming with their children "Will you in humble reliance upon God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, endeavor to set before your child a Godly example to pray with and for your child." In other words, you endeavor, you are zealous for that which honors the Lord. You could literally translate this text to say "zealous to be a do-gooder." I don't do this to be saved but because I love my Savior. I don't start off in neutral for to do that which is good I have to kill that old man in me every single day and I have to put to death the deeds of the flesh every single day in order that I might live unto Him. That's why it says in Titus 2:11-12, *[11] For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.* So that is the first feature.

Secondly, you are blessed in your suffering. I'd like to look at II Corinthians 4. There are so many texts on this from Jesus to Peter to Paul but I just picked this one. II Corinthians 4:16-18 says *[16] So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. [17] For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, [18] as*

we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. Remember these people are dying for the faith and he calls it momentary light affliction. Do not fear those that can kill the body.

So he is telling us in the midst of this world that if we would live Godly in Christ Jesus you will suffer. In the world you will have tribulation but in Me you have peace and this is repeated time and time again that all who live Godly in Christ Jesus it is only a matter of time that you will suffer for Christ in some way to some degree at some fashion. If Christ is Lord of your heart, then instead of a pity party of playing the victim at that moment, we were just presented with a platform to make a defense for the faith, whether it's Lattimore at the burning post or Ridley or Wycliffe or Huss or you or me. We have brothers and sisters who are dying for the faith all over the place right now.

That's not where we are for the suffering we're facing today is a little bit different. There is a couple who is suffering in Arizona. This couple is gracious and Godly and who desires to live in a country that guarantees them the free practice of their religion. They cannot enable, embrace or support the practice of a same sex marriage which is an incoherent, irrational statement. More than that it is a statement of blasphemy against God and they couldn't participate in it. So the Supreme Court of the state brings the ruling and here's the ruling – in the practice of your religion there will be times that you will have to curtail your desires in order to be an American citizen. Now that's a long way from where we were, which was a government that protected the free practice of your religion.

Perhaps you're the president of a company of digital technology and you decide you want to stand firm for the sanctity of marriage so you become a participant in the public square to do that and even though you have made your company millions and billions of dollars by your leadership, you then lose your job because of your stand for the sanctity of marriage. While I don't think the government has a right to do what they did in Arizona I do believe that private companies have the right to fire you for being a Christian. If they don't want to hire Christians, then they don't have to hire Christians. There may be some civil litigation that could be looked at in terms of that but my problem is that when we're in a situation where people embrace that form of life where you stand for that which is good then now you're ready to suffer.

I believe with all my heart that the time is and is rapidly approaching where you will one day have to decide between faithfulness and zealotry for Christ sanctified as Lord in your hearts or a job or even citizenship. We have 2100 years of brothers and sisters who did not live in the gracious bubble we have lived in, in this country. It was not new to them. Now we'll see in that day how much gold, silver and precious jewels there is in the church and not just wood, hay and stubble for in that day we'll find out. So when you suffer for righteousness sake, instead of being the victim or dying in a pity pile, it becomes a platform in order to trust Christ and to make Him known.

The third feature is fearlessness in life. Isaiah 8 is what Peter is quoting in this text or whether adapting Isaiah 8 which is a statement by Isaiah, inspired by the Holy Spirit, telling God's people under Assyrian captivity which was looming in front of them, not to fear and it said do not fear man or the fears of man. I Peter 3:14 says *[14] But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,* and understood in the context is troubled by them and their fears.

When people come intimidating believers in whatever form they use, they are actually bringing against you what they fear and they know if it works on them it will probably work on you, but they haven't yet met Christians who have Christ as Lord in their hearts. In that day we will not fear, fear nor will we fear man nor will we fear the fears of men. I'd like to show you another passage in Proverbs 3. This book is a wonderful collection of Divine common sense. I could show you multiple texts on this but I'm just going to show you this one which is one of my favorite texts dealing with my own fears in life – fears that I need to get rid of. The Bible does not allow for any phobias in our life except the liberating fear of the Lord. Have no fear (Matthew 10:26), be anxious for nothing (Philippians 4:6) but let me make a qualifier here.

Pastor, in a broken world is it ok to have anxieties and fears? Yes and no. No fears and no anxieties but you can have concerns. I will Paul here. Paul said in II Corinthians 11:28 [28] *And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my concern for all the churches.* So I am making a differentiation – no fear, no anxiety – but you can have some concerns. You are living in a broken world but don't have fear because whatever you fear is lord in your life at that moment. That's why we have to daily enthrone Christ. Whatever you fear controls you at that moment and that's why Satan goes about like a roaring lion. Why does a lion roar? He knows when he roars he will intimidate his prey and they will freeze for just that moment and then he'll have the fangs in the neck. Satan does that seeking to bring fear to us.

So let's look at what it says in Proverbs 3:5-6, [5] Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. [6] In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. With that in mind Proverbs 3:21-27 says [21] *My son, do not lose sight of these— keep sound wisdom and discretion,* [22] *and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck.* [23] *Then you will walk on your way securely, and your foot will not stumble.* [24] *If you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.* [25] *Do not be afraid of sudden terror (in other words, do not fear, fear) or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes, (Why?)* [26] *for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught.* [27] *Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.* The Lord is the One who sustains you. So now instead of being paralyzed by fear now you're free to be zealous for the good again in our lives.

The fourth feature is to be gentle. I Peter 3:15 says [15] *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.* We are now at the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23 says [22] *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* [23] *gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.* Here is the fruit of the Spirit in our life so that when we deal with it's not harshly. It's with determination, diligence, courage and conviction but it's also with compassion and without defensiveness. It is with gentleness because you're not only winning the argument to give a reason for the hope that is within you but you're also winning the person. So there is gentleness that marks out the effective defender.

The fifth feature is effective defender is respectful. Do you see how inane people are who are the opponents of Christ when I have to defend the faith? I am fully aware that sin and the philosophies of this age are irrational, illogical, incoherent and make no

sense but I know the person who is the proponent of it for I would be the proponent of it if it were not for God's grace that saved me. In fact before I knew the Lord in some cases I was worse than that. So why should I be respectful? They are made in the image of God and even as we dismantle what is raised up against the Lord we want to win that person so we treat these people, marred by sin and irrational thinking, with respect.

Number six is that the effective defender is prepared. We are to be always ready to give an account. You have to know God's Word in your life to be ready. Lord, help me be ready so that when the moment comes I can give a proper and accurate account of the hope that is within me. There have been many times in my life where I hesitated to speak for the Lord when His glory and truth was attacked and it was because I didn't feel like I was ready. I want you to be in the secret closet of prayer and the Word and I want you to be in the public and small group assembly where you're being disciplined in order to be ready. I also want to say that there were moments when I didn't think I was ready and I got into it and I was ready. Then I remembered what the Lord said "When they deliver you up do not fear for I will give you what to say and how to say it at that moment" (Matthew 10:19-20). There were things that I was ready to say that I didn't know I was ready to say until I stepped forward in that moment and the answer can be respectful, gentle and reasonable.

I have tried to help you out here so that you're not fearful of that but you are going to get stumped somewhere out there. The best I've ever been around when it comes to giving a defense was Dr. Francis Schaeffer but the second best for me was Dr. Henry Krabbendam and I watched the way he defended the faith. I'll never forget the time we were talking with someone and he said "Oh my friend, I don't think I have the answer to that. I will see you tomorrow morning." Then he went and found the answer. So the fact that you don't have the answer at the moment is the gift of God to get you to the answer so you can be ready. The answers you will remember more than any other will be the ones you had to go dig to find.

The seventh feature of an effective defender is that you want to be Biblically reasoned. The reason I say it this way is because I start with the Bible. I don't reason to the Bible. I reason from the Bible because the Bible is reasonable and it is supra-reasonable. It is supra-rational. It is never irrational. It is never illogical but it is supra-logical. So I start with what the Bible says and then give a reason. I know that one God dwelling in three Persons is supra-rational for this One God as Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer makes sense.

There are scientists out there that are so much smarter than me where they have IQ just falling out of them and I have to go harvest IQ in my life but it is never a problem to sit down and talk with them because I know where they are. Face, time and matter are eternal and if you give enough space and time to this matter you get a uni-verse through the chance conjugations of the mutations of this world. I will take that on any time because it makes no sense. Spontaneous generation is not supported by any scientific experiment. On the contrary things left alone without someone making them and putting them together all run down into disorder. That's what science says so I have no problem talking with a scientist about origins because science cannot declare origins, by definition it can't do that. I'll be glad to sit down and talk about the Trinity who said "In the beginning (there is time) God created the heavens (there is space) and the earth (there is

matter).” Then the Holy Spirit hovered and brought the universe instead of multi-verse. That is reasonable to me and I’d be glad to take that one on for I can work with that.

What about salvation? As I sit and talk with Hindu friends who believe that God shows up in everything and that incarnation is a continual experience, Jesus says “No, the Word became flesh.” We both can’t be right. I think what Jesus says make sense. By a man comes death and by a man also comes the resurrection that makes sense. It makes sense that my religion can’t save me if I understand what sin is.

Have you watched us as a nation try to logically explain away something called evil? I see it every day when a husband or wife comes to me and says the spouse is walking out on their marriage. The wife or husband who is being abandoned says to me “Can you help me understand this answer?” I say “No, I can’t.” I can tell you why, what and what evil is but I can never make sense of it because sin never makes sense but grace does. Grace that is greater than my sin does. Grace that liberates me from its guilt and power does. I’ll be glad to talk about the reasonableness of Christianity that is so unique because it is God saving us by grace through His Son.

I’ll be glad to talk about God’s providence that explains you’re in a world where a lot of bad things happen and everything that happens to non-Christians happen to Christians except for God’s condemning judgment. But we have a God who says to us that if He is Lord in your heart and you’ve put your trust in Him here is a promise you can be assured of yet not that all things are good; [28] *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose* (Romans 8:28). That makes sense to me. If there is a God even the miracles make sense to me. I don’t need berries to explain a bush bursting into flames I just need God. By definition, when God shows up that is miraculous and that makes sense to me.

Number eight is the effective defender is non-discriminating. I Peter 3:15a says [15a] *but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you...* We are to be ready to answer anyone, it doesn’t matter who they are. Should it be the victim of pornography or the victimizer? It doesn’t matter who it is for we should be ready to give an account of the hope to anyone because Jesus can save anyone. He saves traitors like Peter. He saves those who would commit manslaughter like Moses. He saves those who are conspirators to murder like David. He saves those who falter before the Lord like Ezekiel.

He saves sinners who would deny Him even though they had been blessed to be raised in a Christian home. I know this because I am one of those. I am grateful for those who would take the time to answer no matter how incoherent, irrational or blasphemous my challenges were to the Christian faith. They still answered, being Biblically prepared and Biblically reasoned with gentleness and respect to win me as well as prove the embarrassment of what I was saying and that there was a truth that would set me free. I want to be careful on this. There is a time for public debates with the evolutionist or whomever but I believe the best work in apologetics to win people and positions is one on one. So we are to be ready to answer anyone.

Number nine is the effective defender has a good conscience toward God and toward men as is referenced in I Peter 3:16. You have to be careful here because you already have a perfect record and that is the righteousness of Christ. You already have a clean record because of the blood of Jesus who washed them away. You have a new heart but Lord, help me walk with a good conscience toward You. It is so liberating and

keep short accounts with the Lord. I John 1:9 says [9] *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

I don't have to get saved again but when I falter and my intimacy with the Lord has been broken He is there ready to receive me. I don't come to Him like a criminal to a judge for that's already been handled. I come to Him as a son who has walked away from it and needs to confess and be forgiven. He is ready to forgive you because of His only Son who died to make you His son and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness so that I can keep a good conscience with Him. Then I can keep a good conscience toward others. Keep a good conscience and speak the truth in love toward one another. If you're truthful you can not only have a good conscience but you can have a short memory because you're telling the truth you don't have to remember what you said to someone else. Keep a good conscience by speaking truth in love.

The tenth feature is that you have your hope constantly on display. I love the way Peter says this in I Peter 3:15b which says [15b] *...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you...* While suffering is the platform for making a defense for the faith effectively to win the day and the person, yet the motivation of the skeptic is why we live with so much hope. Why don't you live in despair or in the dumps or as a cynic or grumbling? Why are you always living out hope? It is because of the One who is enthroned upon my heart is my hope. Though I have not yet seen Him, I love Him. Though I have not yet come to the new heavens and the new earth, the best is yet to come. Though I falter now, in that day I won't and until that day there is no charge that can stand against me. There is no condemnation for it's all been erased. There is no accusation for it's all be eradicated and nothing can separate me from the love of God in Christ therefore the hope of the Lord fills my life. Lord, give me that in my life.

There is where God has called us as He has laid out the composite picture. So here is my takeaway that is three questions. Is this composite profile a facsimile of me? We have been giving the features of the effective defender answering the questions of the forensic artist and the artist is finished. Would he say 'Oh that's Harry Reeder!?' Or is that a picture of you? There is a resemblance. I think we can convict him of being a defender of the faith. If not, then question number two is where are you falling short of this? Where are those features not seen in my life? Get back to where Christ is the foundation of your life because you want these features in your life. Wherever it is not there, then Lord, where is it not there and would You begin to build it in me?

The third question is if not, then why not? Why not ask the Lord to begin to build this profile in each of us so that tomorrow at the water fountain, or at the office or in line at school, or in the fraternity, with Christ as Lord you are ready to give the reason for the hope that is within you so that the skeptic's skepticism would become an embarrassment and the skeptic would be brought from that unto life in Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Thank You so much for this very rich text and the opportunity we have had to walk our way through it, at least in some detail. Father, I thank You first of all that in Jesus we get a new record and a new heart. Now Father, every day help us to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts and then Father, make us more and more every day like this profile. Make us a reasonable

facsimile and where we are not then grow us and where we are we praise You and Father,
I ask that You would then use us so that in this world we will defend the faith that has
been given to us and we will do it in such a way that not only will the truth be honored
but those who would speak against it would be drawn to Christ in not only our talk but
also out walk for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.