

“Ready to Give a Defense”



Answering Our Friends' Religious Questions

By Kyle Pope

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Preface



James declared through the Holy Spirit, “**he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death**” (James 5:20). Solomon echoed the similar thought, “**he who wins souls is wise**” (Prov. 11:30). There is nothing one can do in this life that demonstrates love for another person more than trying to teach that person the truth. The question is how do we do this? What do we say? How do we answer questions that arise? Christians must prepare themselves to be ready to act when opportunities arise.

The material in this study was first prepared for a series of home Bible studies in Amarillo, Texas at the request of young adults seeking to prepare themselves for just such opportunities. Later the same material was used in adult classes at the Olsen Park church of Christ in Amarillo. These lessons are intended to help prepare Christians to answer common questions that arise when talking to our friends. Thirteen basic areas are addressed, after first considering the goal and disposition that should govern all such discussions.

These lessons will not give you a script of rehearsed answers, but they will lay a foundation to enable you to respond to some of the main questions you may face. We must understand that it is the word of God that converts souls (Rom. 1:16; James 1:18; Psa. 19:7). We must bring people to Scripture in the assurance that God’s word will accomplish its objective (Isa. 55:11). It is my hope that this material proves helpful in your work to teach your friends. May God bless your efforts to teach the gospel to lost souls.

Kyle Pope
February 2013

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Lesson One

Attitudes and Objectives



Introduction.

Read: **1 Peter 3:12-16**. Peter urges Christians, through the Holy Spirit, to be **“ready to give a defense for the hope”** that lay within them. Jesus taught that those who follow Him must let their light **“shine before men”** so the world will see us and glorify God (Matt. 5:16). The apostles were charged to **“make disciples of all the nations”** (Matt. 28:19-20). Christians today must carry on this work as we work to teach our friends, neighbors, and family. In this lesson we will consider the proper attitudes and objectives we should have in carrying out this task.

I. Our Attitude toward Teaching Our Friends.

A. What is our attitude toward ourselves as we teach our friends?

1. **“First remove the plank from your own eye”** (Luke 6:41-42). Jesus teaches in this text that we can only see accurately to help others come to the truth when we are first willing to look at our own shortcomings. If we fail to do this we can come across to others as arrogant or self-righteous. Jesus warned that the one who approaches God self-righteously is not acceptable to Him (Luke 18:9-14). Further, if we have sin in our lives it can damage our credibility with our friends. We must show our friends that gratitude to God for His mercy motivates our desire to teach them.

Sin I ignore in my own life hurts my relationship to God and damages my credibility.

B. What is our attitude toward our friends as we teach them?

1. **“Making a distinction”** (Jude 22-23). Jude, through the Holy Spirit instructed two distinct ways to approach teaching others. *First*, **“On some have compassion,”** but *Second*, **“others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled**

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We can't teach everything all at once—people can only learn so much at one time.

by the flesh.” Jesus displayed this distinction in His teaching. He was very sharp and firm in His rebuke of the stubborn self-righteous attitudes of the Pharisees (Matt. 23:29-33), but gentle and compassionate to souls ignorant of the truth (John 4:19-24) or broken-hearted over their own sin (Luke 7:37-47). In teaching others we must seek to make this same distinction. While some will only be moved by a sharp rebuke, others are ignorant of the truth and require honest, gentle, and compassionate instruction.

2. **“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now”** (John 16:12). Jesus recognized when teaching His apostles that they could not receive everything they needed to learn about the gospel at one time. Often in trying to teach someone we feel as if we must give them everything the Bible teaches on an issue all at once. While we should never be afraid to declare the **“whole counsel of God”** (Acts 20:27), we must recognize that people are limited in what they can absorb in one sitting. Sometimes, planting the seed and giving it time to germinate and grow is the very thing that is needed.

II. The Objective of Teaching Our Friends.

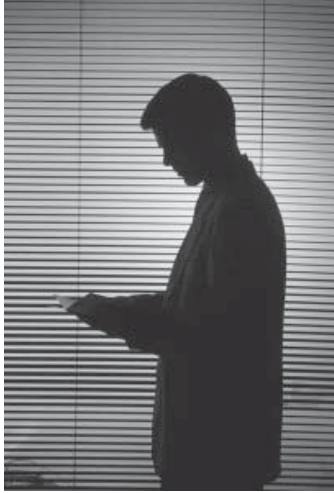
A. What is our goal in teaching our friends?

1. **“The end of your faith—the salvation of your souls”** (1 Pet. 1:6-9). The goal of faith and thus the goal of evangelism is the salvation of the soul. It is not winning an argument. It is not self-exaltation. It is leading the soul of a person who is lost in sin out of the perilous condition of eternal condemnation into a saving relationship with God. The goal is leading that soul unto eternal life in the age to come. We must keep this objective in our minds in all that we say and do in teaching the lost.

B. The Problem of Sin.

1. **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Rom. 3:23). A good starting point in talking with our friends is to focus on the problem of sin. The reason Jesus died was because of our sin. The reason people will be lost is sin. The reason all human beings need salvation is sin. The reason that it is important to act

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within the authority of Scripture is because the failure to do so is sin.

2. **“Sin is lawlessness”** (1 John 3:4-8). To understand the problem of sin we must first understand how sin is defined. Sin is not just feeling bad about something. We might feel bad about things that don’t matter to God. Sin is not just making someone else feel bad. Sometimes people may want things that God does not. Sin is the violation of God’s law. In this age God’s law is embodied in the New Covenant or **“Law of Christ”** (Gal. 6:1,2). All people everywhere are accountable to this Law (1 Cor. 9:19-22).

3. **“To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin”** (James 4:17). Sin not only involves doing things that God prohibits but failing to do what God commands us to do. This is true whether we are talking about personal conduct, how we treat our families, how we behave at work, or how we worship God. Until we can lead someone to recognize that doing what is unauthorized is sin, a careful study of what the Bible teaches in these areas means very little to a person.

We must help our friends understand that sin condemns us before God.

Conclusion.

There is nothing that demonstrates love for another person more than seeking to teach them the truth. We must be diligent to do this whenever we have the opportunity. Our love can lead souls to be saved and cause the kingdom of our Lord to grow.

Study Questions.

1. The word translated “defense” in 1 Peter 3:15 is the Greek word *apologia* (ἀπολογία). Some Christians in the first centuries after Christ wrote texts called *apologies* in which they explained and

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defended their belief in Jesus to unbelievers. What are some things a Christian should be prepared to explain if we are “ready to give a defense”? _____

2. In Luke 6:41-42, when Jesus taught about judging a “speck” in someone else’s eye while we have a “plank” in our own eye, is He teaching that it is best not to even try and teach someone the truth? _____

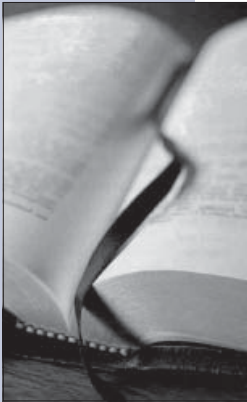
3. What does Paul teach in 1 Corinthians 8:1 about the danger of arrogant knowledge? How can this relate to our efforts to teach others the truth? _____

4. Explain the difference between Jude’s teaching on making a “distinction” and showing “partiality” or “respect of persons” condemned in James 2:1-9? How may we practice the one and avoid the other? _____

5. What is the context of Jesus’ teaching in John 16:12 and what did He promise to send them since they could not “bear” learning all they needed to at that time? _____

6. What are some ways that our world has led people to feel guilty for things that are not sinful, but tolerant of things that are? _____

7. How does James 4:17 indicate the importance of making certain that all that we do in worshipping God be done with the Divine authority? _____



Lesson Two

Authority in Religion



Introduction.

While Jesus was upon the earth He was asked a very important question by the Jewish leaders—“**by what authority do you do these things?**” Jesus responded to the question with His own question. He asked them if the teaching of John the Baptist came “**from heaven or from men?**” (Matt. 21:23-27). When the Jewish leaders refused to answer Him, Jesus refused to answer their question. Since they would not acknowledge the obvious fact that John’s message came from heaven, Jesus refused to directly acknowledge that His own message also came from heaven. In this exchange Jesus showed by His question that religious authority is either derived from heaven or men presume to establish it for themselves. In this lesson we will consider how important it is to begin with acceptance of a common source of authority in talking to our friends.

To help someone learn the truth we must start with a common source of authority.

I. How Do Men Presume Authority for Themselves?

A. Men presume to establish authority for themselves when they follow the “commandments and doctrines of men” (Col. 2:18-23). Many things are done in religion that are in truth merely “self-imposed.”

- 1. Jesus rebuked the Jews for following the “tradition of the elders” to the neglect of God’s word** (Matt. 15:1-6). Even though such traditions may be widespread and accepted for generations, if they are contrary to God’s will as revealed in His word, they must be rejected.
- 2. Some teach that the church possesses authority unto itself, separate and distinct from the authority of Scripture.** As a result, when a practice is not found in Scripture, but followed by a religious

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Emotions are unreliable and changing. Divine will is not revealed by strong feelings in the heart

organization, the so-called “authority of the church” is appealed to in order to justify the practice.

- a. **The church that Jesus established derives all authority from Christ** (Eph. 1:22-23). He is the Head over “**all things**” to His church.
- b. **The word of Christ will judge men on the Day of Judgment** (John 12:47-49). The church will not serve as a standard of judgment when we stand before God.
- c. **Church leaders can err and practice things that are wrong** (Gal. 2:11-13). The only authority that the church or its leaders possess is the responsibility to call men unto obedience to the word of God.

B. Men presume authority for themselves when they rely upon their own feelings. Many people justify various practices in religion because they come to have strong emotional feelings within themselves that God approves of their actions.

1. **Paul acted with a good conscience while persecuting the church** (Acts 23:1; 1 Tim. 1:12-13). It is possible to feel that something is right when it is actually sinful.
2. **The way of man “is not in himself”** (Jer. 10:23). God has not created man with an inborn instinct or moral directive that guides our behavior. The conscience can be weak (1 Cor. 8:7), seared (1 Tim. 4:2), or even evil (Heb. 10:22).

II. How Can We Make Sure That We Have Divine Authority for What We Do?

A. We must recognize the absolute authority of Scripture. God has revealed His word to mankind in the writings of the Bible. It is the absolute authority for man in this age and the means by which we can determine Divine authority for teaching and practice.

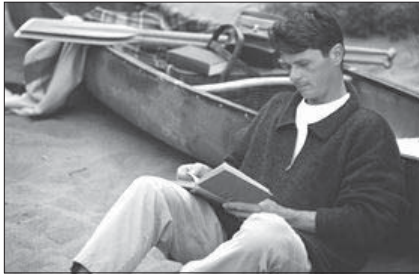
1. **Scriptures can make one “wise unto salvation”** (2 Tim. 3:14-15). The Bible reveals the plan of salvation God has offered in Jesus Christ.

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2. Scripture gives one all things needed **“for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”** (2 Tim. 3:16-17). By following the Bible one can be **“thoroughly equipped”** to be pleasing to God. Nothing else is needed.

B. We must “rightly divide” the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

Like any written material, one must make certain that he properly applies and interprets the Bible.



1. Some **“twist”** the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:14-16). Not every teaching that claims to have Biblical authority is valid.
2. We must **“test the spirits”** (1 John 4:1). Only then can we be certain that we are following Divine authority.

C. We must recognize that the Bible can be understood

(Eph. 3:1-4). Some have claimed that the Bible cannot be understood, but is a mysterious text only scholars or church leaders can unravel. While the Bible urges teachers to teach and explain the gospel (Acts 8:31), Paul shows us that we can understand the **“mystery”** when we read it. Like any written work, this involves considering...

1. **What does it instruct?** We could call these **Direct Commands** (cf. Matt. 28:19-20). Jesus teaches that we must follow His instructions. These come to us through what Jesus said while on earth and what He revealed through the Holy Spirit to His apostles (John 16:13).
2. **What does it describe?** Not all examples reflect the approval of God. Not all examples reflect the practice of His chosen apostles. **Approved Apostolic Examples**, however, teach us what we may do in order to please God (cf. Phil. 4:9). As those to whom Jesus gave the Holy Spirit, the approved examples set forth by the apostles becomes a binding standard for teaching and practice. The Holy Spirit speaks of the early prophets and apostles as a part of the **“foundation”** of the church, with Jesus as the **“Chief cornerstone”** (Eph. 2:20).

The Bible
is written
communication
from God to
man that can
be discerned
just like any
other text.

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3. What does it infer? We could call these **Necessary Inferences**, or inescapable conclusions (cf. Acts 20:7). When communicating information in written form a writer often makes inferences that further complete instructions and descriptions given to a reader. The text in Acts 20:7 shows by clear inference that the Christians described came together on Sunday to “**break bread**” (i.e. observe the Lord’s Supper). We can thus infer necessarily that it was Divinely authorized for them to do so.

Conclusion.

The Bible allows us to have all that we need to act with the authority of heaven. Our challenge is to believe it, accept it, and faithfully obey it.

Study Questions

The teachings and examples set by Christ’s apostles are a binding standard for conduct in Christ.

1. The “tradition of the elders” was a body of oral teaching that developed by the time of the first century and recorded what Jewish teachers believed about how the Law of Moses should be followed. After the New Testament, this was written down in the Jewish text known as the *Mishnah*. Explain the tradition Jesus cites in Matthew 15:1-6 that He says “made the commandment of God of no effect” in following it. _____

2. The Roman Catholic Church teaches a doctrine known as *Apostolic Succession* that claims that the authority of the apostles was passed down to leaders of the church throughout history. From this, it is argued that the Church forms a separate, but equal, standard of authority with Scripture. How does Jesus’ teaching in John 12:47-49

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show that this cannot be true? _____

3. Many people argue that the Holy Spirit continues to directly reveal things to people today. We will explore this further in lesson seven. Some believe this *revelation* is shown by strong feelings within the heart. How does the example of Paul in Acts 23:1 refute this view?

4. If Paul commands Timothy to “rightly divide” the word of truth what does it infer can be done (2 Tim. 2:15)? _____

5. Throughout history some religious groups have taught that only religious authorities can properly understand Scripture. Others have argued that the Holy Spirit must operate on the heart to allow men to understand Scripture. How do Paul’s words in Ephesians 3:1-4 address these false doctrines? _____

6. What did Paul tell the Philippians would result if they followed his apostolic example (Phil. 4:9)? Would not the same be true for us today? _____

7. Explain the sense in which Paul in Ephesians 2:20 says the apostles are part of the foundation of the church. _____

8. List some other examples of necessary inferences in Scripture.

