

A Positive Approach to Apologetics and Evangelism

(Part One: Acts 1-2)

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear (1 Peter 3:15).

New Testament faith is a complex combination of thinking and acting. The acting side of the equation is critical. The Bible makes it clear that many who think or speak with theological correctness do not exhibit the appropriate attitudes and actions. Such people face an uncertain future. (Clark 1993, 19)

The word *answer* from 1 Peter 3:15, is from the Greek word, *apologia*. It is where we get the term *apologetics*. Apologetics is defined as (1) a “systematic argumentative discourse . . .” (2) “a branch of theology devoted to the defense of the divine origin and authority of Christianity” (Merriam-Webster).

The focus of this presentation is not about biblical defense in general, although this is not ignored. But, it is about the actual personal approach taken by the apostles—because both the argument and the spirit of the argument matters.

On the subject of evangelism, Joseph C. Aldrich says, “The inductive model presupposes knowledge of the individual being addressed. The gospel is then tailor-made to his individual needs. The goal is to discover that point in the individual’s life at which the gospel will become good news, and then share it as such. Jesus’ method of dealing with people followed this adaptive, inductive model” (1981, 87).

For example, “To Nicodemus the ruler, he said, ‘You must be born again.’—he never used ‘born again,’ a highly conceptual metaphor, in any other recorded instance in the New Testament. He talked to the woman by the well about ‘living water.’ But when the rich young man came up and asked what he had to do to have eternal life, Jesus did not talk to him about living water. Knowing that money was this man’s god, he said, ‘Sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’ He was basically calling him to a total switch of Gods. On the other hand, he didn’t tell Zacchaeus, the tax collector who went up in a tree, to give away everything he had. He simply said, ‘Zacchaeus . . . I must stay at your house today.’ By the end of the day, Zacchaeus had decided on his own to give half of his possessions to the poor” (quoted in Aldrich 1981, 88).

Aldrich says, “Jesus met a person at his point of need. We should, too. If his need is in the area of marriage, God has good news for him. If he is struggling with guilt, God has good news for him . . . Obviously a confrontational/intrusional model of communication will be more general (deductive) because the individual being ‘evangelized’ is virtually a

stranger” (1981, 88). It is important to win over the stranger. Proverbs 11:30 says, “The fruit of the righteous *is* a tree of life; and he that winneth souls *is* wise.”

The writer of the book of Acts is Luke, the physician. His presentation is upbeat and delivered with great assuredness. His confidence is reflected immediately in the first verse, “I have given an earlier account, O Theophilus, of all the things which Jesus did, and of his teaching from the first” (BBE).

According to Albert Barnes, “Luke was the companion of Paul in his travels, and was an eye-witness of no small part of the transactions recorded in this book.” Luke states, “To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, (v. 3). Luke uses the Greek term *tekmērion* (infallible). Thayer defines the word as (1) “that from which something is surely and plainly known; (2) on indubitable evidence, a proof.” Luke was confident because he was an eyewitness. We also must be confident, although we are not eyewitnesses. Our approach should be a reflection of our experiential faith and belief in the Bible.

“Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed” (John 20:29). Thomas believed because he had seen the Lord, many others believe through faith (see Hebrews 11:2).

Acts chapter one covers many important areas, such as: the promise of the Holy Ghost; the question and answer about when the kingdom of God would be restored; the ascension of our Lord into heaven, the appearance of two men in white apparel; and the important matter of choosing a replacement for the fallen disciple.

Acts chapter two begins with the day of Pentecost, the rushing mighty wind, the appearance of cloven tongues like as of fire, the infilling of the Holy Ghost, and everything else mentioned in connection to the birth of the New Testament church. This was a fulfillment of the promise made by Jesus Christ in Acts 1:8, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

Luke recounts the response of the “Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven” who were there, “Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language” (Acts 2:6). While the 120 were experiencing joy unspeakable, others “were bewildered” (v. 6, ESV).

Acts 2:7 says, “And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?” Barnes explains that, “. . . the term Galilean was used as an expression of the deepest reproach and contempt, Mark 14:70; John 7:52.”

Luke points out that, “. . . they were all amazed, and were in doubt . . . (v. 12). “Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine” (v. 13). “Others said jokingly” (v. 13, GW). Barnes says, “The word rendered ‘mocking’ means ‘to cavil, to deride.’ It occurs in the New Testament in only one other place: Acts 17:32, ‘And when they heard of the

resurrection of the dead, some mocked.’ This was an effect that was not confined to the day of Pentecost. There has seldom been a revival of religion, a remarkable manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit, that has not given occasion for profane mockery and merriment. One characteristic of wicked people is to deride those things which are done to promote their own welfare. Hence, the Saviour himself was mocked; and the efforts of Christians to save others have been the subject of derision. Derision, and mockery, and a jeer, have been far more effectual in deterring people from becoming Christians than any attempts at sober argument.”

What is the approach one should take after he is mocked, derided, and insulted? With the help of God, it needs to be a positive one. It should be a confident and sober attempt at staying right with God while committing the spiritual act of leading people to truth. To not respond in kind, but to respond according to the historical scriptural record, is an ideal goal.

The apostle Peter begins his sermon by “standing up with the eleven” (v. 14). That speaks to the power of unity. Peter was confident, anointed, and he was not alone. God and his brethren were with him. Also, Hebrews 12:1 says, “. . . we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses . . .” Heaven is also a witness. Winning souls is a spiritual work.

In Acts 2:14, the apostle addresses the crowd, “Ye men of Judaea, and all *ye* that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:” There is no fear, malice, or anger toward those that had just ridiculed and mocked the apostle’s experience. This is a man of God; doing the work of God—respect, concern, and love for the people he is addressing was instead displayed.

Peter spends little time refuting one of their pointed jibes: “For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is *but* the third hour of the day” (Acts 2:15). Instead he presses on with scripture after scripture, getting to the point and informing them that what had just transpired was a fulfillment of prophecy. He chooses the prophet Joel’s message which is specific and to the point. There are no generalities.

In verse 22, Peter, uses a common refrain, “Ye men of Israel...” Once again, an appeal—an appeal to the souls of his countrymen. He continues to plead, “...hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God...” In verse 23, the apostle blames them, and holds them responsible for the crucifixion of our Lord.

Peter doesn’t park very long on the topic of their guiltiness before God. He moves on, to subjects that inspire hope, “Whom God hath raised up” (v. 24). “For David speaketh concerning him...” (vv. 25-28).

The apostle reaches out again to his blood brothers in verse 29, “Men *and* brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David...” Albert Barnes states, “This passage of the Psalms Peter now proves could not relate to David, but must have reference to the Messiah. He begins his argument in a respectful manner, addressing them as his brethren, though they had just charged him and the others with intoxication. Christians

should use the usual respectful forms of salutation, whatever contempt and reproaches they may meet with from opposers.”

The message to his brethren is a powerful one: “Men *and* brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:29-36).

The apostle Peter’s appeal to his kinsmen was about to reap rewards. His attitude, kindness, and civility toward his antagonistic brethren paid off: “Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren, what shall we do? (v. 37).

The message the apostle preached was not just for those gathered, but also for their progeny. “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:38-39).

Why would anyone stick around if they didn’t feel appreciated? The message is what made them stick around. But, how much of a role did the preacher’s approach play in all of this? Barnes notes that the word “*exhort* means that He entreated them by arguments and promises.” “And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:40-41).

The initial interaction between the disciples and the unbelieving Jews started out badly, but it didn’t end up that way. “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). Attitude and approach are important. We can overemphasize the argument side of things and underemphasize the approach, which is not good. The next set of verses clearly demonstrate that the results of their approach were powerful—there was unity that can only come from a fear and respect for God.

“And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house,

did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:43-47).

If we want a book of Acts revival, we must look at the scriptural historical record. We have the doctrine of the apostles, but we may not always demonstrate the spirituality and the approach of the apostles. Both are vitally important. God help us to be led of the Spirit to approach people like the apostles did.

Alexander Balmain Bruce says, “Apologetic, then, as I conceive it, is a preparer of the way of faith, an aid to faith against doubts whencesoever arising, especially such as are engendered by philosophy and science. Its specific aim is to help men of ingenuous spirit who, while assailed by such doubts, are morally in sympathy with believers” (1892, 37).

Bruce also states that, “The wise apologist instinctively shuns conflict with dogmatic unbelief as futile.” He comments, “The attitude and temper characteristic of the apologist disappoint extremists on both sides” (1892, 37-38).

Bibliography:

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