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Lakeland Hills Leader

Our Defense Of The Gospel Of Jesus Christ [Part Two]

By Chuck Richardson

"But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;" [1Peter 3:15NAS95]

Last week we found that sanctifying the Lord in our hearts is essential, and forms the basis of our relationship in, and with Christ. Our faith is going to be challenged, and if we have faith, we must be prepared for its defense. Diligent preparation is the only way can be prepared to be with our Lord for eternity. This week we want to complete our understanding of the instruction in our passage. We must answer the question, why do we give our hearts away so willingly? Acknowledging this question reveals our heart and causes us to make a choice. This decision is the reason for our examination of this text, so I beg you to stop and reflect with me on our heart's desires as it relates to our defense.

"Always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;"

Do you read this passage to mean you only give a defense if you're asked to? And if you aren't asked, then you're free and clear of the obligation? Well, my friend, you are sorely mistaken! A foundation truth of discipleship is opposition. Notice three passages that prove this assertion. *"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.'" {Mat. 16:24,25}*

This was realized by the first generation of Christians assembling and serving in Jerusalem as we see in Acts: Saul was in hearty agreement with putting Stephen to death. *"And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison."* {Acts 8:1-3}

Finally, Paul said plainly to the Philippian Christians: *"Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you, or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me."* {Phil. 1:27-30}

Christ told us we are what we think [Mat. 5:21-27]. We like to think our thoughts are not relevant to who we are, but Jesus says otherwise. [John 5:39-47] *But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?* {Rom. 2:3,4}

How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under-foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? {Heb. 10:29}

Therefore, the exposure of our heart, is serious business, so we must identify our hearts desire and cultivate the work that makes our hope real. If we aren't prepared to give a defense, what does this say about our hope? Friend, we have no hope! Either we are looking for the easy path to salvation [Luke 9:57-62], or we believe that Jesus will or must receive us as we are without any conditions beyond what we're willing to adhere to [Luke 16:24; 18:23], Jesus clearly says: *Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.* {Luke 17:33}

We will develop the reason for the hope within us in next week's article.