

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: A REASON FOR YOUR HOPE

Scripture: II Timothy 2:22-26

Flee also youthful lusts, but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient; In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken away captive by him at his will.

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.

The churches of America are enjoying an unprecedented popularity and prosperity. Almost every denomination reports a substantial increase in membership, and the construction of new church buildings constitutes a major part of the building industry. There have been numerous attempts to account for this increase of interest in support of religion. Some believe that it is a genuine religious revival; others attribute it to the fears and tensions which have followed two world wars; some say that people seek church membership only for social or business advantage.

Without questioning the sincerity of any, we wish to propose two questions for consideration. How many church members -- new or old -- are able to give a logical, appealing, convincing, and intelligent reason for the hope that is in them? How many were converted through mere mass psychology or emotionalism, without recourse to reason?

Emotionalism is good, if it is properly balanced and controlled by intellectualism. Religion begins with an emotional response to One who loves us, and gave his Only Begotten Son for us. We love him because he first loved us. It is significant that when Jesus repeated and sanctioned the ancient command, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," he added as the first qualifying phrase, "with all thy heart," that is, with the emotions; then quickly he went on to add, "And with all thy mind." Emotionalism must be bal-

anced and controlled by the logical and reasonable processes of the mind. Man must worship and serve with brain as well as with the heart.

Faith is good. It is a gift of God. Some things we must accept on faith. At some time or other every one of us must proceed on faith and wait for faith to become knowledge. Only the omniscient wisdom of God can understand some mysteries, yet man must proceed on the assumption that God knows what he is doing, and that he may be trusted to the uttermost. On the other hand, knowledge too is good. It is also a gift of God. It should be one of the virtues of the believer who lives in Christ, for the Holy Spirit, which is the life of Christ, is given to humble and obedient men to teach them all things, and to guide them into all truth, and to bring all things to their remembrance. With knowledge should also come God's gift of reason -- the power to think from cause to effect and to organize knowledge in proper relationships.

Most of the New Testament passages about witnessing refer specifically to the apostles, who were chosen to be special witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus; but the responsibility for witnessing was not confined to them. Every man and woman who has named the name of Christ must bear a share of that responsibility. Too many church members even today are willing to relegate the task of witnessing either to twelve apostles, long since dead, or else to their minister, who according to their philosophy is hired and

According to their philosophy is hired and paid as a professional to do that sort of thing. Your minister cannot bear witness for you. He cannot reach your friends and associates in shop, office, store, or factory as you can. He cannot bear witness to what you know, what you have felt and experienced.

It might be interesting to note at this juncture that the word "witness" in the New Testament is usually translated from a Greek word which gives us our English word "martyr" and which means literally, "One who gives testimony to the truth at the expense of his life." If we really know, and if we really have convictions about what we know, not even death can stop us from sharing with those who have need of our convictions, our knowledge, and our joy and peace in that knowledge.

Peter says that we must always be ready to give an answer to every man who asks a reason for the hope that is in us. It is perhaps significant that this advice grows out of his discussion of the problems encountered by Christian women whose husbands were still pagan, and husbands whose wives were still unbelievers. But it is extended to cover a much wider field. We should be ready at any time and at any place to give an answer to anyone, even if he asks in a spirit of raillery or reviling. This answer should never attempt to return evil for evil, or railing for railing. Neither should it be given in a spirit of dogmatism or self-righteous superiority, but always in quietness, in reverence, in patience, in meekness, in love, and in the fear of God.

Paul gives some similar counsel in his second letter to Timothy, and adds one or two further considerations of his own. "Foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes." When one's beliefs are challenged there is a great temptation to defend one's speculations too, and to ridicule the speculations of your opponent in the hope of getting the argumentative advantage. He who would be a witness for Christ by giving a reason for the hope that is in him should confine his testimony to what he knows. He cannot testify to what he does not know. Like the apostles, therefore, he should speak the

things which he has both seen and heard. He should keep his testimony or his witness affirmative, not negative. "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men."

Paul uses another significant phrase. A witness for Christ must be "apt to teach." Not only should he know what he knows and why he knows it, but he should know the best and most effective way of telling it to others so that each man may find his reasons appealing, logical, and convincing.

What are some of the things which the follower of Christ must know if he is to give a reason for the hope that is in him? Again we need to realize and admit that no one can be an expert on every specialized subject in the field of religious knowledge. Yet many Christians have used this excuse to justify their total ignorance of the theory or philosophy of religion. They prefer to leave all such niceties to the minister whose particular business they think it is to know them.

Many modern Christians and Christian leaders tend to neglect, ignore and even belittle doctrine and theology. Yet how can anyone give a reason for the hope that is in him unless he has some basic knowledge of Christian doctrine? He should have some workable concept of the nature of original sin, and the fall of man. He should have some convictions about the nature of Jesus Christ, and his relationship to God the Father. He should have some basic understanding of the doctrine of the atonement and the gospel of salvation. He should have a reasonable understanding of eschatology--that is, of future things such as resurrection, judgment, reward, punishment, and the final destiny of man. It is the task of the minister to teach, to help the members acquire these basic understandings; but each member needs to do some study for himself, to search the scriptures, to seek and welcome that Holy Spirit which teaches all things, guides into all truth, and bears witness to us and to others of what we know. Then we shall be able to give powerful, reasonable, and convincing witness, and to give to all men a reason for the hope that is in us, in meekness, gentleness, and the fear of the Lord.