

## Make a ready defense with gentleness and reverence...

### A look at Systematic Theology (D. Mar)

#### 1. Study 1 Peter 3:15. What is the historical context of this letter?

The Apostle Peter wrote this letter in Rome, not yet a Roman prisoner, just before or early into the brutal Imperial persecution of Christians for a huge fire in Rome that they did not commit.

On the night of July 18 of 64 A.D., a fire started in the merchant area of Rome. The horrific fire, later known as the Burning of Rome, engulfed the city for six nights and seven days leaving only 30% of Rome unscathed. Thousands of homes and buildings were destroyed leaving thousands homeless. It is debated whether the Emperor Nero intentionally had the fires set to make room for his plans of palaces and monuments, however the public certainly thought so and anger mounted against him. To save his political life, Nero used a small unpopular Jewish religious sect, Christians, as the scapegoat and redirected the public's anger towards them.

The early Roman Christians were misunderstood. They were largely Jewish Christians who kept to themselves. The public was suspicious of them because of rumors that they were cannibals drinking someone's "blood" and eating "his body." To appease public anger, Christians were fed to lions in the amphitheater, dipped in tar and burned as torches, tied to chariots and dragged through the streets of Rome until dead. In many other ways, including crucifixion, Christians were murdered, and it was during this time that the Apostles Peter and Paul met their end.

#### 2. In studying the passage, 1 Peter 3:15, what did Peter mean by "sanctify" and "being ready to make a defense"?

This verse within context of the whole letter is in the section where Peter has moved from a specific exhortation of spousal relationship (vs. 1-7) to a general exhortation of all Believers (vs. 9-14): how Believers should act towards each other and how Believers should act towards their enemies.

In verse 15, Peter follows the conjunction "but" with "sanctify." The Greek word for sanctify is *hagiasate* which means to "set apart or to separate from others." Peter's use of *hagiasate* is in reference to acknowledging and dedicating our Savior Jesus as the Lord of our life. In context of the previous verses, the recognition of God's sovereignty removes the fears and concerns of enemies who threaten. What a statement from the man who once responded as the world would to adversity: offensively (ie John 18:10) or denial (Mark 14:66-71)!

Peter further encourages Believers to know why you believe. The Greek term *apologian* is in reference to the defense that a defendant would give before a judge and is the basis for the English word apologetics. In essence give an account of why you have faith or hope in Christ. Furthermore Peter states clearly that the defense is spoken with 1) gentleness and 2) reverence. The Greek word for gentleness is *proutetas*, which means "strength under control"; thus, it is not meekness with weakness. Reverence reflects the Greek term *phobos* or "fear". Other translations use *respect*; thus, Peter is making a distinction from being argumentative, flippant, or arrogant while defending your faith.

Practically what does it mean: "always being ready to make a defense to everyone"? How much of your faith do you need to know? What are the bare essentials that you must know? One way to help you gain a broad understanding of your faith is to organize your thoughts on theology in a systematic manner.

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There are various ways of systematically organizing one's theology. Systematic theology is a comprehensive study of God and His work, principally from biblical sources, in an organized and logical order:

Bibliology: the study of the Bible and how it came to be.

Theology Proper: the study of the essence, being, and trinity of God.

Christology: the study of Jesus Christ and His work.

Pneumatology: the study of the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Anthropology: the study of man.

Hamartiology: the study of sin and its nature.

Angelogy: the study of fallen and unfallen angels.

Soteriology: the study of God's plan and work of salvation.

Ecclesiology: the study of the Church.

Eschatology: the study of prophecy and the future of the end.

Not only is systematic theology useful for organizing your thoughts, but it can help you: 1) evaluate doctrine, 2) reconcile inconsistencies, 3) measure your progress in understanding your faith, and 4) explain and defend your faith (apologetics).

Throughout the history of Christianity, there have been many examples of a systematic presentation of theology. In its earliest forms when oral traditions were prevalent such as the Nicene Creed to founding doctrinal statements of various denominations born out of the Reformation (also known as confessions) when the printed Word was more widely available. Yet many of these important documents, while agreeing on major doctrinal issues, disagree at certain points attesting to the differences in interpretation of the biblical text. And scholars representing the differing perspectives can present persuasive evidence for their biblical interpretation.

Too often the differences are highlighted for the purposes of demanding a verdict for the "correct" interpretation; Church authorities will ask for conformity to their standard. Yet you are the one who is held accountable for your life with God. Denomination, academic training, or culture does not determine your interpretation and theology. Doctrinal differences are caused by your approach in biblical hermeneutics not interpretation; it is how you read the Bible! Your Bible study method determines your interpretation and ultimately your theology. How much do you take literally? How much do you take allegorically? Did you properly identify the literary genre? Are you consistent? Do you have any objective controls to your approach? Do you have a reasoned basis for your approach? Do you have a totally subjective approach?

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To better understand your doctrinal / denominational perspective and evaluate your hermeneutic approach, various historical confessions and catechisms have been made available here to be viewed within the context of systematic theology. Most will have their scriptural proofs. There are differences. Where do you stand?

Anglican

Thirty-Nine Articles

Baptist

The 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith

Lutheran (The Book of Concord)

The Ecumenical Creeds:

Apostles' Creed,

Nicene Creed, and

Athanasian Creed

The Lutheran Confessions:

Augsburg Confession and The Apology of the Augsburg Confession,

Smalcald Articles,

Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope,

Luther's Small and Large Catechisms,

Formula of Concord

Presbyterian

Westminster Confession of Faith

Westminster Shorter Catechism

Westminster Larger Catechism

Reformed

The Belgic Confession

The Canons of Dordt

The Second Helvetic Confession

The Heidelberg Catechism

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