

## **Begging the Question** **1 Peter 3:15b**

### **Introduction:**

When it comes to open doors for evangelism, I think on average these opportunities may come a little more frequently for a pastor than for a parishioner.

There are three things that often happen when someone finds out that I'm a pastor...

1. Apology (cussing/swearing)
2. Statement (church attendance/affiliation, religious background, etc.)
3. Questions...
  - a. "Pastor...Is that like a priest?"
  - b. "What do you do as a pastor?"
  - c. "What do you believe about...?"

In each case, there is often an open door for dialogue about Church, Christianity, and/or Jesus Christ.

In the past five months I've had several open doors to have a spiritual conversation with different people due in part or on the whole to my vocation as a pastor...

1. Skokie (December)—Prayer at the Glenview Terrace Nursing Home Holiday Party.
2. Ft. Lauderdale Airport (March)—Couple sharing our table for lunch.
3. Sports Clips (May)—Manager
4. Church (June)—Pre-marital couple
5. Church (June)—Web tech (Howard)

Being a pastor almost begs the question for many people to talk or dialogue more about spiritual things. Wouldn't it be great if all of us—pastors and parishioners alike—had more opportunities like these! Unfortunately, not everyone is begging to hear the Gospel or to have a spiritual conversation. I wish they were. It would

certainly make our job, our role, our goal as followers of Jesus to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others a little easier.

Wouldn't it be great if there were something that each and every one of us could do to increase the likelihood that someone would ask us to share more about our faith in Jesus Christ? What if there was something we could do to grease the hinges so that the open door would come open a little more often and a little more easily? What if there was something we could do that would beg the question for people—"Would you tell me more about that?"

There is something we can do and it is suggested to us in...**1 Peter 3:15b (pg. 901)**.

Today is the first in a two-part series on one verse—1 Peter 3:15...

- This week—1 Peter 3:15b
- Next week—1 Peter 3:15a

**(Read 1 Peter 3:15).**

The key phrase from this verse that we will be considering this morning is this— "...who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have..."

Peter makes several important claims/assumptions here...

1. There is a hope that belongs to the Christian that can and should be evidenced by others (non-Christians).
2. The evidence of this hope, at least in some instances, will prompt, raise, or beg a question as to the reason for this hope.
3. There is a reason or answer to the question that the Christian should be prepared to give.

We will deal with Peter's emphasis on "reason," "answer," and "preparation" next week. Our focus this morning is on the first two claims—the idea that there is a hope that can and should be evidenced in the lives of each and every believer which will beg the question for unbelievers who will likely ask about the reason for the hope that they are seeing. Next week we will deal with answering the question that is raised. This week we will deal with raising the question itself.

We might summarize it this way...

## **The Evidence of Hope by the Christian Begg for an Explanation of that Hope from the Christian (I Peter 3:15b).**

Of course, much of what Peter anticipates will raise the question with the non-believer hinges on the very “hope” that Peter anticipates will be evident in the life of the believer. If there is no evidence of hope in the life of the believer, why would a question ever be called forth? If there is no evidence of hope in the life of the believer, why would an inquiry ever be made?

The following questions, then, are important ones for us to answer...

- What is Peter’s definition of “hope” for the believer?
- Why might this “hope” beg the question from unbelievers?
- How is this “hope” meant to be displayed?

### **1. The Definition of Christian Hope—The Hope of Heaven.**

It is important to note that Peter doesn’t really qualify “hope” in any way in the immediate context. So it’s not immediately clear to us what he means? What is the nature of this hope? Hope **in** what? Hope **for** what?

In providing a definition of “hope” in this context it is important to note that this isn’t the first time that Peter has used the word in this particular letter...

- 1 Peter 1:3-5
- 1 Peter 1:13

In both cases, Peter’s uses the word “hope” in connection with the Christian’s hope for heaven. According to Peter, we have been given in Christ a living hope for a future heavenly inheritance. And we are to place our full hope on the grace that will be ours at the Second Coming when Jesus will be revealed. For Peter, in this context Christian hope is all about the future and it’s all about heaven.

The rest of Scripture affirms the Christian hope of a future where all will be made new and heaven on earth will be our home...

- Romans 8:20-21 (all of creation will be renewed)
- Revelation 21:1-4 (no death, tears, or pain)

For Peter, “hope” is not ultimately left undefined. It has a particular focus and a particular meaning—an expectation and assurance of a heaven. It is the same hope spoken of when the Apostle Paul said that for him “to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). And when this anticipation is evidenced in the life of the believer—we can anticipate that it will have a particular affect on those around us.

## **2. The Desire for Christian Hope—Begging the Question.**

Peter suggests in this verse that when evidence of “hope” is seen in the life of a believer, the believer can and should anticipate that it will beg the question from at least a few (likely not all) non-believers that bear witness to it.

And it is likely that it is non-believers who are in view here...

- 1 Peter 3:9—insults
- 1 Peter 3:16—speak maliciously

But this in and of itself raises a question—“Why would such a question be raised by a non-believer?” Why does Peter assume that this will be the case? Is there something unique about the quality and character of the Christian’s heavenly hope that a question might naturally arise? The answer is most certainly “Yes!”

If there is one attribute that distinguishes the Christian from the non-Christian, it is the presence of an authentic, affirmative, and undying hope for heaven. This is especially true for those in our culture who embrace a thoroughly naturalistic and atheistic worldview.

**Illustration:** *Parenting Beyond Belief* is the newest resource for parents who don't believe in God.

In a review of the book, Lisa Miller explains that it "aims to help folks who are raising their kids without religion deal with the sticky questions that come up about Santa Claus and heaven," as well as dealing with other concerns atheistic mothers and fathers have living "in a culture saturated with talk about God."

Nonbelievers, both well known and unknown, have contributed essays to *Parenting Beyond Belief*. One "compelling chapter" explains how to talk to

children about death when there is no belief in a hereafter. The author recommends telling children, "No, honey, Grandpa won't come home for Christmas. He died and is dead for always," and performing rituals for remembering Grandpa. (*Ted DeHass, Bedford, Iowa; source: Lisa Miller, "BeliefWatch How To," Newsweek (7-16-07), p. 10*)

The fact is that there is no room for the hope of heaven in an atheistic worldview as evidenced in these burial inscriptions...

- "I am of good courage. I who was not, and became, and now am not. I do not grieve"—ancient Greece (ISBE, pg. 753)
- "Here lies an atheist. All dressed up and no place to go"—modern headstone in Thurmont, MD  
(<http://www.flickr.com/photos/gindymcallister/415565083/>)

It is this lack of hope that the Apostle Paul acknowledges when he writes...

- "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no **hope**" (1 Thess. 4:13).

Peter's expectation, then, is that when those who have no hope see the evidence of the hope of heaven in the life of the Christian, a question will be raised in their heads and in their hearts. It will beg the question as to the reason for how and why such a hope is possible.

### **3. The Display of Christian Hope—Christian Compassion.**

If as followers of Jesus Christ, we want to have open doors for the Gospel where people might ask us to give a reason for the hope of heaven that we have, the question is raised and must be answered—"How is such a hope to be displayed?"

Practically speaking, what does the encounter look like where a non-believer catches a glimpse of the hope of heaven that belongs to the believer and would ask about it? What evidence can and should be offered?

There are at least three possibilities...

1. **Christian Speech.** We can talk about our hope of heaven by bringing it up on conversation—"I can't wait to get to heaven!" People just don't talk that way today and it might raise a question for someone that might want to know more. However, it's not what Peter would suggest to us in this context.
2. **Christian Grief.** Paul's desire and expectation is that the grief of the followers of Jesus is different from the grief of others (1 Thess. 4:13). The funeral for the Christian isn't just about keeping the memory of grandpa alive, it's about remembering the fact that grandpa IS alive—more than he has ever been before.

**Illustration:** Fred Winters, the pastor of First Baptist Church in Maryville, Illinois, was shot and killed during a Sunday service on March 8, 2009, by a troubled young man. A week after the tragic event, his wife, Cindy Winters, was interviewed by Julie Chen of CBS's *Early Show*. When asked about her husband's alleged killer, Terry Sedlacek, Winters spoke only a message of forgiveness:

I do not have any hatred, or even hard feelings towards him. We have been praying for him. One of the first things that my daughter said to me after this happened was, "You know, I hope that he comes to learn to love Jesus through all of this." We are not angry at all, and we really firmly believe that he can find hope and forgiveness and peace through this, by coming to know Jesus. And we hope that that happens for him.

*Brian Lowery, managing editor, PreachingToday.com; source: CBS, "Pastor's Wife Forgives Accused Gunman," www.cbsnews.com (3-16-09)*

Forgiveness can be offered because we don't grieve as others grieve! And questions about the Christian's hope for heaven can certainly be raised by how Christian's grieve. However, once again, it's not what Peter would suggest to us in this context.

3. **Christian Compassion...**

For Peter, the one thing that will evidence the Christian's hope for heaven in the world to come and beg the question about it is how we live in the world right now. It's not about talking the talk. It's about walking the walk—in times that are tough.

Peter is addressing a community of Christians that is truly facing tough times—economically, physically, socially, and spiritually. In our own tough times today, everyone is suffering a little without distinction. In the tough times in view here, it was the Christians alone who were bearing the load—because they were Christians. And Peter’s clear instruction to them (and to us!) is that they must never cease from doing good to all...

- 1 Peter 3:8-17

In tough times, the one thing that will be challenged the most is the Christian’s commitment to doing good to all—to both believers and non-believers alike. The stress and strain of tough times can cause us to question our energy, our empathy, our ability, our availability, and our very desire to do good. It’s hard work...

- To live in unity and in love
- To show sympathy, compassion, and humility
- To bless instead of curse

...especially in hard times when those we love and serve may speak maliciously and insult us for the very good that we do.

For Peter, doing good—when it would be easier to do evil and when others are doing evil to you—is the answer to raising questions about the Christian hope for heaven. But it is more than that as well. It is about **how** these good works are accomplished. **Read 1 Peter 3:13.** There is an excitement, energy, enthusiasm that is to be evident, too.

And while, for Peter, “good works” includes more than our commitment to Christian compassion, it is certainly to be included. Peter is quite clear—“be compassionate!” As Christians, we are called to find ways to bless people—even if they don’t like you, agree with you, take advantage of you, or even say “thank you”. And do it with an attitude of eagerness!!

It may not be self-evident, but the good works of Christians in general, and the works of Christian compassion in particular, are important means by which the Christian’s hope for heaven is made manifest to an unbelieving world.

## Revolution of Love

- Origin—3 youth pastors attending Trinity and serving churches in Lake County began to think and pray about uniting youth ministries in the area to serve together in Lake County as a practical expression of our harmony, unity, love, and compassion.
- June 10-14, 2009
- 6-10 youth groups
- 186 students and leaders (photo)
- Service sites...
  - Park Districts
  - Schools
  - Car Washes
  - Winchester House
  - Individual Homes
  - Random Acts of Kindness (Baker's Square, Kentucky Fried Chicken, appliance store, etc.)
  - Kids Hope United (photos)
  - Northern Illinois Food Bank (photos)
  - Tri-County Thrift Store (photos)
- Eagerly!!!

At every service site our hope for heaven, as Christians, was made evident to all who witnessed them. The compassion shown was our formal protest to the idea that this world is all that there is and that it is all that it was intended to be. This earth is not all that it could be, should be, or will be. Because of the person and work of Jesus Christ, it will be renewed. Our eager attitude and active service as Christians will not bring it into existence, but it will bring evidence of it...

- Pulling weeds testifies to the end of the curse
- Washing school desks testifies to a day when rust and moth will no longer destroy
- Feeding the poor testifies to a day when there will be no more hunger or pain or tears
- Assisting the elderly testifies to a day when death will be no more

When seeing what we're doing and how we are doing it, it begins to beg the question for some as to why we're doing it. Christian compassion is very unique in the world.

At the Northern Illinois Food Bank we were told stories about...

- Volunteers who were grumpy
- Volunteers who complained about the work
- Volunteers who stole

When it was time for our team to leave, Al told us "I've never told a group of volunteers this before, but you guys ROCK!" And when he heard that we were coming back, he insisted that they make room for us.

At the Ace Hardware in Grayslake...

- When the manager discovered that the free car was truly FREE, she was left speechless.

At Winchester House...

Dear Revolution 2009 Volunteers,

You are an amazing group of people! Each and every one of you served for three days - each in a very unique way. The impact for residents at Winchester House was something they are still talking about. Those who cannot speak for themselves I'm sure would allow me to thank you on their behalf.

I've worked at Winchester House for 13 years now. I'm hard pressed to think of a group who came with an attitude to serve in the way you did. No job was too hard, no task too insignificant, no resident not worth your investment of time and expressions of compassion. You did an amazing job! I hope we cross paths again - you're always welcome.

Sincerely,  
Mary Purnell, ADC

And people began to ask questions...

- CLTV
- Neighbor woman...
  - “Why are you scraping scum off of shoes?”
  - “Because I’m serving God and I want to give 110%.”
  - “It’s impossible to give 110%.”
  - “Anything is possible with God.”
  - “You’ve given me something to think about.”

The Gospel can bring hope to others. But it is also true that hope can bring the Gospel.

**Conclusion:**

And so this text begs the question for us—“How will we respond?” Brothers and sisters, Let’s keep Hope alive! And in these tough times, let us not become weary in well doing! Let our hope for heaven be evident to all through our actions and the attitude by which we accomplish them. And may the question be begged of us—“Could you tell me more?”

**Reverse offering...**

- Knives are for cutting
- Forks are for eating
- Spoons are for serving

Take a spoon and serve up some hope for a world starving for it—and may they ask you why.