

Beyond a Reasonable Doubt 1 Peter 3:15a

Introduction:

Illustration: Atheist Penn Jillette is one half of Penn and Teller, a comedy and illusion duo that has been headlining Vegas shows for years. Penn has never been shy about his disbelief in God, often writing about his conviction in articles and best-selling books. In a recent video blog posted on YouTube, Penn shares a story about the time a gracious Christian businessman gave him a Bible as a gift. Penn goes on to use the story as an opportunity to point out that Christians who don't evangelize must really *hate* people. Here's the direct quote from his video blog:

I've always said, you know, that I don't respect people who do not proselytize. I don't respect that at all. If you believe that there's a heaven and hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever, and you think that, uh, well, it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward—and atheists who think that people shouldn't proselytize, [saying] "Just leave me alone and keep your religion to yourself"—uh, how much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize them? How much do you have to hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? I mean, if I believed beyond the shadow of a doubt that a truck was coming to hit you, and you didn't believe it, and that truck was bearing down on you, there's a certain point where I tackle you. And this is more important than that.

Bill White, Paramount, California; source: "Penn Says: A Gift of a Bible," YouTube.com

It's not every day that an atheist essentially invites Christians to openly share with him about one's hope of heaven. This kind of open door for the Gospel may not happen as often as we would like, but it does happen from time to time. And it's at this moment that the most important and the most LOVING thing that we can do is to give the reason for the hope of eternal life that is within us.

This morning we begin the second of a two-part series on 1 Peter 3:15 (**Pew Bible—page 910**). Last week in a sermon entitled "Begging the Question" we looked at the second half of this verse "who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have". In review, we learned that...

1. There is a hope that is unique to Christians that can and should become evident to non-Christians around us. This hope is, in part, our hope of heaven.
2. The evidence of this hope by Christians, at least in some instances, will beg the question by non-Christians as to the reason for the hope. We were reminded that those who don't believe in God in this world often readily admit to having no hope for a future in the world to come.
3. The hope of heaven for Christians is made evident, in part, in our commitment to **eagerly** do good no matter how tough times might get for us—physically, emotionally, socially, or spiritually. No matter how tough times may get for us we do not begin to do evil and we don't stop doing good. And in doing so, we should not be surprised when we are asked to share the reason for this hope that is ours.

Last week we discussed what it is that raises the question of our hope with non-Christians. Today we will see what is expected of us when it comes to answering the question once it's raised.

And answer the question we must...**Read 1 Peter 3:15a.**

Peter is quite clear about what answering the question entails...

1. **A Ready Preparation (“Always be prepared/ready...”)**—As Christians, we are always to be on the alert and ready to respond at a moment's notice whenever an opportunity to give an answer might present itself. And to be “ready” would seem to assume some level of personal responsibility and preparation on our part.

“Readiness/preparation” includes both a willingness to speak up but also a readiness to know what to speak when given the opportunity to do so.

Illustration: There is a difference between a soldier who is willing to go into battle and one who is truly ready/prepared (boots shined, weapon cleaned, trained, briefed, rehearsed orders, etc.)

For Peter, there's no excuse for not being ready. We can take great comfort in Jesus' words to his disciples... "But when they arrest you do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say..." (Matt 10:19). **But what Jesus is ruling out here is "worry" – not "readiness/preparation"!!** Jesus promises us aid when we don't know what to answer, but not an excuse when we haven't prepared an answer.

2. **A Reasoned Answer/Defense ("...to give an answer...")**—The idea is one of "defense". We might think of a defense attorney making her case before judge and jury. We're to be ready to offer an adequate answer to the question being asked of us—in this case the reason why we have a hope for heaven. The Apostle Paul might be our model of one who often offered a rational and reasonable defense of himself, his ministry, and his faith to everyone he encountered (Acts 22:1, 25:16; 1 Cor. 9:3).
3. **A Regard for All ("...to everyone who asks...")**—We're to be ready to answer anyone and everyone who might ask us about the reason for the hope that we have. This requires from us...
 - Little Prejudice—We give our answer regardless of age, ethnicity, social/economic status, religious background, etc
 - More Preparation—No simple answer and no one answer will do. The answer we provide will have to necessarily be tailored to our audience...
 - High school teenager
 - College educated co-worker
 - Buddhist neighbors
 - Atheist family member

This doesn't necessarily mean the answer is always changing. It simply means that the people we encounter are always changing. And the answer that is appropriate and sufficient for one may not be appropriate and sufficient for another.

Illustration: I watched a video on evangelism this week. Two men were at a table in a restaurant. One was sharing the “Bridge to Life” illustration with the other. However, the man had other questions that needed answering...

- “What about the Trinity?”
- “Why is it that Christians still struggle with sin?”

The Christian continued to refer to the Bridge to Life which couldn’t answer the man’s questions. It was humorous to a point. And it made a point!

It’s not that Christians have to have a perfect answer to every question, but we do need to be aware of the questions that our out there and the answers that are available to us—even if it’s “I don’t know”.

The final thing that Peter would want us to know is that the phrase—“always be prepared to give an answer to everyone” is for everyone. There are no exclusions or opting out. As Christians, we are all called to live in such a way that the question about our hope will come. And we are all called to give an answer ourselves to that question. This command is for every Christian. It’s not just for...

- Adults
- Bible students
- Pastors
- Those who enjoy apologetics

It’s not that all of us are responsible at the same level, but we are all responsible!!

So Peter is fairly clear about what answering the question of Christian hope entails...

- Readiness/Preparation
- Reasoned Answer/Defense
- Regard for All

However, Peter is less clear about what exactly we are supposed to say. What is the “answer” Peter is looking for, anticipating, and expecting from us?

Illustration: Let's pretend that you are someone who might be willing, in theory, at some point, possibly, to consider maybe doing something that, while not "evangelism-type" evangelism, still could be in some way construed as a sort of sharing of hope. Kind of.

Steven C. Bonsey, "A Shy Person's Guide to the Practice of Evangelism," Episcopal Times (Summer 2005)

Let's assume that that is true! What's the answer we should give? What's the reason for the hope that we have? What do we say?

Of course, the answer to that question, although not mentioned directly in this verse, is obvious and not unexpected. (It's the standard Sunday School answer!!) Our hope for heaven is JESUS!! He alone is THE REASON for our hope...

- 1 Peter 1:3-5. Our hope is a living hope because our hope is in Jesus and He is ALIVE!! **And Peter is telling us only what he's heard from Jesus himself...**

As followers of Jesus, we have a hope of heaven because our hope is in Jesus and He promises to us.

So when someone asks us for the reason for the hope that is in us, the answer isn't complicated—we tell each and every one of them about our faith in Jesus. Tell them about how Jesus...

- Came
- Lived a Perfect Life
- Died
- Rose from the Dead
- Ascended into Heaven
- Return Again

Tell them that our hope for heaven doesn't come from...

- Going to Church
- Good Deeds
- Giving to Charity

Our hope for heaven is all about our faith in Jesus alone. If we have nothing else to say, we're to say something about Jesus, for He is THE REASON for our hope. There is no other!

But this text warrants something more from us. If each of us has "Jesus" ready as our answer, then we have answered well. But if that's all each of us has is ready to answer, then we may not be as prepared as we could and should be. We live in a world that has come up with every reason in the world NOT to have faith in Jesus. The questions they desire answers to are many...

- What is the nature of reality?
- What is truth?
- What about the existence and nature of God?
- What about creation of the universe?
- What about evil?
- What about the reliability of the Bible?
- What about the existence of Jesus?

The answer of "Jesus" as the reason for our hope of heaven presupposes answers to hundred other questions upon which it is based. As one who is called to be ready to give a reasoned defense to everyone who asks, we must be ready to give an answer to these questions as well. We need to provide every reason in the world why they can have faith in Jesus.

My Christian Manifesto—Why I am a Follower of Jesus!

What I would like to do now is to do the very thing that Peter calls each of us to do in this text—to give the reason for the hope for heaven that I have—not just WHAT I believe, but WHY I believe it. I hope that this brief presentation will have three effects...

1. Illustrative—A reasoned defense of faith in Jesus
2. Affirmative—Encourage us all in our faith in Jesus
3. Informative—Consider or reconsider of placing faith in Jesus

What is Being Claimed? This Christian Manifesto is not comprehensive...

1. **Not comprehensive in relation to all Christians.** Many Christians would agree with me, but I do not speak for everyone. I speak only for myself.
2. **Not comprehensive in relation to all questions.** There are many other questions and concerns that cannot be answered due to time constraints. And the arguments and evidence that are made have been simplified and are simply meant to be representative of the number and kinds of evidence that is being appealed to.

What is My Bias? (Our bias toward certain beliefs need to be acknowledged...)

1. My Christian Background
 - a. Raised in a Christian pastor's home
 - b. Home-schooled
 - c. Christian college (Taylor University)
 - d. Christian seminary (Trinity)
2. My Christian Occupation
3. My Christian Faith

I have a definite Christian bias! However, while my Christian background has played a very significant role in my **becoming** a Christian, I am confident it's not why I have **remained** a Christian. And I am confident that I would, could, and should choose differently if the evidence demands something different of me (cf. 1 Cor. 15:14). For me, keeping the faith is not about keeping a tradition, but following the Truth wherever it leads me. I will not give my life for something that in my head and in my heart I know just cannot be true.

Challenge: The fact is that we cannot eliminate our bias completely, but we must be aware of them, for they impact the evidence we choose to view and how we view the evidence we choose. All evidence and all possible conclusions must be left on the table as we consider the evidence before us—even the possibility that we are wrong.

Illustration: A judge or jury that presupposes the innocence or guilt of a defendant before even looking at the evidence or in spite of the evidence. If we are going to find Jesus innocent or guilty, it's only fair to remain as neutral as possible until the evidence is laid out before us.

Do I Exist? (If I am uncertain as to my own existence, why should I worry about whether or not Jesus existed?)

“I think, therefore, I am”—Descartes. Simply put, if I doubt everything else about my existence, I cannot doubt my own existence. For if I doubt, that means that I am thinking. I, therefore, necessarily exist. While not all existing things think (trees, grass, etc.), all thinking things necessarily exist. Our rational minds cannot envision a something that thinks but doesn't exist in some state.

What is the Nature of My Existence? Two options...

1. The World is Real
 - a. The “real” me exists in this world
 - b. I can trust my senses and my sensibilities about the world and universe in which I find myself
2. The World is an Illusion (not real)
 - a. The “real” me exists outside this world
 - b. We cannot necessarily trust our senses and sensibilities about the world and the universe in which we find ourselves. Our goal should be to try to connect with our true selves “out there somewhere”.
 - i. **Illustration:** Joe (VHS student) seeking higher levels of consciousness.

Conclusion...

1. This world is the real one. If so, we continue to live our lives and pursue the Truth as before.
2. This world is an illusion—If so, we continue to live our lives and pursue the Truth as before. Why? Because all things considered it's

is still the world which should have our attention and we should investigate as it is.

- **This world of illusion is a self-illusion**
 - **Unconscious choice (dream)**—Dreams are a one-way street. As best we know it it's impossible for the things that are dreamed to connect with in any meaningful way to the being that dreamed it. And if I did manage to "wake up" myself, it would be self-defeating because in the illusion "I" will cease to exist. It might be better to keep dreaming.
 - **Conscious choice (virtual reality)**—This illusionary reality is something that I have chosen for myself. Why would the illusionary "me" chose against the reality created by the real "me"? It would be prudent to go with the reality that I have created for myself at this time.

- **This world of illusion is a forced delusion (Matrix)**
 - Presumes the existence of a being greater than myself that has forced me into a forced dream or computer construct of some kind...
 - Benevolent Being—If so, I should accept the illusion as granted. The being has my best interest in mind.
 - Malevolent Being—If so, leaving the illusion (as painful as this one might be) can likely only increase my pain and suffering.

Regardless of whether the evidence leads us to believe that this world is real or an illusion, it is in our best interest to concern ourselves with the world we are in.

What is the Nature of Truth? (How do we know what is true and what is false?)

1. **Subjective Theory**—Truth is defined strictly by the individual. In short, truth is what one believes it is. There is no absolute truth that is true for everyone, everywhere, and all times. Truth is what is “true” for me. The existence of God is up for me to decide!
 - a. **Illustration:** Meghan (VHS student)—“It only matters that you believe something. It just so happens that we believe two different things.”

Critique:

- **Law of Non-Contradiction**—“It is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be at the same time and in the same respect” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy).
 - Subjective Theory violates the Law of Non-Contradiction. The same direction cannot be both “up” and “down,” $1+1$ cannot be both 2 and 4, and the statements “god exists” and “god doesn’t exist” cannot both be correct. The Law of Non-Contradiction requires that these “truths” cannot co-exist together!!
 - Subjective Theory is self-contradictory.
 - To say that there is no absolute truth is to state that there is at least one absolute—that there are no absolutes.
 - To say that you don’t believe in the Law of Non-Contradiction is to say that you believe it!

Illustration: Avicenna, a Medieval Muslim philosopher said, ‘Anyone who denies the law of non-contradiction should be beaten and burned until he admits that to be beaten is to not be burned and to burned is not to be beaten.’ (*Stand Your Ground* by Hardy, page 36)

2. **Correspondence Theory**—The truth is defined by the reality of how things really are. For example...

- “There are 100 people in this room” is true if indeed there are that many people in this room.
- “There is a god” is true only if there is a god (regardless of my personal feelings or belief)

As much as we would like to create our own reality, the real world suggests strongly to us that we don't get to choose the Truth, but that the Truth chooses us.

What About the Existence of the Universe?

1. Teleological Argument

- a. Existence of Nature's Laws (Order)
 - i. Boyle's Law
 - ii. Newton's Law of Motion
 - iii. Law of Conservation of Energy
 - iv. Law of Gravity
 - v. Speed of Light

These laws are mathematically precise, universal, and interconnected. Science accepts the reality of these laws and cannot exist without them. (Randomness makes verification, quantification, etc. impossible!) Order appears to be in the very fabric of our universe.

- b. Existence of Nature's Complexity

Illustration: In *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, Bill Bryson marvels at what makes up human life:

No one really knows, but there may be as many as a million types of protein in the human body, and each one is a little miracle. By all the laws of probability proteins shouldn't exist. To make a protein you need to assemble amino acids...in a particular order, in much the

same way that you assemble letters in a particular order to spell a word. [For example, to make collagen,] you need to arrange 1,055 amino acids in precisely the right sequence....

The chances of a 1,055-sequence molecule like collagen spontaneously self-assembling are, frankly, nil. It just isn't going to happen. To grasp what a long shot its existence is, visualize a standard Las Vegas slot machine but broadened greatly—to about ninety feet, to be precise—to accommodate 1,055 spinning wheels instead of the usual three or four, and with twenty symbols on each wheel (one for each common amino acid). How long would you have to pull the handle before all 1,055 symbols came up in the right order? Effectively forever. Even if you reduced the number of spinning wheels to two hundred, which is actually a more typical number of amino acids for a protein, the odds against all two hundred coming up in a prescribed sequence are 1 in 10²⁶⁰ (that is 1 followed by 260 zeros). That in itself is a larger number than all the atoms in the universe....

Yet we are talking about several hundred thousand types of protein, perhaps a million, each unique and each, as far as we know, vital to the maintenance of a sound and happy you.

Bill Bryson, "The Rise of Life", A Short History of Nearly Everything, pp. 288-289; submitted by Kevin Miller, Wheaton, Illinois

And the “you” that exists has...

- Self-replication
- Self-consciousness (thinking, conceptualization, etc.)

Can blind material matter alone explain the complexity of nature?
And if so, where did the material matter come from in the first place?

Illustration: Anthony Flew (*There Is A God*)

What is the Nature of the Creator of the Universe?

Are all gods the same God?

Illustration: Phone Game—Pretend that each of person receives a phone call from God. Each time the phone rings this is what you hear...

1. I am God—One God, Trinity, No Wife, Eternal, Creator, Jesus was the only human being who was, is, or ever will be God, please call me Father.
(Christian)
2. I am God—I was once a man and became God of this world, I have a wife.
(Mormanism)
3. I am God—One God, No Trinity, Creator, Eternal, Jesus Christ is NOT God.
(Judaism)
4. I am God—One God, No Trinity, 99 Names (not Father, but Judge), Jesus is NOT God. (Islam)
5. I am God—No God, Human beings can become gods. (Buddhism)

Ask the following questions...

- Each of these identified themselves as “God”. From the descriptions given, would you assume that this is the same god talking or different gods?
- If it were true that the same god was revealing himself, what else would have to be true? This God would have to be a liar or a lunatic (multiple personalities), which would be inconsistent with the consistency and order of our universe.

Is the Bible the one and only Word of God?

1. The Bible claims to be the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16)
2. Textual Evidence

Illustration: The New Testament was written in first century A.D. There are some 20,000 manuscripts in existence. The earliest textual evidence we have was copied 100 years after the original. In contrast:

- Caesar's *Gallic Wars* was written in the first century B.C. There are only 10 manuscripts in existence. The earliest textual evidence we have was copied 1,000 years after the original.
 - Aristotle's *Poetics* was written in the fourth century B.C. There are only 5 manuscripts in existence. The earliest textual evidence we have was copied 1,400 years after the original. (<http://www.icr.org/bible-manuscripts>)
3. Archeological Evidence—We don't have all the evidence we would want but all of the evidence we have supports the Bible.
 4. Internal Evidence (66 books and over 40 authors)
 - a. Coherence
 - b. Consistency—apparent contradiction but no real ones

Is Jesus the One and Only Son of God?

1. Jesus claimed it to be true (John 8:58)
 - a. Liar, Lunatic, or Lord! If he is a great moral teacher, listen to him!
2. Jesus' authority
3. Jesus' miracles
4. Resurrection
 - a. Disciples not willing to kill for their belief in the Resurrection, but their willingness to die for it.

Conclusion: The REASON for the hope of heaven that I have is my faith in Jesus and the reasons for my faith in Jesus are many. The reasons that I've given may not give everyone a reason to believe, but I would suggest it isn't unreasonable to believe it.

If you don't have the hope of heaven today, why not? If you haven't placed your trust in Jesus, why not? What is the reason for your lack hope? What is your rationale for rejecting Jesus? Maybe you disbelieve because...

- You claim his world is an illusion...What evidence do you offer?
- You simply don't believe that the existence of God is possible—That's a bias and not a reason.

- You believe that the universe came into being by “Chance”... “Chance” is a statistic not a power.
- You believe that Jesus was just a good moral teacher... Do good moral teachers claim divinity?
- God disappointed you...Is it God that disappointed or your idea of God that did?

What is your reason to doubt? And is it based on evidence? Are you honestly willing to go where the evidence leads you? Question, concerns, presuppositions, excuses are not evidence.

If you do have a hope of heaven, let's live in such a way that gives people a reason to believe we have such a hope.

If you do have a hope of heaven, let's be ready to give a rational defense for the reason for our hope—and that reason is the resurrected Jesus.

There are a lot of reasons why people reject Jesus. Let it not be because of the way we live, because we lacked an answer to give, or because we answered in a way that is inconsistent with our message.

There is evidence beyond a reasonable doubt. Let's not give more reasons to doubt.