

Sermon & Bible Study Helps

BE READY

Emphasis Passage: 1 Peter 3:15

King James Version: But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and 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:

New King James Version: But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;

Holman Christian Standard: but set apart the Messiah as Lord in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.

New International Version: But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

New American Standard Bible: 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;

Revised Standard Version: but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence;

New Revised Standard Version: but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

New Living Translation: Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if you are asked about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it.

Greek Text

κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, ἔτοιμοι αἰεὶ
But as Lord sanctify Christ in your hearts being ready always

πρὸς ἀπολογία πάντι τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος,
to make a defense to anyone who asks you to give an account of the hope that is in you.

KEY WORDS (WITH STRONG'S REFERENCE NUMBERS)

ἀγιάσατε (hagiasate)—verb, aorist, active, plural, imperative

(37) ἀγιάζω (hagiazō)—set apart as sacred to God, make holy, consecrate

ἀπολογία (apologian)—noun, feminine, singular, accusative

(627) ἀπολογία (apologia)—answer, verbal defense, defense

HELPFUL SCRIPTURE

Bible verses about homosexuality

Gen. 19:4-5, 13; Lev. 18:22; Lev. 20:13; Deut. 22:5; Jud. 19:22; Rom. 1:26-27; I Cor. 6:9, 13;
I Thess. 5:22; I Tim. 1:9-10; II Pet. 2:6; Jude 7; Rev. 22:14-15

CONTEXT

The first century was one of intense persecution for Christians. While the persecution Christians faced would certainly become even more severe before Christianity triumphed in the Roman Empire, it was those early years that tempered the church and prepared her for victorious life during her approaching more difficult years. Peter's counsel to the Christians living in that first century provided powerful guidance to help equip the early believers for the trying days that lay ahead. As scattered "aliens" the early Christians had to learn to live above their circumstances and focus their attention on God and the salvation He provided them through Christ (1 Pet. 1:1-12). By maintaining this focus, they would be empowered to live thoughtful, holy lives that would bring glory to Christ and serve as a powerful witness to the lost (1 Pet. 1:13-2:12).

SERMON AND BIBLE STUDY NOTES

Introduction

Christians are under severe pressure today to accept homosexuality as a legitimate alternative lifestyle. There is even considerable pressure in some denominations for this. The recent act of the Episcopal Church to make a practicing homosexual a bishop of the church is one of many examples of this.

Regardless of the myriad voices calling on the church to rethink its position on homosexuality the biblical witness is clear—homosexuality is not an acceptable alternative lifestyle. While this is true, the church must not turn its back on homosexuals. In light of the terrible devastation caused by this lifestyle, the church must develop an effective ministry to homosexuals that will draw them to Christ. Peter's counsel to those who were experiencing persecution provides some superb guidance to the

church as it considers how to engage in ministry to homosexuals. His counsel in 1 Peter 3:15 offers three guidelines that are particularly helpful to the church as it develops an effective ministry to homosexuals.

1. The Church Must Remain Committed to Christ as Lord

Peter knew that it wasn't enough for Christians to simply acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. Mere assent to Jesus' divinity would not be enough to help them live victorious lives in the face of intense persecution. Nothing short of total commitment to Christ as Lord of their lives would sustain them.

Peter emphasized the importance of Christ's lordship by telling his readers to "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts." This brief directive offered considerable guidance. Peter's use of the imperative form told these believers that this was not an option if they wanted to withstand the pressures they faced. They owed their primary allegiance to Christ. Furthermore, Peter told them the area of their lives in which they needed to sanctify Christ as Lord. They needed to set Christ apart as Lord in their hearts. Edwin Blum, *1, 2 Peter*, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 240, notes, "When the center of one's life is rightly related to God, he is able to respond properly to the vicissitudes of life."

It is easy to see the importance of Peter's counsel in developing a ministry to homosexuals. The constant pressure Christians will face to accept other authorities on the question of homosexuality requires a firm resolve to remain faithful to the One who called them and gave them the ministry of reconciliation. Only a total obedience to Christ will enable Christians to stand firm in the biblical truth about homosexuality.

2. The Church Must Have a Clear Message

Standing firm on the truth of God's word is only the starting point for Christians. They must also have a message for an unbelieving, skeptical world. Peter told his readers that they must be ready at all times. In other words, Christians must know what they believe and why they believe it from the start. Peter told his readers to be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks. It wasn't enough for them to go out preaching, constantly on the attack. There would be times when they would be asked about their faith. They needed to be so knowledgeable about their faith that they could answer questions at any time. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. IV, p. 114, comments that "this attitude calls for an intelligent grasp of the hope and skill in presenting it. In Athens every citizen was expected to be able to join in the discussion of state affairs."

The church must be this prepared in its ministry to homosexuals. It must be able not only to declare the sinfulness of homosexual behavior, but also be ready to explain why it is so convinced of this. To say, "Well, it's just wrong," will not convince anyone of the moral or spiritual reasons why homosexuality should not be condoned or accepted. If Christians are uncertain about their conviction in this area or they convey a weak message to homosexuals, they should not be surprised if their denouncements fall on deaf ears. To convince someone of the truthfulness of a claim requires confidence in that conviction and a well-argued apologetic.

3. The Church Must Have the Right Attitude

Peter saw no place for arrogance in the church's ministry. Even though he knew Christians had the truth, and everyone needed to hear that truth, Peter didn't consider it a matter for arrogance. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of I and II Epistles of Peter, the Three Epistles of John, and the Epistle of Jude*, p. 151, quotes Luther on this passage, who said, "When you are asked about your hope you are not to answer with haughty words and carry things off with audacity and force as though you meant to tear up trees, but with fear and humility as though you stood before God's judgment and were making answer."

Peter's counsel to his readers is certainly appropriate for ministry to homosexuals. Unfortunately, much of Christian history and some segments of Christianity today, are marred by spiritual arrogance and hatred toward homosexuals. While it is certainly understandable that Christians would be deeply offended by homosexual behavior, this offense cannot give way to fleshly responses. Indeed, spiritual arrogance and hatred will undermine any effort to minister effectively to homosexuals. Most homosexuals chose to adopt their lifestyle after intense personal struggle. As a result, they feel very strongly about their lifestyle. To disregard these convictions and simply declare the equivalent of "turn or burn" will only drive homosexuals further from Christ and make it more difficult for them to ever be willing to consider the sinfulness of their lifestyle. Gentleness and a sincere respect for them as men and women for whom Christ died, and whose lives have inestimable worth, is crucial for ministry to homosexuals.

Conclusion

It is crucial that the church make two commitments. First, she must commit herself to the truth that homosexuality is not an acceptable, alternative lifestyle. Second, she must commit herself to a redemptive ministry to homosexuals. If the church ever accepts homosexuality, the best hope homosexuals have of leaving this lifestyle will be lost, because the key to leaving homosexuality is spiritual. It is found in relationship with Jesus Christ. However, the church must make sure that she offers Jesus to homosexuals in a loving, redemptive way, or she will risk alienating the very people who desperately need the message she has.

What Can One Person Do?

- Ask your pastor to preach a message on why the church must minister to homosexuals.
- Have someone involved in ministry to homosexuals lead a workshop in your church on ministry to homosexuals. Visit the website of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, at www.faithandfamily.com, for the names of some ministries to homosexuals.
- Begin a ministry to people infected with the HIV/AIDS virus.
- Write to your elected national representatives and tell them you want them to vote for the Federal Marriage Amendment that will define marriage solely as the union of one man and one woman.
- Write letters to the editor explaining why you are opposed to same-sex marriage. See the Kansas City Declaration on Marriage at www.faithandfamily.com for reasons why same-sex marriages should not be equated with marriage.
- Ask God to give you a deep love and compassion for people trapped in the homosexual lifestyle.
- Befriend a homosexual so you can share Christ's love with him or her on a regular basis.

SUGGESTED BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

This is a suggested Bible study for any size group. The sermon notes on this sheet, the accompanying fact sheet, and the enclosed materials serve as resources as you prepare to teach and then lead this Bible study. Answers are provided with the questions when appropriate, but do not be too quick to give the answers. Allow the participants time to talk about the questions among themselves and offer their own answers.

Before leading this study, pray that the Lord will give a fresh or renewed vision for ministry to people in need as a result of this discussion.

Create Learning Readiness: Share some facts about homosexuality from the accompanying fact sheet.

Say: Homosexuality is everywhere today. In many circles, it is being accepted as a legitimate, alternative lifestyle. (Share the example from the Introduction to the Sermon and Bible Study Notes section of this Guide.)

Say: It is certain that the Bible does not accept homosexuality as an acceptable, alternative lifestyle. (Share some sample passages from the Helpful Bible Passages section of this Guide if necessary.)

Say: Even though the Bible strongly condemns homosexuality, it does not consider homosexuals to be unredeemable. In fact the Apostle Paul acknowledged that some Christians in the church at Corinth had been homosexuals before their conversion to Christ, 1 Cor. 6:9-11.

Say: In this study, we are going to examine the important place the church has in reaching homosexuals and helping them to come out of the homosexual lifestyle.

Call on someone to read 1 Peter 3:13-16.

Say: The verse we want to focus on for this study is verse 15. This verse contains three important guidelines for successful ministry to homosexuals.

Ask: *What is Peter talking about in verses 13-14?* Persecution of Christians by unbelievers.

Say: Have you noticed that the church is under attack these days by people who want us to accept homosexuality as a legitimate, alternative lifestyle?

Ask: *What kinds of things are you seeing and hearing that reveal this attack?* Let the members talk about this for a while. If they have trouble thinking of some things, mention the recent decision by the Episcopal Church to make a practicing homosexual a bishop. You may also want to refer to the article entitled "The Church Under Fire: The Pro-homosexual Use of the Bible in the Church and Its Institutions." If a copy is not available, go to the Issues section of www.faithandfamily.com, and download a copy.

Ask: *What did Peter tell his readers they must do in order to withstand the persecution they were facing?* He told them to “sanctify Christ” in their hearts.

Ask: *What does it mean to “sanctify Christ” in your heart?* Refer to the first point of the Sermon and Bible Study Notes section of this guide for a discussion of the meaning of this phrase.

Ask: *How would Peter’s advice to the persecuted church help us to prepare for ministry to homosexuals?* The church must remain committed to Christ as Lord. The constant pressure the church will face to accept other authorities on the question of homosexuality requires a firm resolve to be true to the One who called them and gave them the ministry of reconciliation. Only a total dedication to Christ as Lord will enable Christians to stand firm on the biblical truth about homosexuality.

Ask: *After the church sanctified Christ as Lord in their hearts, what did Peter tell them that they must be prepared to do?* They must be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks them to give an account of their faith.

Ask: *Why would it have been important for Peter’s readers to be able to do this?* Refer to the second point of the Sermon and Bible Study Notes section of this Guide for a discussion of this.

Ask: *How would this counsel help us to have an effective ministry to homosexuals?* Let the members talk about this for a while. If necessary, refer to the second point of the Sermon and Bible Study Notes section of this Guide for a discussion of this.

Ask: *What was the attitude that Peter told his readers to have as they shared their faith with those who asked?* They needed to be gentle and reverent in their witness.

Ask: *Why would this kind of attitude be important in their witness?* Let the members talk about this for a while. If necessary, refer to the third point of the Sermon and Bible Study Notes section of this Guide for a discussion of this.

Ask: *Do you think this kind of attitude would be helpful in ministry to homosexuals? Why?* Let the members talk about this for a while. If necessary, refer to the third point of the Sermon and Bible Study Notes section of this Guide for a discussion of this.

Ask: *Has this study given you some additional insight on ministry to homosexuals? What have you learned?*

Ask: *How can we put the things we learned in practice this week?* Let the members come up with some suggestions.

Say: Very good. Let’s try some of these ideas this week and share some of the results next week.