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What Is Apologetics?

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Welcome to The Apologist by the Cántaro Institute, a podcast for the advancement of the Christian philosophy of life. Your host is Christian thinker and Institute Director, Steven R. Martins. This episode is brought to you by Biblios Clothing Company. For apparel and accessories that spark gospel conversations, visit www.bibliosclothing.com.

What Is Apologetics?

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Greetings from the Cántaro Institute. In today's podcast, we'll be looking at what is apologetics. For some of you, the term apologetics is something you may already be familiar with. The question might seem rather rudimentary. For others, you might have heard of the term, but you're not well acquainted with it. And then there are those who have not even heard the term at all, and we shouldn't be surprised about that.

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The several pockets of anti-intellectualism that persist in the broader Christian community have certainly played a factor in that. The term apologetics is necessary for us to either learn about or review, not only because of the subject matter of this podcast, or the nature of our institute, but also because of its vitality for Christian witness and living. But in order to answer the question, what is apologetics?

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we need to first turn to the biblical passage from which we derive this term, and from which we understand what it means. 1 Peter, chapter 3, verse 15. It reads as follows. I'm reading the English Standard Version, by the way. "But in your hearts, honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do it with gentleness and respect."

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Now, to show you that I'm not reading into this text, allow me to unpack what the Apostle Peter has written here to the Church at large. Firstly, we know that Peter is writing to the Church at large because he does not make mention of any particular Church community. You think of the epistles written by the Apostle Paul, such as when they were written to the Corinthians, the Ephesians, the Galatians, etc. We don't see that here in this text.

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This epistle is for both the believing Gentiles and Jews scattered across the Roman Empire in the first century AD, the Diaspora. In terms of what Peter teaches and instructs in his epistle, there is nothing to suggest that there is anything time limited. In other words, what Peter writes is just as applicable to the Church today as what he wrote to the Church of his time. Secondly, we should note that this verse does not exist in and of itself.

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In other words, it is not isolated, but rather forms part of a greater literary composition. And on that note, if we look at our Bibles, you'll find that in 1 Peter, chapter 3, verses 8 to 22, this whole section is devoted to instructing us as to how we are to live as Christians in a fallen world. This apologetic instruction, therefore, is part of this literary and didactic unit. Now the term apologetics has not yet come up.

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I'll get to that shortly. But first the words that begin verse 15. "But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy." When Peter writes "in your hearts", he is not referring to the emotional aspect of man, and obviously not referring to the beating organ in our chests, but rather faithful to the Jewish understanding of the term, he is referring to the root unity, or the center of the human person.

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The heart, in other words, is equivalent to the concept of the soul in that it is the center of who we are, the wellspring of life. We could then rephrase Peter's instruction this way: "In the root unity of your person, or in the center of your being, honor Christ the Lord as holy." Now in the Greek text, what Peter is saying is that we are to acknowledge or declare Christ the Lord

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as holy. And again, taking into consideration Peter's Jewish understanding of the scriptures, what he is instructing Christians to do is no different than what God's people were instructed to do according to Mosaic law. God's people, according to the Old Testament covenant, were to reflect God's holiness to the nations through their obedience to the law. In the same way, Christians are to reflect the holiness of Jesus Christ

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through everything we do, by every function under the sun. Peter is saying that our life expression, flowing from the wellspring of the heart, is to be our confession of Jesus Christ as Lord, as King, as sovereign over everything. I like what the biblical scholar J. Ramsey Michaels once said of the church and ancient Israel. I quote,

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"The task of a holy people is to make known to the world the holy one who called them." The next few words that follow are now placed within its appropriate context. As a result of our holy living, or to put it another way, as a result of our living as Christians, we are to be, and I quote, "always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you."

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This is where we find the Greek word *apologia*, from which we derive the term apologetics and upon which we have built the discipline of apologetics. And yes, apologetics is in fact a discipline. What are we, as Christians, supposed to always be ready for? To make a defense, to make an *apologia*. For what? For the hope that is in you. Or to amplify that, for the hope that is in our hearts,

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in our root unity, in the very center of our being. We'll get to what that hope is shortly, but first the Greek word *apologia*. In the first century context of the Apostle Peter, the Greek word *apologia* was used for a formal defense presented in the court of law. But it can also refer to a formal defense in a public context, as well as in private. An example is

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when the Apostle Paul presents a formal defense in the Hebrew language against the false accusations of his fellow Jews concerning his message and the nature of his mission. As the first verse reads, "Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you." The same can be found in Acts chapter 24 when Paul stood before the governor Felix to again provide a formal defense against the false accusations of the Jews.

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As the tenth verse reads, "Knowing that for many years you, that is Felix, have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense." There's more. In Acts chapter 25, we read of Paul's defense before Festus, and in Acts chapter 26, there we read also of Paul's defense before Agrippa. Why was Paul placed in this position, constantly needing to defend himself?

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It was the Jews who caused him all the turmoil. He was preaching Jesus as the Christ and Messiah, *Yeshua Hamashiach*. But the Jewish religious authorities were not pleased with his message. They had made their feelings clear by having Jesus crucified. And it was certainly not helping that Paul was preaching in the synagogues wherever he went before going to the Gentiles. Peter's point is that this

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is going to put us in the crosshairs. We are going to be targeted by the hostility that this world has against Christ. We're reminded of Jesus' words, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you." Now the Church was not only facing continual hostility by the Jews.

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You might be surprised to know that Christians were being called atheists by Roman authorities and their pagan communities. Today, we understand that term "atheist" to mean that person who believes that there is no god. In Peter's time, for Christians to be called atheists meant that they did not believe the Roman emperor to be a god. You have to bear in mind that the empire cultivated emperor worship. It was known as the imperial cult.

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There are several examples that can be seen with Caesar Augustus, for example, shortly before the birth of Christ. Well, Christians refused to worship the emperor. They worshipped only Jesus, and of course the Father and the Spirit, all one as the triune Godhead, whether or not they articulated it in this manner at the time. As a result, many Christians were being forced to provide a formal defense, to respond to their accusers.

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And while Peter certainly had this in mind, I cannot believe that he limits us to that alone. No, his writing makes clear to us that he intends to say that Christians should be ready to make a defense even in informal settings, which could very well occur between Christians and non-Christians at any point in time and under any sort of circumstance. I'm sure that you could think of any moment in which you were asked why you believe what you believe as a Christian

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or why you hold to certain Biblical moral convictions. The truth is, we're to always be ready because we're always going to have to give an *apologia*. And we all do provide an *apologia*. It is simply a matter of whether it was a good and Biblical apologetic or not. You may have heard the phrase, "everyone's a theologian", most notably from R.C. Sproul, who has a book under that title. Well let me tell you here:

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Everyone's an apologist. Now we need to get a move on. What is this hope? How might we articulate this hope that lies in the root unity of our beings, in our hearts? This hope is none other than the holistic gospel of Jesus Christ, who has come not only to save man from his sin, but to also restore him to his rightful place and function, and to restore all of creation with him for the glory of God. That is what I mean by holistic.

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I mean that this hope is far more than just the rescue of the human soul, it is the promised redemption of all things. Consider for example Psalm 102 verse 25 to 26. "You lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will all perish, but you will remain. They will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away."

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Isaiah chapter 11 verses 6 to 9. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with a young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together, and the little child shall lead them. The cow and the bearer shall graze, their young shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the whole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy

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in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." Isaiah chapter 25 verse 8. "He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of His people He will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken." Isaiah chapter 65 verse 17. "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered

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or come into mind." Or consider these New Testament passages, such as Romans chapter 8, verses 22-24. "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope

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for who hopes for what he sees?" And 1 Corinthians 15, verses 26 and 54, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death, When the perishable puts on the imperishable, And the mortal puts on immortality. Then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." There is certainly a lot to unpack in these cited passages, but time does not permit us to get into it all right now.

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There will be a time and a place for us to revisit these texts in the future. But nonetheless, it is this hope that Christians are to provide a well-reasoned *apologia* for. But as per Peter's instruction, it must be done with gentleness and respect. Aside from proper etiquette and mannerisms, what the apostle Peter means here is something much deeper, something more profound. We can certainly be polite,

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and yet be brimming with proudness and bitterness on the inside. So, no, Peter is not saying to be merely polite with those who do not know the truth, and with those who assault us in hostility against Christ. The scholar Michaels, to cite him again, writes that this gentleness and respect is rather a reference to, and I quote, "inward quality or attitude of mind, a profound acknowledgement of the power of God and of one's own poverty and dependence on Him."

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Think of Jesus' words on the Mount, Matthew 5 verse 5. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." This gentleness and respect should come natural to us because of who we are, who God is, and what God has done for our salvation and renewal. We were once lost in our sin, destitute, without a single ounce or penny of righteousness in the bank. We were dead in our trespasses,

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spiritually bankrupt, fully deserving the wrath of God, with no hope to be found within ourselves. But God, quoting John chapter 3 verse 16, "so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life." God intervened while we were yet sinners. God made a way for our salvation and renewal. God rescued us when we were

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and still are, undeserving. Peter's point? If we were saved by the grace of God and not by our own works, by the Spirit of God and not by any other means, in other words, we have nothing in ourselves to boast of, how could we possibly not be gracious, gentle, and respectful with those who are still lost in their sin? How could we possibly offer them a rose if we first cut off their nose?

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No, we must be gentle and respectful, for we were once lost in our sins, deserving of the judgment of God. And this must come from the heart. In fact, this hope produces the necessary fruit to fulfill what Peter writes of us. Understanding now what the Greek word *apologia* means, and what Peter's instruction to the church was, we return to the question, what is apologetics?

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I'm going to be closing with a quote that I'll be opening with on the next episode, a quote by the late theologian Cornelius Van Til in response to this very question. He says, "Apologetics is the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life." Join me next time as we finish answering the question, What is Apologetics?

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And as we explore the very nature of the apologetic discipline. Grace and peace to you all.

Closing

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