

Know Your Neighbor's Religion

The Christian Response

What we have learned...

- All three belief systems we have studied are considered restorationist
- All three belief systems deny the orthodox Christian Trinity
- All three belief systems deny the full deity of Christ as ontologically co-equal with God the Father
- All three belief systems rely on abrogation to correct problems and conflicts within their theology

All three belief systems we have studied are considered restorationist

- All three belief systems state that the Gospel message as transmitted in the New Testament has been corrupted
- Therefore, we need to show this statement is false

Facts concerning the New Testament

- We must investigate the New Testament as historical documents, not holy, religious text
- No historian rejects wholesale any sources that have variations in secondary details
- Miracles reported in the text do not undermine historical credibility

Facts concerning the New Testament

- We have 5,600 Greek, 10,000 Latin, and 5,000 other ancient language handwritten manuscripts of the New Testament
- According to scholar Daniel Wallace, less than 1% of the variations amongst all of these documents is significant
- None of the variations, nor all of the variations in compilation, contribute to any significant theological variation

Facts concerning the New Testament

- The gap of time between the originals and the existing manuscripts is far narrower than any other ancient work
- We have copies of most of the New Testament from 100-150 years after the originals were written

AUTHOR	BOOK	DATE WRITTEN	EARLIEST COPIES	TIME GAP	NO. OF COPIES
Homer	<i>Iliad</i>	800 B.C.	c. 400 B.C.	c. 400 yrs.	643
Herodotus	<i>History</i>	480-425 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1,350 yrs.	8
Thucydides	<i>History</i>	460-400 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1,300 yrs	8
Plato		400 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1,300 yrs	7
Caesar	<i>Gallic Wars</i>	100-44 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1,000 yrs	10
Livy	<i>History of Rome</i>	59 B.C. – A.D. 17	4 th Cent. (partial) mostly 10th cent.	c. 400 yrs c. 1000 yrs	1 partial 19 copies
Tacitus	<i>Annals</i>	A.D. 100	c. A.D. 1100	c. 1,000 yrs	20
Pliny the Younger	<i>Natural History</i>	A.D. 61-113	c. A.D. 850	c. 750 yrs	7
New Testament		A.D. 50-100	c. 114 (fragment) c. 200 (books) c. 250 (most of NT) c. 325 (complete NT)	+50 yrs 100 yrs 150 yrs. 225 yrs.	5366

Facts concerning the New Testament

- The New Testament passes ALL of the historical-critical tests
 - We have early testimony (most written within 40 years of Christ's death)
 - We have eyewitness testimony
 - We have testimony from multiple, independent, eyewitness sources
 - We have trustworthy eyewitness accounts
 - We have corroborating evidence from archeology and other writers
 - We have enemy attestation
 - We have self-deprecating events and details

All three belief systems deny the orthodox Christian Trinity

- Jehovah's Witness and Islam flat out deny the Trinity
- Mormonism embraces, at best, a Modalism model of the Trinity
- Therefore, we need to establish that the Trinity is verified in the New Testament, which he have seen is reliable in its information that it presents

First, let's figure out what the Trinity is!

- We are all familiar with the ontological Trinitarian model: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit
- But we also need to know the economic Trinitarian model: the roles and functions of each of the persons in the Godhead

Ontological and Economic Trinity

- In terms of the ontological Trinity, the three persons are distinguished by what the Westminster Larger Catechism calls “their personal properties” (WLC 9). It then goes on to define these personal properties: “It is proper to the Father to beget the Son, and to the Son to be begotten of the Father, and to the Holy Ghost to proceed from the Father and the Son from all eternity” (WLC 10). With regard to the economic Trinity, we distinguish among the three persons of the Godhead in terms of their roles in creation and redemption. It is the Father who sends the Son into the world for our redemption. It is the Son who acquires our redemption for us. It is the Spirit who applies that redemption to us. We do not have three gods. We have one God in three persons, and the three persons are distinguished in the economy of redemption in terms of what They do.

Ontological and Economic Trinity

- In orthodox Christianity, we say that the Son is equal to the Father in power, in glory, and in being. This discussion rests heavily on John 1:1, where we read, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This verse indicates that the Father and the Word (the Son) are different and are one. In one sense, the Son and the Father are identical. In another sense, They are distinguished.

Ontological and Economic Trinity

- From all eternity, within the ontological Trinity, the Father begets the Son, and the Son is begotten of the Father. From all eternity, God also freely decrees the salvation of yet to be created human beings in what theologians refer to as the “covenant of redemption.” This covenant of redemption among the Persons of the Trinity is the eternal foundation for the work of the three Persons in the history of redemption. From all eternity the Father agrees to send the Son, and the Son is willingly sent. The Son doesn’t send the Father; the Father sends the Son.

Ontological and Economic Trinity

- So even though the Father and the Son are equal in power, glory, and being, and even though there is no eternal subordination within the ontological Trinity, nevertheless there is a subordination of the Son to the Father in the economy of redemption (R.C. Sproul).

Ontological and Economic Trinity

- So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him (John 5:19-23).

Ontological and Economic Trinity

- “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one” (John 10:28-30).

Ontological and Economic Trinity

- “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I” (John 14:26-28).

Ontological and Economic Trinity

- “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

Dorothy Sayers' Trinity Allegory

- For every work (or act) of creation is threefold, an earthly trinity to match the heavenly.
- First, (not in time, but merely in order of enumeration) there is the Creative Idea, passionless, timeless, beholding the whole work complete at once, the end in the beginning; and this the image of the Father.
- Second, there is the Creative Energy (or Activity) begotten of that idea, working in time from the beginning to the end, with sweat and passion, being incarnate in the bonds of matter: and this is the image of the Word.
- Third, there is the Creative Power, the meaning of the work and its response in the lively soul: and this is the image of the indwelling Spirit.
- And these three are one, each equally in itself the whole work, whereof none can exist without the other: and this is the image of the Trinity.

All three belief systems deny the full deity of Christ
as ontologically co-equal with God the Father

- Since they deny that Christ is equal with the Father, we simply need to find where the New Testament demonstrates this is true.

Christ as ontologically co-equal with God the Father

- Mark 14:53-65 Christ would not have been threatened by stoning unless he equated himself with God (Leviticus 24:14-Whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death).
- John 1:1-3 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Christ as ontologically co-equal with God the Father

- John 8:58-59 Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.
- Prophecies regarding Christ equate him with the Father:
 - Isaiah 7:14
 - Isaiah 9:6
 - Micah 5:2

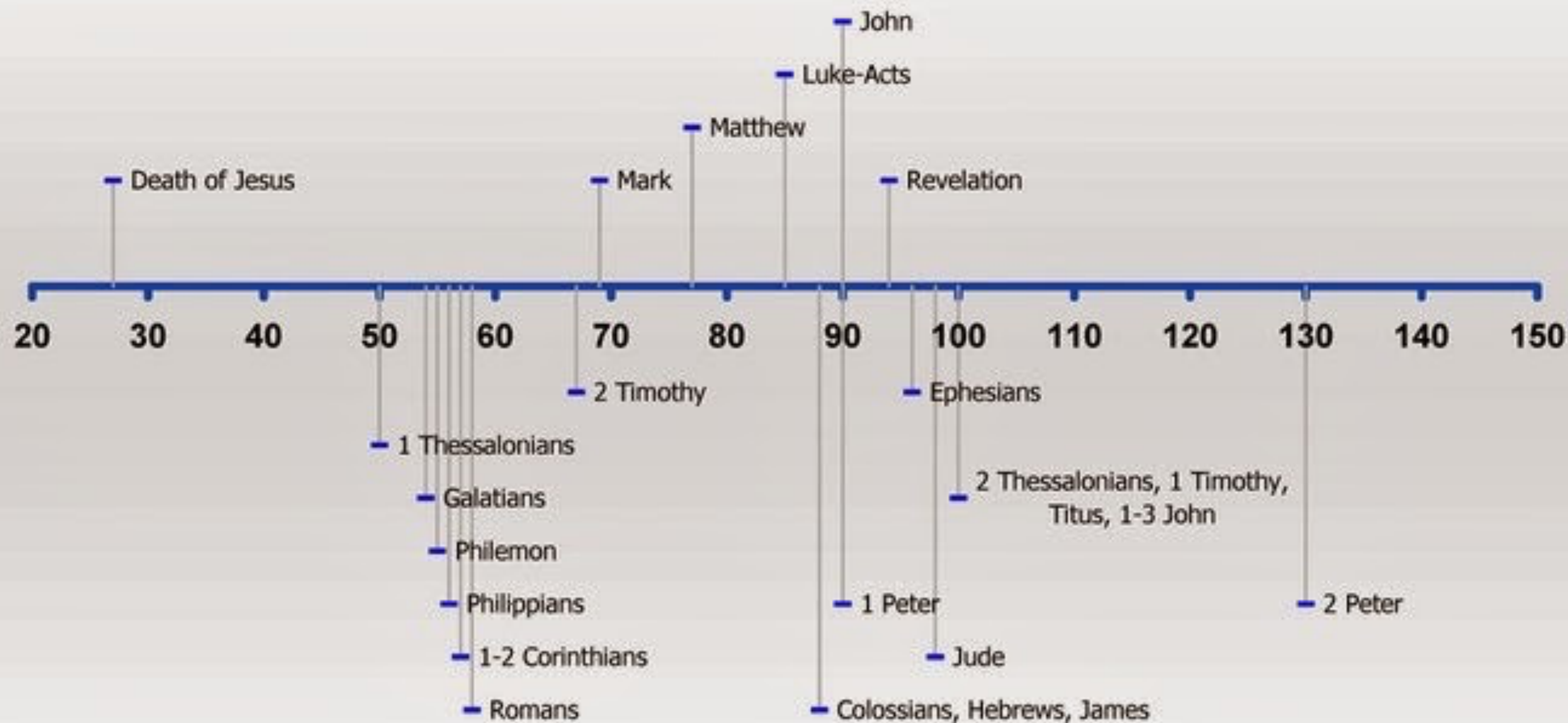
The Problem of Abrogation

- Abrogation denotes continuing revelation
- All three of the belief systems we have studied utilize some form of abrogation in order to correct theological dilemmas or bring dogma in line with current activities

The Words of LDS Elder Jeffrey Holland

- One of the arguments often used in any defense of a closed canon is the New Testament passage recorded in Revelation 22:18: “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of ... this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.”
 - However, there is now overwhelming consensus among virtually all biblical scholars that this verse applies only to the book of Revelation, not the whole Bible.
 - Those scholars of our day acknowledge a number of New Testament “books” that were almost certainly written after John’s revelation on the Isle of Patmos was received.
 - Included in this category are at least the books of Jude, the three Epistles of John, and probably the entire Gospel of John itself.

Compositon of the New Testament Books



Book	Date (A.D.)	Book	Date (A.D.)
James	45-49	Philippians, Philemon	63
Galatians	49	1 Peter	63-64
1 & 2 Thessalonians	51	1 Timothy	63-66
Mark	50s or 60s	Titus	63-66
Matthew	50s or 60s	Hebrews	64-68
1 Corinthians	55	2 Peter	66
2 Corinthians	56	2 Timothy	67
Romans	57-58	Jude	68-80
Luke	60	John	85-90
Acts	61	1, 2, 3 John	85-90
Colossians, Ephesians	61	Revelation	90-95

How Was the Canon of Scripture Determined?

- How do you decide what is in the canon and what isn't in the canon? The way Protestants answer this question is typically by saying that the canonical books have to come out of the apostolic circle. Either they are written by an apostle or they are written by those who were associates of the apostles. For example, Luke wasn't an apostle, but as an author of a Gospel and an associate of the apostles, he comes out of the apostolic circle. Having an origin in the apostolic circle would be a necessary condition. Also, consistency with the other books that are recognized as canonical is required. And then, frankly, we trust in the Holy Spirit to guide the church in recognizing those books of Scripture in which we hear the Word of God to us. This criterion is more subjective, but it is saying that it is through the works of the New Testament that have been assembled that we sense God is speaking to us, and therefore believe that these are the limits of the canon.

How Was the Canon of Scripture Determined?

- When it comes to the New Testament, if you read the sub-apostolic fathers, that is, those church fathers that wrote immediately after the apostles, we find them distinguishing very clearly between their own writings and those of the apostles as found in the Bible. They did not regard their own work as inspired, but they did treat the works that we find in the New Testament today as authoritative. For example, Ignatius, a very early church father, spoke of a collection that he called “the Gospels and the apostles.” This would probably be what we would today call the Gospels and the epistles – that is, the four Gospels plus the letters.

How Was the Canon of Scripture Determined?

- From the very beginning, the four Gospels and the book of Acts were never doubted by anyone. It wasn't that the church decreed the authority of these books; rather these books imposed themselves upon the early church. It was never doubted that these were the correct record of the life of Jesus and the early church.
- In fact, even those that doubted some of the books that are included in the canon today always accepted the four Gospels, the book of Acts, thirteen letters of Paul, 1 John, and 1 Peter. These books were accepted even by those who doubted some of the books in the canon. In the east – that is to say, in the eastern end of the empire, the Greek-speaking part – there were doubts expressed about the book of Revelation, John's Apocalypse. In the west, some church fathers expressed doubts about the book of Hebrews.

How Was the Canon of Scripture Determined?

- In A.D. 175 we have our earliest list of New Testament books in the canon from the so-called “Muratorian Fragment.” Muratori was an Italian scholar who discovered this fragment in the 18th century, and so this is sometimes called the Muratorian Canon. It includes the four Gospels, Acts, thirteen letters of Paul, Jude, and two letters of John, but it doesn’t mention Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter, or James. Interestingly enough, the Muratorian Canon does accept the Wisdom of Solomon. It also accepts the Apocalypse of John, that is, the Book of Revelation, and it accepts the Apocalypse of Peter, which is not in the New Testament. This Apocalypse of Peter is not the same document as a later Gnostic document that goes by a similar name; this is something different, and the Muratorian Canon includes it. In the year A.D. 200 Caius provides a similar list of accepted books. He lists the same twenty-one books that are found in the Muratorian Canon, so this seems to show that there is a pretty firm conviction in the church about these books by that time.

Abrogation Problems

- Who or what is the authority and who decides who or what the authority is?
- Who decides what needs to be corrected?
- Does this entail that the previous revelation or instruction is permanently null and void?
- Should one not conclude, then, that the entire theology is fallible since, at any moment and at any time, new revelation can cancel out anything that currently exists?

Abrogation Problems-Islam

- Qur'an-"Do they not consider the Qur'an? If it were from other than Allah they would have found in it many inconsistencies" (S. 4:82).
- Qur'an-"Whatever verse we abrogate or cause it to be forgotten, we bring a better verse than it or like it" (S. 2:106).
- Seventy-one chapters contain abrogation which is over 60 percent of the Qur'an. Sometimes it is just one verse. For example, Sura 9:5, which is called the verse of the sword by all Muslim scholars, abrogates 124 verses that are written in the Qur'an that speak tolerantly about other religions.

Abrogation Problems-Mormonism

- Mormonism-"I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book" (Joseph Smith).
- "These plates have been revealed by the power of God, and they have been translated by the power of God. The translation of them which you have seen is correct, and I command you to bear record of what you now see and hear" (History of the Church, by Joseph Smith, Vol. 1, pp. 54-55).
- There have been 3,913 changes in the Book of Mormon since 1830.

Abrogation Problems-Mormonism

- Joseph Smith said no one could attain the highest degree of glory without plural marriage.
- Prophet Woodruff made it an excommunicable offense to marry more than one wife in 1889.
- Brigham Young said no black person would hold the priesthood until every white man on earth (living and dead) had received it. Prophet Kimball contradicted this in 1978.

Abrogation Problems-Jehovah's Witness

- JW's hide their abrogation in “continuing enlightenment in interpretation.”
- “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” (James 1:5 ESV)
- JW's use this verse to validate their “corrections” in their Bible teaching.
- Never mind the fact they have a sordid history of failed prophecies!

How Do We Engage Our Neighbors?

- Always deal with your neighbors who subscribe to these differing beliefs with love.
- If they offer to share their faith, make sure they allow you to do the same.
- Be patient, but firm in your faith. If they won't accept your defense of your faith, it is probably more that they are rejecting Christianity wholesale, not that you have failed as an apologist.

How Do We Engage Our Neighbors?

- The emphasis of your defense should be on Christ: his deity, his ontological equality with God, and his work of sacrifice for the free gift of salvation to us that we do not earn. NONE of these three religions teach this.
- The free gift of salvation stands in stark contrast to the works-based salvation the other three religions embrace.
- To deny that Christ died and rose to save the world, and yet to work to gain God's favor, is to deny God's love as unconditional and, furthermore, to make God smaller than He really is.

How Do We Engage Our Neighbors?

- 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 (1 Peter 3:15).