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Conducted by  
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**“Will you please explain 1 Pet. 3:15. As an ordinary Christian without any preaching or teaching skills, how do I train to be able to give an answer to anyone who asks of me?”**

1 Peter 3:15 reads, **“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”**. It seems to me that Peter supplies the primary idea which is essential to the ‘real life in Christ’ when he says, **“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts”**. I am convinced that without doing **that**, the best we as Christians can hope for is some sort of re-vamped ‘old man’, instead of the completely ‘new life in Christ Jesus’. Inherent in the primary idea is the necessity for us to train ourselves to be **godly**. I would go so far as to say that this goes much further than **learning about** God; it must surely mean that **we must live** the Christian life in a practical way. Godly character and conduct are essentials if we are to give an answer of the hope that is within us. The New Testament teaches me that I do not have to attend theological seminars in order to do this; I must look at the Scriptures objectively in order to find what I must **do**. Perhaps a good starting point would be to examine some teaching of Paul to Timothy in 1 Tim.4: 7-12.

#### WHAT ANSWER SHALL WE GIVE?

To those who say to us, “Why are you a Christian: what are you hoping for”? I believe we must be able to give a positive answer. For myself, I like to think that **assurance** takes the ‘wishful thinking’ aspect out of hope, and makes what I **believe** into a **reality**. The full assurance of faith means that if I am willing to live my life under the benign rule of God, with Christ in my heart, and guided by the Holy Spirit – both inwardly and through the word – then I do not torment myself by thinking that I **may** get to Heaven; I **know** that I shall be there eventually. You see, even though the Church was gloriously fashioned by Christ, and has a universal communion, salvation comes by the Gospel to **individuals**, not communities, and each individual Christian is responsible for his hopes, doubts, aspirations, faith, and commitment, and it is as individuals that we shall stand before God and give our ultimate answer to Him. During my secular employment I had, on many occasions, to discuss the attributes of training with works managers. I very quickly learned that they weren’t much interested as to how good training would improve our industrial and commercial standing in the world community; they were at the ‘sharp end’ of the production process, and what they invariably asked was, “Well, what are the benefits for **me** and for **this firm**”, and unless they could be convinced of **that**, then there was little hope of a deal. Isn’t this true of our Christian lives? Unless and until I can show people ‘Christ in me’, they are unlikely to be impressed by Church statistics, good though these may be. Therefore, let us see how our lives can be assured by the practical application of God’s word.

#### WORD OR SPEECH

This aspect of Christian life is extremely important, because the value of what we **say** is often a true monitor of what we **think**. In 1 Tim. 4:12 Paul states those areas in life in which we should be examples; firstly, **“be thou an example of the believers, in word”**.

Many times we open our mouths and articulate words without engaging our brains. As Christians we shouldn't do that, because the warnings against it are quite severe and direct (Read James 3 about the misuse of the tongue). Furthermore, in Eph. 4:29 we read, **"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers"**. In past years, during open discussion and debate, I have heard brethren use words which have edified no one, and rather than **'bringing grace to the hearers'**, they have brought **disgrace** to the Church; as Paul goes on, **"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice"**. Maybe there have been, and will be, occasions when things need to be said, but there is a correct way of saying them i.e., **in love**, and without bitterness. We must always remember the words of the Lord, **"But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man"** Matt. 15:18. If the heart engenders unwholesome things, then likely as not such things will proceed from the mouth and defile. Yes, my readiness to answer concerning my hope in Christ will be enhanced by the words that I use, and by the spiritual manner in which I use them.

#### CONDUCT OF LIFE

Conduct may be defined as 'ones's actions; the way one acquits oneself'. Christian conduct will testify as to whether the Christian's hope is a **real** hope, or a make-believe hope. Our behavioural patterns reflect our expectations. The true Christian will feel a **need** for Christ no matter what phase of life he may be passing through, whether it be joy or sorrow. Christ will supply our every need, and this means that our expectations will never be frustrated, consequently our behaviour should always be governed by His supply, and since He always seeks our good, our expectations of Him will be consistent with our spiritual appreciation of His ability to supply the motivation for conduct which is Christ-like. You see, real Christian conduct lies not merely in following a set of scriptural rules, but in the abiding presence of Christ in our hearts by faith, and by the guidance and promptings of the Holy Spirit, the soul-searching Guest who will never leave us unless we deliberately dispel Him from our lives. Such is the value of our spiritual inheritance that if our conduct as Christians falls short of that which is expected of us, then this can only be attributed to wilful negligence on our part, and a failure to appreciate the power of the heavenly resources available to us.

When Paul wrote to the saints at Philippi he said, **"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgement; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ"**. Phil. 1:9,10. That's about the essence of it, isn't it?

#### LOVE, FAITH, PURITY

These three great Christian attributes must characterise our lives if we are to have an undying hope, and if we are to give meaningful answers to those who question us regarding that hope. In his first letter to Timothy Paul says, **"Now the end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned"**. The God-type of love can only come from a pure heart; a heart that has been cleansed and **kept** clean. Such a love must be given freely and must not offend the conscience of the giver i.e., it must be genuine. In Rom. 12:9 Paul writes, **"Let love be without dissimulation"**. The 'unfeigned' faith must be a faith without hypocrisy, that is, it must not be like that of the scribes and Pharisees. 'Pretended' love is no love at all; it is certainly not the AGAPE love which Paul describes in 1 Cor. 13.

There are those today who are very quick to comment on what they consider to be hypocritical attitudes of some Christians; what these critics fail to see, of course, is the blatant hypocrisy of the comments which **they** make from time to time. God's revelation in the Bible is no longer relevant, so they say; it is a tissue of lies and contradictions and can be dispensed with entirely. Christ is seen as some sort of radical

pervert who has 'conned' people all down the ages. Marriage is seen as something which can be 'tried' but there must always be a 'quick-release' button so that people can escape from it. Purity has been dispensed with, and any young person who has not been sexually active before leaving school or college is looked upon with pity by some of the sexually-progressive clan. Oh no, these people are not hypocrites, so **they** affirm; they are just 'modern', and their modernity must be embraced by everyone: let's have no more of this 'archaic' stuff, like respecting God and His Christ. Well, the day of exposure is coming.

Dear questioner, if ever there was a time when Christians should be able to give an answer of the hope within them, it is now. The hope we have, though, must be **'an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast'**. We must train ourselves to be godly, and that can come only through the word, and by putting into practice those things that we learn. The conclusion of the whole matter is that **discipline** is the key, both physically and spiritually. May God bless us all in our pursuit of maturity in Christ.

(All questions, please, to Alf Marsden, 20 Costessy Way,  
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