

Table of Contents

<i>Lecture 1: The Purpose of Defenders</i>	2
<i>Lecture 2: The Diligence of a Disciple</i>	8

Lecture 1: The Purpose of Defenders

Today we reach something of a milestone. We come to the end of our Defenders course. It has taken us about seven years to get to this point. But now we cross the finish line. So it is with a sense of nostalgia as well as satisfaction that we finally reach the end of our course. In the final two lessons I want to say a few words about the class by way of reflection and retrospect as we close.

The very first purpose of the Defenders class, if you look at our purpose statement, is the following: *To train Christians to understand, articulate, and defend basic Christian truths*. All three of those verbs are important.

First, to understand Christian truth. We want to have a grasp as profound as we can of Christian doctrine – what the Christian world and life view teaches. So in this class we've tried to explain and elucidate various concepts that underlie the Christian faith. We've surveyed the different views that the Christian church has upon these various Christian doctrines. If anything, I hope that this class has opened your mind to the diversity of perspectives that are represented in contemporary and historic Christianity on these different doctrines.

But it is also important that we not merely understand these doctrines but that we are also able to articulate them. We want to be able to explain them clearly. In this class I've tried to show you how to express these doctrines in an accurate way that will communicate them to the people that you want to talk with. I hope that some of you will take the opportunity to become teachers yourselves and to lead a Bible study group or a Sunday school class where you will be teaching this material to others.

Finally, we've aimed also to defend these doctrines. As we've surveyed Christian doctrine (from the Doctrine of Revelation to the Doctrine of the Last Things), we've looked at how one might defend these doctrines, what arguments and evidence might be given in support of these various Christian truth claims. You will remember that one of the qualifications that Paul lays down to be an elder in the church (Titus 1:9) is that he needs to be able to teach Christian doctrine and to confute those who contradict it. I think we all want to aspire to that kind of maturity even if we never actually serve as elders in the church. So being able to teach Christian doctrine and refute objections to it, I think, will be something that is greatly to be desired.

That is the very first purpose of the Defenders class that we've tried to fulfill.

The second purpose of the class, you may remember, is *to reach out with the Gospel to those who have not yet come to Christ*, always being ready to give a defense to anyone who should ask the reason for our hope. I hope that many of you will avail yourselves of the opportunity of bringing a non-believing friend to the Defenders class. As I said

earlier, this is a place where we welcome a diversity of perspectives, not only among Christians – we have Catholics, we have Baptists, we have Pentecostals, we have all sorts of Christians represented in class – but also non-believers as well. Even more importantly, each of us in our individual lives needs to be involved in helping to fulfill the Great Commission by sharing the Gospel with others.

Finally, third, *to be an incendiary fellowship of mutual encouragement and love*. In a large megachurch like ours, you are really going to get lost if you don't have a smaller church-within-the-church that you can identify with and that you can get to know, where there are people that you care for, pray for, and who will care for and pray for you. That, I think, is something that we are building in our Defenders class.

And yet, having said that, in a sense we have only scratched the surface of Christian discipleship. Some time ago someone shared with me that what Jesus actually said in the Great Commission that he left his disciples with in Matthew 28:19-20 was,

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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.

Notice what Jesus said we are to teach as we make disciples of the nations. We are to teach them to obey all that Jesus has commanded us. As I reflected on that, it hit me forcefully that I am not really doing that at all in this Defenders class. I am not teaching you what Jesus commanded. We really haven't looked at the teachings of Jesus about the ethical and spiritual life, for example; about the kind of person that you are to be as a Christian follower of Christ. Much less have I taught you to obey those commands. To do that you would need to have some sort of a discipleship group such as the twelve disciples where Jesus took these twelve men apart and poured his life into them and taught them to obey his commands. He did not just teach them the commands, but he taught them what it means to live an obedient life of a disciple, of being one of his followers. I haven't even begun to do such a thing as that in this Defenders class. In that sense, I have a real sense of inadequacy. I won't say failure, given our limited objectives, but I am just so impressed with how little we've really done in one sense about building disciples. We have just scratched the surface of what it means to be a Christian disciple.

It seems to me that the paramount thing that Jesus has commanded us to do and that we need to remember is found in Matthew 6:33 in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well." Jesus said don't focus on your needs or these other material concerns. Focus on the Kingdom of God and its righteousness. This, I think, ought to be the heart cry of every Christian disciple – the Kingdom of God, his reign in your life, and the righteousness that

attends it. What kind of character are you building? What kind of person are you becoming, to bear the name of Christ as a Christian – to be his disciple?

What does a disciple of Christ look like? Turn to 2 Peter 1:3-11 where we have a very interesting list of the character qualities that ought to describe a Christian disciple. There Peter says,

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.

So the goal here is to escape the corruptions that are in the world because of sin, and to partake of the divine nature – to become like God himself. So here is Peter’s advice – listen to this advice:

For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, So, you have your faith in Christ, and now you are going to add a certain character quality that ought to characterize a disciple of Christ. The first one is what he calls “virtue,” that is to say, moral excellence. You should have a virtuous character; be a good person. You are to cultivate moral excellence.

Then he goes on to say,

and virtue with knowledge,

So in addition to virtue, we want to supplement our faith with knowledge. This is obviously not intended to be just any sort of knowledge – not knowledge of Russian literature or agriculture or quantum mechanics. Rather he is talking here about Christian doctrine, about the knowledge of God’s truth. Look at Ephesians 4:14. Paul says, “so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles.” Part of Christian maturity is to have doctrinal discernment so that you won’t be carried about by every wave of doctrine or teaching that comes along. You will have a clear grasp, a clear knowledge, of Christian doctrine.

Then Peter goes on to say,

and knowledge with self-control,

That is to say, self-mastery. You should have mastery over your self. What this means will be, for example, self-mastery over your bodily passions and appetites, over the lusts that are inherent in our fleshly body. These are so powerful, obviously, that it takes tremendous self-mastery for people to keep these bodily passions in check and to live a

holy and righteous life. Have you arrived at the point in your Christian life where you can say, “I am the master of my own body, of my own flesh; I control its appetites and its desires?” I find that these appetites and passions are so powerful that if you allow them free reign they become really impossible to control. So the better thing to do is what Paul says – to mortify these earthly passions and appetites that are in you by avoiding the things that would arouse them and stimulate them. For men, I think that would mean, for example, not going to movies that have explicitly sexual material in them. If you avoid these things and shun the temptation, then these sorts of desires will be easier to manage and self-control will become more feasible.

Another aspect of self-control is control over your temper. It is easy, especially for some people, to become very angry at others and to lose our temper. This is a loss of self-control; a loss of mastery over yourself. Also one’s tongue – how do you use your speech? Do you glorify Christ in the way you talk, or do you say things that you later regret and wish you hadn’t said? Why did you say those things? Because in a moment of a loss of self-control, your tongue got away from you and you began to speak in ways that you shouldn’t. Or other various desires that you might have. Our desires are not to be for earthly, material goods like wealth, big houses, and fancy clothes. Our desires are to be spiritually oriented and to be focused upon those eternal values that will last forever, and not to be sucked in by American consumerism and materialism and greed.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:25 says that we should “exercise self-control in all things” in the way that an athlete exercises self-control. Undoubtedly what Paul is thinking of here is the Greek Olympians. The Greek Olympic athletes exercise self-control so that they might win their event. In the same way that an athlete in training for the Olympics is master of himself and exercises self-control, so we as Christians need to exercise self-control over our lusts, appetites, temper, tongue, and desires.

Next Peter goes on to say:

and self-control with steadfastness,

Or, as I call it, perseverance. That is to say, endurance. We are in this for the long run. The promise of Scripture is that he who endures to the end will be saved. Remember Jesus’ parable of the sower where some of the soil received the Word of God, the shoots sprang up, but then they withered away because they had no root. Others are overtaken by the thorns of materialism and the desire for worldly things and are choked out. But we are to be disciples who are in it for the long run – who persevere. So Peter says add perseverance to your character.

Next he says,

and steadfastness with godliness,

That is to say, we are to have a spiritual orientation. In 1 Timothy 6:6-11, Paul says,

There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs.

This is a real warning, especially for us in an American culture that is so consumeristic and materialistic and says that the American dream is to have a chicken in every pot and everyone is a homeowner. Those are not Christian values. Christian values are godliness, to have a spiritual focus, to let your life be focused on spiritual things rather than material things and material advancement.

Then Peter says,

and godliness with brotherly affection,

Brotherly affection or kindness toward others is to be exemplified first and foremost within the body of Christ to our fellow Christians. In Romans 12:9-10 Paul says this: "Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor." We ought to be cheerleaders for one another and to be seeking the good of one another. We are not fighting against one another or jealous of one another, but seeking one another's good.

In 1 John 3:16-20, John says this:

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth.

By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

So John says we are to be liberal in giving the goods that we have to help brothers and sisters in need.

The last quality that Peter says that we should have:

and brotherly affection with love.

This is the *agape* love that characterizes God himself. Paul describes this sort of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Paul says,

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

As Christians, we ought to be able, each one of us, to put our own name in the place of the word “love” in this passage. “I” am patient and kind, “I” am not jealous or boastful, “I” am not arrogant or rude, “I” do not insist on my own way, etc. When you do that substitution, it is really convicting, isn’t it? Because we know how far we fall short of this standard it convicts us of our lives. Nevertheless, this is a description of what a Christian disciple ought to be like.

In our final session I want to talk about how we can go about developing these character qualities in our lives.¹

¹Total Running Time: 22:47 (Copyright © 2021 William Lane Craig)

Lecture 2: The Diligence of a Disciple

As we close out our Defenders class, we've been thinking about the character qualities of a disciple of Christ listed in 2 Peter 1:3-11. There is one quality that ought to be characteristic of our pursuit of all of these virtues. Peter says "make every effort" to cultivate these virtues. That speaks of the Biblical quality of diligence. That is to say, we are to be zealous, steady, and relentless in pursuing these virtues. We need to be diligent in adding to our Christian faith these sorts of character qualities that befit a disciple of Christ.

Let's not miss the promise that goes with this command in 2 Peter 1:8ff:

For if these things are yours and abound, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What a fantastic promise! If you want to live a life that is bearing fruit for Jesus Christ, a life that is effective in carrying out the ministry that God has given you, then these character qualities are sufficient for that. Having these character qualities in abundance will prevent you from being ineffective or unfruitful. They will guarantee a fruitful, effective Christian life and ministry.

Peter goes on to say,

For whoever lacks these things is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall;

What a promise! Do you worry about whether you will persevere to the end? Will I fall away and apostatize? Here Peter says this is the guarantee – that you will persevere and you will not fall away. If these qualities are yours and abound then you will never fall.

so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I think you can see how essential and important it is to try in our Christian lives to develop the character of Christ and to abound in these Christ-like qualities.

At the same time, although we are to be diligent about this (Peter says make every effort to do this), still this can be really discouraging or put you under the pile because nobody by human effort can bring his life into conformity with the character of Christ. The more you try, the more you realize how far short you fall of the standard to which we aspire. So if we are not to lead Christian lives of defeat and constant discouragement, how can we develop these sorts of qualities and a victorious Christian life? The answer, I believe, is through the fruit of the Spirit. It is the filling of the Holy Spirit that will enable a person

to live a life which increasingly conforms to the image of Christ and produces these sorts of qualities in abundance.

Look at Galatians 5:16, 22-23. Paul says, “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.” Then he goes on to talk a little bit about characteristics of the flesh. But then in verse 22 he says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” As we are filled with the Holy Spirit, that is to say, under the control of the Holy Spirit, empowered by the Holy Spirit in our lives, the result of that will be this so-called fruit of the Holy Spirit. These are really the earmarks of the spirit-filled life, not charismatic gifts like speaking in tongues or miraculous healings. When you look at the church of Corinth for example, they abounded in charismatic gifts like speaking in tongues and miracles and so forth. And yet Corinth was the most carnal church in the New Testament. The real sign of the fullness and the power of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life is the production of the fruit of the Spirit – these character qualities that result from walking in the power of the Holy Spirit.

As you look at this list of the fruit of the Spirit, you immediately notice the overlap with the list of character qualities that Peter says are key to the successful, fruitful, persevering Christian life. For example, one of the fruits of the Spirit is love. That matches up with one of the qualities on Peter’s list. Joy and peace don’t seem to be found on Peter’s list. These seem to be products of the filling of the Holy Spirit in your life – a joyful and contentful Christian life. But then notice patience and faithfulness. When these two are had in combination, that results in perseverance. If you are faithful and patiently endure then you will persevere. Kindness is also found on Peter’s list as brotherly kindness or affection. Goodness is the same as virtue – the production of moral goodness in our lives. Gentleness I don’t really see on Peter’s list; but then there is self-control which is explicitly mentioned in Peter’s list. As for godliness: godliness, you will remember, is having a spiritual orientation, not a material orientation. That is, of course, produced by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So if we want to have the kind of character qualities that Peter says are so vital to the Christian life, these will be had through being filled with and walking in the Holy Spirit. As our lives are yielded daily to the empowering and convicting and guiding presence of the Holy Spirit, we will be changed and the Spirit will produce in us exactly these kinds of qualities.

Do you notice, however, there is one quality on Peter’s list that is not produced by being filled with the Holy Spirit? Knowledge! I think this is really interesting. Knowledge is something you’ve got to get on your own. Being filled with the Holy Spirit isn’t going to give you a knowledge of Christian doctrine. You are going to have to study or take a

class or read some books or something like that. So the fruit of the Spirit will help to produce most all of these Christ-like virtues in our lives, but knowledge is something that we are going to have to get by studying the Scriptures and reflecting upon them philosophically in order to develop sound Christian doctrine.

So I think you can see that while what we are doing in Defenders class is not by any stretch of the imagination a full-orbed curriculum in Christian discipleship, it does deal at least with one essential part of it; and that is knowledge. For the rest what we need to do as individual Christians is to yield our lives daily to the power and the guidance of the Holy Spirit so as to develop these Christ-like qualities in us.

As you think about these qualities, these aren't the sorts of things that just happen overnight. These are virtues that develop over time. So it is not just a matter of being filled with the Holy Spirit at a certain time. It is a matter of what Paul calls "walking" in the Spirit. That is to say, logging time in the Spirit – being filled with the Holy Spirit, empowered and guided by him day-by-day, year-by-year, over a long period of time. So in Galatians 5:16, 25 Paul says, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. . . . If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."

So I would encourage you every day before you get up, before your feet hit the floor, ask the Lord, "Lord, fill me today with your Holy Spirit. Help me to walk today in a way that is pleasing to you in word and deed and thought. Convict me of sin when I am not yielded to your Spirit but am yielded to my own flesh instead." When you become convicted of that, confess it immediately and ask God to fill you again with his Spirit and to take control of your life and to guide you. Keep short accounts with God. Don't let sin fester or be swept under the rug. The moment you are aware of it, confess it immediately, claim his promise that if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Then ask him to fill you again with the Holy Spirit. As we do that – as we walk in the Spirit – then his promise is that the fruit of the Holy Spirit will be produced in our lives and thereby the character that ought to attend a true disciple of Christ and that will guarantee a fruitful and effective ministry.

These are some of the thoughts that I wanted to leave with you as we wrap up our Defenders curriculum. And now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the eternal covenant equip you with everything good to do his will, to do what is pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ to whom be glory and honor forever and ever. Amen.²

²Total Running Time: 13:28 (Copyright © 2021 William Lane Craig)