

A Persevering Gospel Witness

1 Peter 3:15

Pray

Good morning. If this is your first time here, my name is Adrian Garcia. I am the associate pastor of student ministries and missions here at Cornerstone. Our lead pastor John Marc is currently away visiting his mother and son.

We always tell our guests three things: First, **we are grateful that you are here.** We consider you to be God's gift to us, so thank you for choosing to worship with us this morning.

Second, you're in a place where **the ground is level** which means no one is any higher, better, or more significant than anyone else. The ground at the foot of the cross is level ground and we are all sinners in need of a Savior. And Jesus is that wonderful Savior.

While your salvation may be a personal matter, God never designed it to be a private matter. He wants us to live as brothers and sisters in the family of God.

Which leads to the third thing we have to tell you: And that is that **we love you enough to speak the truth to you.** And that is Truth with a capital T. The truth about God's Word, about Jesus, His person, His works, and His words and how He will change your life from the inside out. He is the Cornerstone of our faith.

Introduction

TMAI Article:

“Riding the bus through town, Jacob was sitting at ease when a stranger came and sat next to him. Unexpectedly, the man turned and said words that he had no business knowing.

With studied clarity, the man recited the names of Jacob's children and where they went to school. He also revealed the name of Jacob's wife and the address of their family's home. Then—so as to leave no room for doubt about his intentions—he revealed a gun and said, “Stop sharing about Jesus.”

When he heard this, Jacob was disturbed, but not entirely surprised. He knew that following Jesus came with a cost, but he also knew it was the right thing to do. He knew that God had shown His love to him in Christ, and he wanted others to know that love too. And so, thanks to a network of churches that he had served over the

years, Jacob and his family went underground before he emerged somewhere else to continue his work—sharing about Jesus.”

Context: 1 Peter is a book about suffering righteously, suffering as a Christian. You could say that a theme of the book: **Expect Suffering**. Not generic suffering like disease or loss, but rather on **hostility** and **opposition** for being a Christian. Peter is writing to believers who are being **mocked, reviled, physically abused, and even imprisoned**.

As read the letter you see they were suffering unjustly (2:19); they were being falsely accused, slandered, and having their faith denounced in the public square (3:16; 4:4); in these ways they were sharing in the sufferings of Christ (4:13) being ridiculed for His name (4:14).

Peter’s purpose was to encourage the believers to stay the course. To strengthen them by reminding them of their calling and Christ’s example. To spur them on to perseverance amidst their hardships. To remind them that even in the face of open hostility that Christ’s purpose for the church is to always be ready to make a defense for the hope that was in them.

Let’s read 1 Peter 3:8–17...

Main Idea: This passage presents three essential characteristics of a persevering and effective gospel witness amid a hostile world.

Outline:

- 1. An Obedient Heart (15a)**
- 2. An Evident Hope (15b)**
- 3. An Attitude of Humility (15c)**

I. AN OBEDIENT HEART (15a)

but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense

The word **sanctify** means “to honor as holy” “to set apart” “to treat an object [or person] as supreme” “to reverence” or “to hold in absolute reverence.” This word is in the imperative mood and so it comes with the force of a command. This isn’t a suggestion, or wise advice. Peter, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is commanding believers to sanctify something, or rather, someone.

sanctify Christ as Lord – Christ must be above all other allegiances, loyalties, and commitments. The Lordship of Jesus Christ needs to have priority in all of our decisions. It must be the controlling factor of everything we think, say, and do.

Associate Pastor Adrian Garcia

In other words, we Christ must be sanctified as Lord **in [our] hearts**. The heart is the place of our innermost being. What we are in our hearts is who we are as a person. To have Jesus sanctified as Lord in our heart means that His Lordship dominates all of our life.

This is a fundamental gospel concept. The choice to follow Christ, the choice of becoming one of His disciples, it is a choice that must affect every other choice in our lives. It's to give Jesus the proper reverence, honor, and obedience that belong to Him and Him alone.

Now you may be asking, **“How does sanctifying Christ as Lord help a believer persevere in their gospel witness?”** And that is a good question, and the answer is found in the concept of what it means to truly sanctify Christ as Lord.

If you remember when I was explaining the word **sanctify**, I mentioned the word **“reverence.”** And this is a key to understanding the significance of Peter's instruction here. The word **“reverence”** carries the idea of **“fear.”**

In Matthew 10:28, Jesus says, **“Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”** Do you see what Jesus is doing here? He is instructing us to overcome fear by having a greater fear.

He says, conquer the fear of those who can only punish you in a temporary sense, by having a greater fear of the One who can punish you in an eternal sense.

“We fear men so much, because we fear God so little. One fear cures another. When man's terror scares you, turn your thoughts to the wrath of God.” – William Gurnall¹

It is in knowing and rightly fearing Christ that we are able to persevere in our gospel witness amid a hostile world.

The Midwives

In Exod 1:17 we have the midwives who defied Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, literally the most powerful man on earth at the time. And why did they do it? What does the text say, **“But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live.”** In verse 21 we see God's favor upon the midwives for this act.

Rahab (Judges 2); Daniel (1); Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (Dan 3); Daniel (6)

Warning: Saul

“Then Saul said to Samuel, *“I have sinned; I have indeed transgressed the command of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice.”* (1 Samuel 15:24, NASB95)

¹ A Puritan Golden Treasury, compiled by I.D.E. Thomas, by permission of Banner of Truth, Carlisle, PA. 2000, p. 108.

What does fearing God look like?

“Fearing God has two aspects. The first is reverence. It is a sacred awe of God’s utter holiness. It involves the kind of respect and veneration that results in fear in the presence of such absolute majesty. The second aspect is fear of God’s displeasure. Genuine faith acknowledges God’s right to chasten, His right to punish, and His right to judge.” – John MacArthur²

I like that quote because it captures two great facets of the fear of God. One, we fear God based on our proper understanding of who He is. There is a humbling sense of awe as we reflect on His majesty, power, and character. Two, we fear thinking, saying, or doing anything that would bring displeasure to our mighty and awesome God.

Illustration: Conversation I had with my son.

The beauty of being a child of God through faith in Christ is that this holy, mighty and awesome God, whom we should properly fear, is for us. He is actively seeking the good of His children at all times. *“so that we confidently say, “The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?””* (Hebrews 13:6, NASB95)

That good won’t always fit our fallen perception of what good is. **During a visit, one TMAI professor met a Christian man who had been abducted, taken to a field and beaten severely before being shot and left for dead. Remarkably, the man crawled back to his house and recovered.**

TMAI – The story of the brother in India.

always (“at all times”) being **ready** (“prepared”)

Accepting Christ as the Lord of your life involves the duty of always being ready to witness for Him. Always being ready, or always being prepared implies that we are never unprepared...never unwilling... never cowardly to speak of Him and His words.

When we rightly understand who God is and have the appropriate response of fear towards Him then we can have victory over every other fear.

“The fear of God is the death of every other fear; like a mighty lion, it chases all other fears before it.” – Spurgeon

The characteristic of fearing God or fearing Christ is an essential quality of the Christian life. And this is what Peter is commanding the believers to do. To sanctify Christ as Lord. To revere Him as Lord. To fear Him as Lord.

² Successful Christian Parenting, 1998, p. 78.

II. AN EVIDENT HOPE (15c)

to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you,

to everyone who asks you

This implies that believers are living their lives in such a way that it creates curiosity, or interest from the watching world. It's as if each believer is a living breathing piece of evidence that testifies to the gospel's power and Christ's glory.

Ramsey Michaels remarks that the terminology suggests that **“Peter sees his readers as being “on trial” every day as they live for Christ in a pagan society.”**³

to give an account

We want to be able to give a personal, informed, articulate account of who Christ is, what He has done, and what He has done in our own lives.

Now this doesn't mean you will always be able to answer every criticism or question, but it does mean that you are prepared to share the work of Christ in saving people from their sin and the wrath of God. And this should be a focal point of your testimony.

for the hope that is in you

This is the inward hope that a Christian has that transforms our perspective on life. It is a hope that looks to the future with confidence and expectation because we know we have in Christ. And it is this hope that really stands out today because there is an absence of hope in our time. Instead, what we see is fear and frustration.

Politics, Government Overreach, Global Wars, Inflation, Failing Economies, Immoral and Illogical Agendas, The Woes of Living in California, and much more...

“It is significant that the inquiry concerning the readers' Christianity is designated as “the hope” rather than “the faith,” as we might have expected. An inquirer would naturally be interested in the doctrinal aspects of Christianity, but the term suggests that in an age of widespread frustration and uncertainty, it was the distinctive element of hope in the lives of the believers that aroused special interest.”⁴

³ J. Ramsey Michaels, [1 Peter](#), vol. 49, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1988), 188.

⁴ D. Edmond Hiebert, [1 Peter](#) (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1997), 228.

But it is in this context that the Christian's hope should shine brightest!

As the verse implies, we will only get asked about our faith if it is evident that we have hope IN US. Do you have that hope in you? And if someone asked, would you be ready?

A question for us is, if we have an obedient heart, if we have and evident hope, do we have the right attitude when we share?

III. AN ATTITUDE OF HUMILITY (15c)

yet with gentleness and reverence;

yet with gentleness ('humility' 'courtesy' 'meekness' 'kind') **and reverence** ('respect' 'fear')

Illustration: Jesus fish bumper sticker.

We need to be cautious not to go too far and share it with arrogance or aggressiveness. The goal isn't to overpower people with our testimony but instead to demonstrate courtesy and consideration. Just because we have come to know the truth doesn't mean we need to act like a know-it-all.

We have to resist a spirit of superiority and self-righteousness. We must remember that we too were rescued from the depths of our own sin and rebellion. We must strive to be earnest, humble, and respectful.

In the sharing of our faith, we want to be winsome. Not that we trust in our charm or delivery, but we also don't want to conduct ourselves in a manner that is inconsistent with the hope we profess.

IV. CONCLUSION

Whole Bible

But we cannot simply take these verses, and ones similar to them, and neglect other verses. I have really grown to appreciate this quote from A.W. Tozer, **"The Word of God well understood and [faithfully] obeyed is the shortest route to spiritual [maturity]. And we must not select a few favorite passages to the exclusion of others. Nothing less than a whole Bible can make a whole Christian."**

We need the whole counsel of God's Word to help us to fully understand what God's will and purposes for us is. If we cherry pick verses on grace and ignore verses that don't make us feel warm and fuzzy, we are in danger to turning the grace of God into licentiousness. Or in other words, turning the grace of God into a license to unrestricted sinful and worldly living.

