

Defend Your Reason for Hope 1 Peter 3:13-17

Pastor Kelly R. Randolph
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Charles Chu was on a sight-seeing tour in China. He was traveling in a convoy of tour buses over some slick and treacherous roads. Suddenly, the bus in front of his slid off the road and tipped over in a rice field. Chu jumped off his bus and quickly scrambled up on the overturned bus. He found the emergency door. He grabbed the handle and pulled hard but the door did not open. He gave up on the door and started helping people out of the bus through the shattered windows. After he moved away from the door, another man came over, grabbed the handle and easily opened the door. Only then did Chu realize why he could not open it. He had actually been standing on the door he was trying to open. He had become the biggest obstacle, blocking the door of rescue.

In our passage today, we discover how not to get in our own way as we seek to fulfill our mission. We have been sent into the world with a message of hope in Jesus Christ. But sadly, we often get in our own way. Peter tells us three things we must do as we engage an often hostile world with the good news of Jesus. If we do these things, we can effectively defend the reason for our hope.

I. Do not fear those who threaten to harm you (v. 13-14).

A. The context of Psalm 34.

1. Peter quotes Psalm 34 in vv. 10-12 to make the point that Christians who are suffering unjustly should not return in kind to their persecutors. Instead, they should do good to them and bless them.
2. God's eyes are on his people who do good. But his face is against those who do evil. Even when believers suffer, they will have God's ultimate blessing.

B. Based on this truth, Peter draws out some application for his audience.

1. Those who persecute you cannot bring you ultimate harm.
 - a. Peter is not stating that Christians will be insulated from the harm of persecution. He clearly states in his letter that these believers are indeed feeling the sting of persecution (slandered, reviled, maligned, etc).
 - b. What Peter means is that their persecutors cannot do ultimate harm to them. They will be blessed by God in the end.
2. Even if you suffer, you will be blessed.
 - a. This echoes the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5:10-12.
 - b. Believers may suffer in this life. Yet, God will eternally reward them. This eternal inheritance is secure (1 Pet. 1:4-5).

C. Since this is the case, do not fear those who threaten to harm you.

1. Have no fear of them or be troubled.
 - a. Peter is referring to Isaiah 8:11-12. In that passage, the Lord encourages Ahaz not to fear a coalition of Syria and Israel. Instead, he is to honor the Lord as holy and let the Lord be the one he fears.
 - b. We must not live in fear of those who threaten to harm us because of our allegiance to Jesus.
2. Fear has a paralyzing effect on our witness for Christ.
 - a. It paralyzes our mouth so we are hesitant to speak for Christ.

- b. It paralyzes our actions so we are hesitant to live out our faith and be distinct from the world around us.
- c. It paralyzes our engagement with the culture around us and exerts the pressure to withdraw and isolate ourselves.

Christian friends, you have felt that pressure haven't you? On the job you have felt it from a boss or a coworker who criticizes Christians very openly and seeks to intimidate them. Perhaps in the classroom you have felt it from a teacher or professor who ridicules Christian faith as backward, uneducated, and unnecessary. It may be that a family member continues to mock your faith in Christ and isolates you from the rest of the family. Maybe you feel the cultural push-back on Christian faith from various media outlets as social and moral issues are discussed.

The temptation is to be afraid – to withdraw and isolate or perhaps to edit the message and make it more pleasing in an effort to gain approval. Fear pushes us to remain silent or revise the message. We are called to resist this fear. God watches over us and is with us.

Don't fear those who threaten persecution. We must do something else instead.

II. Establish the Lordship of Christ as the controlling reality of your life (v. 15).

A. In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy.

1. In Isaiah, Ahaz is told to honor the Lord as holy and let the Lord be his fear. Peter picks up this emphasis and applies it to his audience.
2. The idea is that instead of being controlled by fear of persecutors, we are controlled by the reality of Christ's lordship.
 - a. In your heart. The heart is the command and control center of life. It is the place where we understand, feel, and decide.
 - b. The reality of Christ's lordship must rule in our hearts. Our ultimate allegiance to Jesus must exert the greatest influence over our ideas, our emotions, and our decisions.

Fearing our hostile audience may take a different form than avoidance or isolation. It may take the form of seeking their approval because we fear rejection. In other words, we avoid talking about Jesus or we try to blend in with our non-Christian neighbors and friends because we want to be liked and included.

Elliot Clark, a missionary who served in a Muslim majority country in Central Asia, indicts our Western evangelical culture with these words:

Christians who try to please people ultimately fail at pleasing God and fail at proclaiming the gospel. And far too often this is the problem in our evangelistic endeavors: We're fundamentally committed to keeping people happy and having them like us, having them think we're smart, contemporary, hip, tolerant, progressive, fun, approving – and the list goes on. We want to please them, and we want them to approve of us. (Elliot Clark, *Evangelism as Exiles*, p. 60)

B. Honoring Christ as Lord shapes our interactions with non-believers.

1. We remain ready to make a defense for the reason we have hope in Christ.

- a. This does not mean a formal, academic defense of the faith as necessary as that is in the right context. This is speaking about being prepared to tell your neighbor, friend, classmate, or coworker why you have hope in Jesus.

By the way, notice that Peter highlights the hope we have as Christians. He doesn't say defend your faith. He says defend your hope. Of course, they are related but one of the glaring differences Jesus makes in our lives is hope. Just this last February, a 27 year old man in Mumbai sued his parents for his birth. He said, "It was not our decision to be born. Human existence is totally pointless." We have been born again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3). We must be ready to tell people why we have hope.

May I ask you today, do you have hope in Jesus Christ? Jesus came to this earth for the purpose of dying on the cross in payment for our sins. He suffered the punishment that our sins deserve. Then he rose from the dead in triumph over sin and death. He did this so that all who trust in him will be forgiven of their sins and restored to a reconciled relationship with God. They will be welcomed into God's kingdom. They will begin to live a new life of joy in the midst of hardship. One day when Jesus returns, they will be with him with a new and perfect body in a new heaven and new earth forever enjoying life the way it was meant to be. For a Christian, no matter what happens to them in this world, nothing can take away that certain future with Christ. It is our hope. This hope sustains and strengthens us through all the ups and downs of life.

You can have that hope by trusting in Jesus Christ. Have you trusted in him and been born anew to a living hope?

- b. We are to make our defense of our hope with gentleness and respect.
 - 1) Gentleness instead of harshness. If someone is coming at you with a hostile attitude, it is tempting to let their hostility set the tone of the conversation. Peter says that we must let the gospel set the tone. We are to be gentle and humble not angry and harsh.
 - 2) Respect instead of contempt. Look back at 3:8. Even if someone is treating us with disrespect, we are called to be respectful. The unbeliever is not an enemy we are trying to conquer. He or she is a person we are trying to persuade.

This is especially important in our time. The level of incivility and disrespect we are seeing in the public square is toxic. If you spend any time at all on social media, you cannot miss it. I challenge you to review the way you interact with others, especially on social media. Can you say that the tone and content of your interactions are gentle and respectful? You may say, "well that is a sign of weakness." No, it is not. It takes much more spiritual strength to exercise the kind of self-control that enables you to make your point without harshness and disrespect. The biblical standard is not just to say the right things but to say them in the right way.

- c. The manner in which you make your defense has the power to shame your opponent. When you defend your hope with gentleness and respect

it exposes the falsehood of your accusers and puts them to shame. It is possible that some will be ashamed now in this life as they see that their abuse of believers is unfounded. It may also point to the shame they will have on the day of judgment when they realize they were wrong.

Don't fear those who may persecute you. Instead, establish the Lordship of Christ as the controlling reality of your life. When we do these things, it achieves an important result.

III. Honor Christ when you suffer persecution (v. 17).

A. Sometimes it is God's will that we suffer.

1. Peter reminds us that our suffering/persecution is governed by the will of God.
 - a. Suffering is not continual but it is inevitable.
 - b. When, how, and how long we suffer is under the control of God's will.

As one writer said, *If suffering is within God's will, it is also within God's sovereign control. And thus Christian suffering is determined not by the will of one's adversaries but by the will of one's heavenly Father.* (Karen Jobes, Commentary on 1 Peter)

B. It is better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

1. He has emphasized in this letter that the kind of suffering that honors Christ is the kind in which Christians continue to do good when suffering unjustly.
2. There is no credit to suffering for doing wrong. That is expected. It is when you suffer for doing good and endure it with Christlikeness that your suffering serves to highlight the hope you have in Christ.

In other words, when you handle persecution without fear, respectfully and gently defending your hope in Jesus Christ, it has tremendous potential to honor Christ.

Conclusion

As we focus on our mission to the world around us, I want to challenge you to do something. As you go through your day interacting with others, ask yourself, "How can I honor Christ as Lord in this interaction?" With the cashier at WalMart, the teacher or fellow student, a family member, a waiter, a coworker, your online interactions – all through the day as you encounter people, ask, "How can I honor Christ as Lord in this interaction?"

As you begin to reorient those interactions by establishing Christ as Lord in your heart, you will find opportunities to defend the reason for your hope. Those interactions are moments when your hope in Jesus can be on full display through your words, your actions, and your attitudes.