

“A Gentle Defense?”—1 Peter 3:15-16

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “A Gentle Defense?”, is 1 Peter 3:15-16 → *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, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

What does it take for you to be on the defensive in a conversation? Maybe it depends upon the mood you're in at that moment. No matter what the person may say you will disagree with him, maybe even unaware that you are countering everything he says to you. Maybe it's more about your relationship with the person with whom you are talking. For some reason just being in his presence may put you on the defensive, ready for an argument. Sometimes a person simply expressing a different opinion than yours can get your dander up and, before you know it, the argument is on. Each of these defensive

examples may elicit the reaction: “My, aren’t we touchy today!” . . . which doesn’t help the conversation at all either.

As you listen to many conversations it doesn’t take long to notice that patience, humility and gentleness are not usually the dominate characteristics. In fact, the words “gentle” and “defense” used together can seem like an oxymoron to many. How can one make a defense while doing so *with gentleness and respect*, as our text commands? Even a conversation based upon Biblical convictions, governed by God’s inspired Word, can break down into sin where self-righteous judgments, contempt and division amongst brothers and sisters in Christ prevails. No wonder 2 Timothy 2:23 tells us to *have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels*.

The command in verse 15 of our text, to be *prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you*, comes from a different perspective which many of the Christians in Peter’s day faced—suffering as a result of persecution. He refers to it as suffering *for righteousness’ sake* (cf. 1 Peter 3:14). In other words, it is being attacked by someone verbally and/or physically because you confess Jesus as your Lord and Savior. This includes your conviction that **only by faith in Him alone** can one be righteous in God’s sight and receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Suffering *for righteousness’ sake* is when Christ in you is attacked while you experience the

suffering. Such unjust attack can easily make you defensive to the point of naturally wanting to retaliate in sin somehow.

There were many Christians in Peter's day who were actually being killed for confessing Jesus as their Lord. The persecution became more intense in the years following Peter's being put to death for his witness of Jesus as the only way to be saved (c. 67-68 AD). In fact, the Greek word for "witness" or "testimony" became the name for those who died specifically because of making a defense *for the hope* in Christ that was in them. They are called "martyrs." Hebrews 11:35-38 describes such suffering: *Some were tortured . . . others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated . . . wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

Maybe you might relate better to the description which Peter gives in verse 16 of our text: being *slandered by those who revile your good behavior in Christ*. It may happen when someone refuses to have anything to do with you or even verbally rails at you because of your insistence that Jesus is Lord and obedience to His Word. It could even be a spouse, children or family members, the ones you love most in the world (cf. Matthew 10:35-36). Even today there are Christians who are under satan's attacks when they lose employment *for righteousness' sake*, or

are denied rightful privileges *for righteousness' sake*, or are slandered and mistreated *for righteousness' sake*. Suffering is happening to some Christians on various levels in various places as their persecutors observe their *good behavior in Christ* in some fashion everyday.

Thus, it is so important to know Who is Lord in the midst of all your conversations, actions and persecution. When Christ is honored and set apart as Lord in your heart then you need not be on the defensive from self-centered, sinful motives, trying to control a discussion out of sinful arrogance. Since He is Lord all you can do is confess the *reason for the hope that is in you* in faithfulness to His Word. The Holy Spirit will take care of the rest. This is primarily the *respect* to which our text refers. It is a respect of Jesus as Lord as you *make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you*.

Notice you make this gentle *defense to anyone who asks you for a reason*. What would cause a person to ask *you for a reason for the hope that is in you*? *Your good behavior in Christ*. When Jesus is Lord in your life it will be displayed in the way you . . .

- . . . speak. Colossians 4:6 says: *Let your speech always be gracious . . . so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*

This is so important when making a gentle defense filled with your conviction. Just because it has to do with confessing the truth of God's Word with strong conviction doesn't give you the right to attack

a person for whom Christ died, even if he rejects you and your faithfulness.

- When Jesus is Lord in your life *your good behavior in Christ* will be displayed in the way you do your work. Colossians 3:23-24 says: *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that . . . you are serving the Lord Christ.* When you function with integrity in your job, doing the best you can for Jesus, others will notice it and may wonder about *your good behavior in Christ*. It may even move them to ask why you act the way you do.
- When Jesus is Lord in your life *your good behavior in Christ* will be displayed in the way you think. The concepts which you encounter in conversations will be “filtered” through God’s written Word. The Holy Spirit gives you a discerning heart and mind, not simply an opinionated, critical heart and mind. Peter refers to it as *a tender heart and a humble mind* in 1 Peter 3:8.

One of the most difficult dynamics with giving this defense through good words and works is knowing your own sinfulness. Even though you have been and are continuing to be taught *to observe all that* Jesus has *commanded you* (cf. Matthew 28:20), you still fall into sin in your speech, actions and attitudes. The devil and your own sinful nature would constantly throw such sins in your face to disable you as you strive to *make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that*

is in you. The heart that honors *Christ the Lord as holy* is also willing to admit sin, repent of it and continue in His forgiveness to confess Jesus is Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit **in all humility and gentleness** (cf. Galatians 5:22-23). Thus, you can have a *good conscience* before God and others.

Later in this chapter Peter refers to this *good conscience* again in reference to your baptism. He says that your *baptism . . . now saves you . . . as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ* (cf. 1 Peter 3:21). Not only did God place His grip on you, making you His child in your baptism (cf. Galatians 3:26-29), but you were also connected to Jesus' death and resurrection, *buried . . . with Him by baptism into death, in order that you can walk in newness of life* (cf. Romans 6:4). A *good conscience* does not come with an analysis of how well you are performing in your words, actions and attitudes or even the suffering which may accompany them. Rather, it comes as a result of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection for you. This is the *reason for the hope that is in you!*

In a culture of religious pluralism we live among a popular teaching that there are many different perceptions of truth and many different ways to get to God. You may be called upon in any given day to proclaim the unpopular fact that Jesus is *the way, and the truth, and the life* and that *no one comes to the Father **except through Him*** (cf. John

14:6). Even if you experience sufferings for such a confession of the truth, it needs to be made and the Holy Spirit will bring about His work through your defense given in love, humility, patience and gentleness. And we pray that *those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame*, not because we have a desire for them to “get theirs.” No, we want the Holy Spirit to convict them of their sins in their shame so that they too can have the same hope of eternal life in them which is in you by repentance and confession that Jesus is Lord. Amen.

*Finally, all of you, have unity of mind,
sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.*

(1 Peter 3:8)

Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.