

## **“A Ready Defense”**

1 Peter 3:13-17

When your children were coming along, when you denied them something that they wanted, did they ever respond by saying something like this, “That’s not fair!” Deep down on the inside of each one of us, there is something that longs for our circumstances to be fair. We want to feel like we are getting ahead. We want the good guys to win, we want the bad guys to lose, and we want the hero to get the girl. Perhaps that’s why as a culture, we are so drawn to these superhero movies. In the movies, when things take a turn for the worse, they always come out good in the end.

We know from experience, however, that real life doesn’t always turn out that way. Sometimes, it seems like the good guy loses. Sometimes, it seems like the bad guy wins. Sometimes, it seems like the girl runs off with the good guy’s best friend.

How do you respond when life isn’t fair? I’ve discovered that people respond to difficulty in several different ways. Some people turn inward. They become disillusioned with life and bitter on the inside. (illus. of Naomi)

Other people become fatalistic and calloused. They adopt the attitude that says, “Whatever will happen will happen, and there’s nothing you can do about it, so deal with it.”

An illustration of this could be summed up in the lives of two men who lived through the atrocities of the Holocaust. One is Elie Wiesel, and the other is Viktor Frankl. Both men witnessed the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps. Both men survived and went on to write books that chronicle their experiences.

Wiesel wrote a book entitled, 'Night,' in which he described the Nazi horrors with vivid detail. At the time, he blamed God for the camp. He wrote:

*"Blessed be God's name? Why? Why would I bless him? Every fiber in me rebelled. Because He caused thousands of children to burn in his mass graves. Because he kept six crematoria working day and night, including Sabbath and Holy Days. Because in his great might he had created Auschwitz and so many other factories of death."*

He writes about how he began to lose his faith in God and wondered how God could allow such horrible things to go on without doing anything to stop it. And that's the conclusion that we're left with in his first book. (Dawn, Day)

Viktor Frankl wrote from a different perspective. In his book, 'Man's Search For Meaning,' he wrote about how he thought the camps were used to show how people can cope with suffering, find meaning in it, and move forward with renewed purpose. He wrote:

*"The meaning of our existence is not invented by ourselves, but rather directed. We can discover meaning in life in three different ways: by doing a deed, by experiencing a value, and by suffering."*

And so here you have two men who both experience untold suffering at the hands of the Nazis, who both chronicle their experiences, yet both men come to different conclusions.

When it comes to suffering and the 'unfairness' of life, are these our only two options? Is the situation bleak, and is God to be blamed? Or, are we to be blindly optimistic? "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade..."

There is another way, and Peter shows us what it is. The theme of these verses in 1 Peter 3 is surrender to God in the midst of trying circumstances. No, life isn't fair. Things don't always turn out the way that we expect them to. But we have a God in heaven who has scars. Without the cross of Jesus, life's absurdities cannot be understood.

Only the cross puts our suffering in its proper light, and this is what Peter writes about here in the third chapter.

When life isn't fair, we simply need to look to Jesus. Our lives are in His hands. When we suffer and when things don't go according to plan, we are to rest in what we know to be true. Keep in mind what Peter has just said:

*“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”*

How they responded when under pressure was critical to their witness. What mattered was not their circumstances so much as it was the way their character was to be on display. They possessed righteous character, and now Peter tells them that they need a ready defense.

At a moment's notice, you and I need to be ready to defend our faith, to give a defense of what we believe and why we believe it. Even when life doesn't seem fair. Even when our circumstances are painfully difficult.

Peter says that we are to set Christ foremost in our hearts, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks us for a reason for the hope that is in us. As Christians, even when life isn't fair, we still have an unshakeable hope through Jesus Christ!

A life of faithful obedience to Jesus Christ is sure to provoke a hostile response from this fallen world system. Because this is true, Peter says that we need to be ready to give a defense of our faith, and he gives three necessary reasons why.

### **1. In the face of OPPOSITION (3:13-14)**

*“Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled.”*

Peter wants his readers to be well prepared whenever an attack for the faith comes. They needed to possess a ready defense in the face of opposition. His words are meant to spur them along to courage when faced with threats from their persecutors.

I’d venture to say that fear is one of the primary factors in keeping us from a ready defense. We fear what might happen to us as we stand up for the truth. Perhaps we fear losing our job, or losing a relationship, or losing popularity with a group of people. Fear must never keep us from the task of declaring the truth of the gospel.

For those that Peter was writing to, fear was something that they were having to deal with. He encourages them:

*“Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?”*

He asks a question that is meant to show how unusual it is for most people to harm someone else if they are ‘zealous’ for doing what is good. He explained this in verses 8-12.

**“Zealous”** — *word that refers to intense enthusiasm; refers to passion for a specific cause*

Christians ought to be the kind of people who are zealous and passionate for doing good. What are you the most passionate about as a person? The things that we are the most passionate about occupy our conversation. We make financial sacrifices for them. We want other people to see their beauty.

Peter says that we ought to be passionate for what is good. By the very way that we live our lives, we adorn the gospel and live it out before the eyes of a watching world.

**Titus 2:10-14—“...so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. For the grace has appear, bring salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”**

We've been saved for this purpose:

**Ephesians 2:10—“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”**

Now, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? And in the event that we are targeted for our faith, or we become the subject of an unfair attack, Peter reminds us that it is not outside the realm of possibility.

*“But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled.”*

Their suffering for righteousness' sake wasn't a sign that they were forsaken, nor were their circumstances to blame for something they had done wrong. Rather, it was a sign of God's blessing on them.

They were to be confident and courageous witnesses, not intimidated by the threats of their persecutors. Peter says they were to not be 'troubled.'

**John 14:1 — “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me...Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.”**

Faith, not fear. Why? Because our enemies might hurt us physically, but they cannot harm us spiritually.

Instead of harm, Peter says that we will be 'blessed.' And the word that he uses is the same word that is used by Jesus in the Beatitudes:

**Matthew 5:10 — “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**

There is no amount of harm that could ever come our way that will cause us to lose our inheritance in Christ. Not even death can take it away. We don't ever have to fear the threats of men nor the circumstances of life. Such is the confidence that Jesus Christ brings to our lives.

## **2. For the sake of OPPORTUNITY (3:15a)**

*“But 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...”*

Peter says that you and I need a ready defense in the face of opposition whenever it comes. And notice that he also says we need a ready defense for the sake of opportunity we will have to share our faith.

There is probably no more of an important subject than the responsibility that we Christians have to be intentional gospel witnesses. The Great Commission has long been approached as the great suggestion rather than the direct mandate that it really is. Evangelism and discipleship are tasks that we leave to the professionals. The only problem with that approach is that it is not biblical. Every Christian is a witness.

The professionalization of the ministry has been one of the main reasons that many Christians have failed to see themselves as agents in the mission. To be sure, God does gift some to be in full-time vocational ministry. But that doesn't mean that they are the only ones responsible for ministry and mission. According to what Paul wrote in the fourth chapter of Ephesians, those who are pastors are equippers. It isn't the pastor's job to do the work of ministry as if he were the only one who can do it; it is the pastor's job to equip the people of God for ministry.

In 1 Timothy 3, we find the pastor's qualifications. But in Ephesians 4, we find his job description.

You say, "Ok, but what does that really have to do with what Peter says here?"

The answer is everything. In this passage, the apostle Peter calls the church to be active in the mission. We need a ready defense because you and I will have the opportunity to speak up for Christ and share the gospel with those who are lost. Remember that Peter has been addressing the issue of submission. What

does that word mean? It is a compound word that means to be under direct orders. It is 'sub-mission.' It is surrender to the mission of God.

As a Christian, can you rightfully say that you are someone who is surrendered to the mission of God in the world? If making disciples is the task that has been given to every believer, how obedient are you in that task?

**E.M. Bounds** — *“What the Church needs to-day is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men—men of prayer...The church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men.”*

That involves men and women who are surrendered to Jesus Christ! Men and women who have a ready defense.

Pay close attention to the language that Peter uses here.

**“Defense”** — *same word we get our term ‘apology’ from or ‘apologetics’; speaks of a logical defense as in a courtroom*

The way that they responded to their unfair circumstances would provide them with opportunities to defend their faith. When their persecutors treated them unfairly, their humble and gentle response would afford them the opportunity to share the reason for their hope. Yet before that happened, they needed to be prepared. In their hearts, they needed to honor Christ the Lord as holy.

**“Honor”** — *sanctify or set apart*

Peter is alluding to something that the prophet Isaiah wrote when Ahaz, the King of Judah, was facing a crisis. The Assyrian army was threatening to invade, and the kings of Israel and Syria wanted him to join them in an alliance.

**Isaiah 8:12-13—“Do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the Lord of hosts, Him you shall honor as holy. Let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread.”**

When I live in the fear of God, I’m free from living in the fear of man. When Jesus Christ is Lord and God over all matters in my heart, then I don’t have to fear what others may say and do to me.

### **3. In the spirit of OPTIMISM (3:15b-17)**

*“...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. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.”*

We need a ready defense in the face of opposition and for the sake of opportunity. But what is our attitude supposed to be? The attitude in which we hold forth the gospel is very important. Are we to be sullen witnesses? Or, are we to be angry witnesses? Should we defend our faith in an offensive way? The gospel is an offense, but that doesn’t mean we need to be unnecessarily offensive in the way we go about sharing it with others.

Notice how Peter says that we also need to have a ready defense, but one that is in the spirit of grace and optimism.

He tells these believers that their defense of their faith is to be done with gentleness and respect. When they are being unfairly targeted, even suffering at the hands of their persecutors, the way they respond is critically important.

How do you respond when you're targeted by someone who disagrees with your convictions? I fear that far too many of us fight back in a spirit of defiance when pressed. When life gets tough, its easy for our claws to come out. We often say things that we later regret.

You can defend the faith and not be defensive in your attitude. We are not to become arrogant in the way that we hold forth the faith, but we are to be gentle and respectful. We are to respond without harshness. Why?

Peter says that it is important in order for us to maintain a 'good conscience' through our struggles. Your conscience serves as an internal witness, either approving or accusing your actions.

**Warren Wiersbe** — *“Conscience may be compared to a window that lets in the light of God’s truth. If we persist in disobeying, the window gets dirtier and dirtier, until the light cannot enter. This leads to a ‘defiled conscience’ (Titus 1:15). A ‘seared conscience’ is one that has been so sinned against that it no longer is sensitive to what is right and wrong (1 Tim. 4:2). It is even possible for the conscience to be so poisoned that it approves things that are bad and accuses when the person does good! This the Bible calls an ‘evil conscience’ (Heb. 10:22).”*

If your conscience is a window, the light coming through that window is the truth of God’s Word. The more time you spend in the Word, studying and obeying the Word, the more sensitive your conscience will be. This is the ‘good conscience’

that Peter mentions here. The Word of God sanctifies us, and keeps us sensitive to God's Spirit.

When your conscience isn't clear, you can't witness with power and effectiveness. If it is accusing you of some sinful attitude, or of something you have said or done, it squelches out an evangelistic spirit. A ready defense demands that we have a clean conscience.

**Hebrews 10:19-23—“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”**

The imagery used here harkens back to Levitical law and the cleansing of lepers (Leviticus 14).

The death of Jesus in my place ought to be my confidence. My conscience is now made clean by the precious blood of Christ. Peter says this much to his readers, so that:

*“...when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”*

We're living in a time where Bible-believing Christians are going to be subject to more criticism and attack because of our scriptural convictions. We can expect to be slandered, misquoted, and taken out of context. And this is especially true

of Christian leaders. We are going to face pressure like never before to conform to the culture.

Before such pressure comes our way, we need to prepare now. Be ready now. That way, we'll have a ready defense when difficult circumstances arise.

Peter says in verse 17:

*“For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.”*

If you suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. We can endure suffering and difficulty because we know that it is short lived. The light and momentary affliction of this life is producing in us a far more exceeding weight of glory.

**Thomas Watson** — *“Afflictions work for good, as they make way for glory...Not that they merit glory, but they prepare for it. As plowing prepares the earth for a crop, so afflictions prepare and make us ready for glory. The painter lays his gold upon dark colors, so God first lays the dark colors of affliction, and then He lays the golden color of glory...Thus we see afflictions are not prejudicial, but beneficial to the saints.”*

A ready defense is the only way that you and I can move forward with hope when life seems unfair.

If you're not a Christian, how do you cope with the pains of life? How do you interpret your difficulty? Perhaps you are in the midst of a crisis now. Maybe life doesn't seem fair to you. What you need to know is that God loves you. He sent His Son into the world to save you from your sin.

Jesus suffered in the sinner's place. When you look at His life, if anyone had a right to complain about the unfairness of life, it was Him. Yet His suffering was all part of the plan of God. Through His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, Jesus has opened the way to God. It is only through faith in Him and His finished work that men and women can be saved. Our conscience can now be sprinkled clean from sin's guilt and shame. Trust in Him now.

If you are saved, do you have a ready defense? Are you prepared for life's difficult circumstances? Do you live in such a way that others notice your hope in Christ, even when things don't go the way you'd like for them to go? And when people ask you for a reason why, what will you tell them?

*“Father, we praise You for the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. When life seems unfair from our perspective, we still have reason to rejoice. May we always be prepared to give a defense to those who ask us for a reason for the hope that we have within us. Amen.”*