

Introduction: I was a teenager who had been transformed by the new life and forgiveness of Jesus and his gospel. I just thought “there’s no way that every person I tell this good news to won’t want to immediately trust in Jesus.” My first few attempts to share my faith fell flat. Mainly because I didn’t have the right focus all the time. I was learning the finer points of Christian doctrine and sometimes felt the need to get into arguments with people about Trinitarian theory, or the baptism of the Holy Spirit or my theory on the end-times.

Crisis: I was on the campus of the University of Virginia and got into a discussion with a religion major who was outside the campus drinking. He was about half lit and I began to tell him that drinking alcohol was a sin. We got into it and the whole conversation was an exercise in futility. I even lost my temper with him and yelled at him to which he replied, “Now there’s a good Christian.” I walked away from that conversation knowing that I had blown it. I didn’t share the gospel and keep the focus on that life-changing message. I became arrogant and pugnacious and aggressive—definitely not helping my case; and I had not studied enough to really answer this young college student getting his masters in religious studies’ questions.

I got shellacked!

My mentors in the faith helped me to hone my approach and it has changed the way I approach witnessing about the gospel ever since. And it is the message Peter wants us to know as well.

The passage we are reading today has been used as a kind of prooftext to justify the development of what is called, “Apologetics” based para-church ministries. Apologetics comes from the Greek word *apologia* which is the very word Peter uses in our passage today to instruct Christians to be prepared to give a ready *apologia*, or a *defense* of the hope. So the word means “a defense.” Now, I would not in any way disparage your growth in apologetics. Paul uses this term in **Acts 22:1** appealing to the Jews to listen to his courtroom *apologia* (defense) of the faith. **In 2 Cor. 7:1**, Paul commends the Corinthians for making a reasonable defense against the false accusations of their pagan peers.

100% of the time in Scripture, this word *apologia* is used to describe a believer/disciple who has to defend themselves against false accusations against their character.

And I submit to you that is precisely the way Peter is using it here as well. This is not a general statement about defending *the faith with evidence and arguments*—this is a specific statement about defending your character in the face of untrue allegations of misconduct. This is why, in context, Peter is so adamant about them maintaining their Christian conduct. They are to be blameless in the sight of their accusers. They are to be holy and if they must be persecuted it is to be for doing good not evil. Submitting to God-ordained authorities, not in rebellion. Living according to the holiness of the gospel.

Peter's Aim: In this book Peter's aim for them is that they would be grounded and rooted in the gospel and its doctrines; live in such a way that is compatible and commensurate with the gospel; and be prepared to defend themselves and their character against questions concerning their hope in the gospel.

1 Peter 3:13

¹³ Who then will harm you if you are devoted to what is good?

Definition: Objective Good is a standard of right and wrong imposed upon us from without. That standard is always good regardless of our disposition toward it, or our knowledge of it. It's objective in that its goodness is independent of what we think, know, or believe.

We are called to be the standard bearers of what is good.

But what happens when you live right and are still persecuted for what you believe?

¹⁴ **But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear them or be intimidated,** Suffering for the gospel and the good moral values of the gospel is a blessing. A fate we should not fear nor be intimidated by. We should take courage, be strong, and find our assurance in God alone. When someone lights their hair on fire over the prospect of a political party or politician being voted into office that they don't like—that usually tells me there is a weak theology of God's sovereignty present. You should advocate, vote the values of the gospel as best you can. But if the other guy wins—God is still on the throne.

Having a strong theology of God's sovereignty isn't an excuse for civil passivity.

Example. Isa. 6; beyond the panic-inducing vision of Yahweh—Israel's God as the judge of all nations, Isaiah realizes something comforting about God. **In the year King Uzziah died.** There is an undercurrent of lament in that statement. How could you get a better administrator for the kingdom. Uzziah was thought to be as wise and prosperous as Solomon himself. As faithful as any king they had witnessed. And then in his prosperity—he took the incense and decided to act like a priest and burn the incense in the inner sanctum. He is struck with leprosy and spends the remaining years rotting away—his son ruling in his stead.

Then this faithful, wise, competent king—**he dies—now what? And in the year Uzziah died—Isaiah says—“I saw Yahweh; high and lifted up.”** Do you know that God is still reigning over the course of human history? **And he has good news in the midst of history. Whatever goes down, come what may—God has good news. And how lovely on the mountains are the feet of the ones who bring that good news?**

Do not fear or be intimidated by anyone who causes you suffering for doing what is good. For standing up for the gospel and the values of the gospel. Do not be intimidated at all.

Peter says ¹⁴ **“But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear them or be intimidated”**

1. We defend the honor of a holy God.

¹⁵ but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

Only 47% of Christians believe the Bible is inspired and is God's Holy Word.

Only 62% of all Christians say that Jesus is God.

78% of those with evangelical beliefs also believe Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God.

We must be prepared to defend Christ as God's unique and only Son.

- **It begins with knowing who Christ is.** Do you know what the Bible teaches about Jesus as God's only Son?
- **It's about realizing that Jesus is our Passover lamb.** Do you know that he's died in our place to do away with sins and bring forgiveness to all who have faith?
- **It's about confessing what is true about this holy Lord and Savior**—who has ascended to the right hand of power and now reigns over all things.

If I'm going to defend my hope in Jesus as Messiah and Lord—I need to *know that and count him as holy*.

The world, by contrast, will intentionally and unintentionally drag his holy name through the mire. They will profane and blaspheme his holy name which is above all names and authorities.

2. We defend our trust in Christ. Prepared to give the answers for our hope.

“ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”

Are you prepared to answer the question:

Why did you come to faith in Christ? What did God sovereignly place in your path; what people, what circumstances, what loss and heartache, what legalism or religious striving—whatever it was—can you articulate what finally drove you into the arms of his Grace?

Can you annunciate to your family and your friends what flipped the switch in you, when the light came on and you said “Ah. The gospel is true. Jesus is Savior and Lord and risen from the dead!”

Why Testimony? Because personal testimonies are powerfully persuasive. When you look at Paul in the book of Acts, you’ll see that just about every time he shares the Good News of Jesus—that good news is embedded in his story of conversion.

Are you prepared to share that faith, that story, that testimony with others?

Application: My encouragement to you is to write it out. Two or three pages, write it down; remember it—be able to help someone see the circumstances that brought you to faith in Christ.

3. We defend the truth of the gospel message.

Prepared to answer the common accusations and objections to the Christian faith.

- Do you know what you would say if someone were to ask you, “How can you believe in 2,000-year-old message about a dead rabbi who rose from the dead?” How would you answer that challenge and accusation?
- Do you know what you would say if someone challenged you, “How can you believe in God when there is so much evil and suffering in the world?” Are you prepared to share your faith in a hopeful future.
- Do you know what you would say if someone confronted you with alleged errors or discrepancies in the Bible? How would you answer it? What reasons would you give for your hope in Christ’s resurrection, your belief in God, and your trust in his Word?

Application: Two books—(1) Reasonable Faith by William Lane Craig; (2) The Logic of God by Ravi Zaccarias; (3) Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions by Greg Koukl; (4) I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist by Frank Turrek.

4. We defend our hope with kindness and calmness.

¹⁶ Yet do this with gentleness and reverence, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

There are two objections presently in our culture against the Christian faith we need to address:

1. Christianity is inherently racist because it's a white man's religion. So, that's just uninformed. Christianity is Jewish as to its roots. Jesus was a Jew, the disciples were Semitic.

2. The Cross is a symbol of hate. The cross is a symbol of redemption because it was there that Rome's wrath was poured out on a man who was innocent of the charges. That act satisfies the wrath and judgment for sin.

But we need to make the case for this with kindness and calmly.

This circles back now to his larger context. And also helps me to circle back to my earlier story. I lost that argument and I likely lost that soul on the campus of UVA that day. But I learned from my mistakes. I began to invite my friends from school over my house. I formed strong relationships with them and regularly shared my story—the reason why I came to faith in Jesus as a lost, hurting, aimless teenager. I shared with my friends the hope of the gospel and one-by-one, they put their faith in Jesus too.

This is an approach I call, "Gospel Diplomacy." It certainly isn't new with me.

Gospel diplomacy is characterized by:

- **Seeking to listen not only to be heard: Paul's stated method was to become all things to all men so that he might win some.**
- **Being careful not to give the Gospel a black eye** through rebellion and sin in my own life.

- **Living in the light of repentance when we do fail**—so that friends and family can see the grace of the Lord Jesus in action—in me a person who is a work in progress.
- **Investing in real relationships**—don't take this the wrong way—but we need to not treat people like they are our audience. They can never have fellowship in the Holy Spirit the way we can with other believers. But we can form real, lasting, relationships with neighbors and coworkers in order to “win a hearing” not just win a soul.
- **Confronting false doctrine in love** Sometimes, like Jesus with the Samaritan woman, you and I must address false teaching, especially if it blasphemes Jesus. But we do that with all gentleness and respect.
- **Let the message do its work** The gospel is the power of God unto salvation, not my tricky little evangelism techniques. In love, speak the truth and let the seed do its work below the soil by growing and/or being snatched away or choked out by the cares of this world etc. Only the condition of the soil can determine the productivity of the seed. And if the heart is receptive—God alone can make it grow.

We need to be kind, relational, listeners, but also *Advocates*. Because at the end of the day, Gospel diplomacy is Gospel advocacy.