

We Christians have an incredible contribution to make to the society in which we live by breaking the cycle of people returning evil for evil. When we do good, most people will return to us good. What a marvelous opportunity we are given—with immediate and measurable results. In the same way that people tend to return evil for evil, they also tend to return good for good. Usually by doing good, blessing comes to everyone involved. So Peter asks in verse 13: *“And who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?”*

Yet Peter also recognizes we live in a sinful world. There are times when even as we do good, when our motive is love, we still suffer for it. As Peter reminds us later in this chapter, that’s exactly what happened to the Lord Jesus who loved all and only did what is good. He paid the ultimate price for his good deeds by submitting to a criminal’s death on the cross. We, too, will sometimes suffer for doing good just as our Lord did. Jesus told us that it would be this way when he taught his followers in John 15: *“A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also”* (vss. 19-20).

To state the obvious, this is a very challenging way of life. But there is good news which should encourage us all. Peter shares it with the first century church and with all who might experience suffering because of doing good. He writes, *“But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened”* (v. 14). For sure, we are called to the marvelous ministry of retaliating with blessings. When we do, we will be blessed by God regardless of the response of the other person. Within this context, Peter encourages us to share the blessings of God with others. The “blessed” life is never to be kept for ourselves; it is to be shared with others.

Peter gives us three steps to follow in sharing our lives of faith:

First, “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord” (v. 15). This is one of those qualifying lines of Peter that I’ve been telling you about. It’s critical that we not miss it if we are to understand what Peter says next. The Christian faith makes no sense, nor does the Christian way of life ever work unless we *“revere Christ*

as Lord.” The word “revere” comes from the same root word as “holy.” Peter writes a great deal about the life of holiness in his first letter. As we saw in chapter one, he instructs us to “*be holy in all you do; for it is written: Be holy, because I am holy*” (1:15-16). This way of life is possible only when we “*in our hearts revere Christ as Lord.*”

We’ve heard Peter refer to Christian believers as “*a holy priesthood*” (2:5) and “*a holy nation*” (2:9). **To be holy is to be different.** It is to be like the Lord who is the personification of holiness. **To revere Christ as Lord in our hearts enables us to live in the truest sense Christ’s life IN US.** Lordship is the key to living in this way. In Luke 6:46 Jesus asks the question, “*Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?*” Jesus’ lordship must be lived out in our daily faith. If Christ is to be my Lord, he must rule my life. He must “call the plays” of my life moment by moment before the game clock runs out.

Samuel Wilberforce, bishop in the Church of England, once said that lordship could be defined with four words: ***Admit, Submit, Commit, Transmit.*** Why yes! We must *admit* our sin and need of a Savior. We must forsake sin and *submit* our lives to Christ as Lord. We must *commit* our lives to the Lord, day by day. And we must *transmit* or share his love and goodness to others. **The importance of transmitting is where I’d like us to focus next.**

So secondly, Peter writes, “*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have*” (v. 15). We Christians are always “exhibit A” of the grace of God at work in this world. That’s why Peter tells us “*to give an answer*” or “*to make your defense.*” Each one of these phrases in English come from the Greek word “*apologia,*” from which we get our English word ***apologetics.*** Paul uses this same word in Acts 22 when he makes his defense before the Jews in Jerusalem and in Acts 25 when he makes his defense to King Agrippa. To give an “*apologia*” means to give reasons or a rationale for what you believe, and by extension, for what you communicate through your way of life. Giving a reason for the *hope* that is communicated through us in the way we live and act is part of being a

Christian. Of course, Peter's instruction is based on an assumption that *we are living a life of hope*. And that hope is based on the lordship of Jesus Christ. In writing to a church made up of hurting people, Peter speaks about the life of hope repeatedly, as we have already heard. **Outwardly, these people had little reason to rejoice or have hope.** But because of Christ living in them, they displayed hope in their lives even when outward circumstances seemed **hopeless**. No wonder people asked them, "*Why are you filled with such hope?*"

Peter is telling us that when such questions are posed to us, we should not be **surprised**. Peter is saying that in a hostile and suspicious world it's inevitable that Christians would be called on to defend the **faith** they hold and the **hope** by which they live. In fact, we should always be ready to give an answer—a defense, an apologetic for our Christian faith. We need to be prepared to tell them that a quality of life like HOPE does not come from in us but rather comes from God's Holy Spirit dwelling within us as we follow Jesus as Lord.

Yet many of us resist the rewarding ministry of sharing our faith with others. We're like Charlie Brown's little sister, Sally, who once said to her brother, "I'm doomed! I need to write a report on rivers, and its due next week, and I know that I'm going to fail!" To that, Charlie Brown responded, "Well, why don't you work really hard and turn in the best report you can possibly write?" With that, Sally replied, "You know, that never even occurred to me!"

This is how many of us have lived the Christian life for much of our lives. We're afraid that someone is going to find out about our faith and accuse us of being a Christian! My dear mother taught my sister, my brother, and me the good news of Jesus and the stories of other Bible characters. Her memory is still a blessing to me today. But she was a proper Presbyterian lady, so discussion of her faith usually took place within our home or within the confines of our church. If someone were to ask her why she believed in Jesus it would scare the daylights out of her. Some of you may be surprised that when I sit down next to a complete stranger on an airplane, my first question is **not**, "**Do you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior?**"

I was trained in *Servant Evangelism* by Dr. Richard Armstrong at Princeton Seminary who taught us that we should meet people where they are, serve them in the name of the Lord, and then do our best to answer their questions about the Christian faith. Personally, I'm convinced that it's impossible to live the Christian life in secret. **And not only that, I believe it's impossible to have Jesus living in you without some of Jesus "leaking out" of you!** And that's what I believe Peter is teaching here! **Let the love and grace and hope of Jesus "leak out" of your life. And when that happens, be ready to give an answer to those who ask you about your life of faith.** In other words, share the love and grace and hope of Jesus Christ with others. Don't resist it. Don't hide it. Don't ignore it. **Share the life you have found in him!**

Third and last: "But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience" Peter says in verses 15 & 16. As we share the good news with others, we must do so in the spirit of Christ—with gentleness and respect and a clear conscience. The word for "*gentleness*" is *prautatos*, sometimes translated "*meekness*." Jesus taught in the Beatitudes, "*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth*" (Matthew 5:5). **To be meek is to be gentle, kind, and gracious—the opposite of being rude, insensitive, and arrogant.** To be gentle and meek is to be like Christ as he lovingly met people at the point of their greatest need. To be gentle and meek is to meet people where they are, in the spirit of "one beggar sharing with another beggar where to find bread."

To do this "*with respect*" means we do not talk down to others. Effective sharing and witnessing always takes place on eye level. We're certainly not any better than others. We have been forgiven by Jesus Christ, and we want to share the benefits of the life he gave us that comes from living under his lordship. We need to respond to others with the same *respect* that Jesus shows to all people. Our Lord never violates people. He never forces his way into their lives. He is gentle and respectful and loving. We also need to have this kind of *respect* for others. **But we will have it only when we have adequate respect for God. We must respect the Creator before we can truly respect those he has created.**

Peter knows it is vitally important for a Christian to have “*a clear conscience*” if he or she is to be used of God in sharing the Jesus way of life with others. We Christians do not have the option of living a double life or a secret life. God calls us to a life of transparency and authenticity. But in our hearts to revere Christ as Lord. The Spirit and the flesh are opposed one to another. One cannot walk honestly before God and others with a clear conscience unless he or she forsakes the works of the flesh and walks in the Spirit. In practical terms, Peter refers to us having a clear conscience in relationship to others and in our own relationship to God (3:21). To have a “clear” conscience requires that we ask for God’s forgiveness. To be “clear” is to be baptized in water, “*the pledge of a clear conscience toward God*” as verse 21 says.

Responding to others in gentleness and respect, and with a clear conscience, has some wonderful benefits for everyone involved. When we have done good to others, and they have spoken evil of us or reviled our good conduct in Christ, they will be ashamed, writes Peter. In other words, the Holy Spirit will use our good conduct as a means to convict them of their empty lives and their deep need for God’s love. Light will shine into the darkness—and the darkness will have an opportunity to respond to the Light of Christ! We have a tremendous opportunity to be salt and light to this hurting, lost world.

One last thing that I suggest we do when we are given an opportunity to share the good news of Jesus is to speak with “I” statements instead of “You” statements. **When we say “I” we testify. When we say “You” we invade and maybe accuse.** It’s usually quite difficult to argue with someone who uses the word “I” to talk about their own personal experience with Jesus, bravely stepping forward to say what a difference Jesus has made in their lives.

One of our Confirmation students this year shared these remarkable words in her **personal** statement of faith: “*God has my back, and I have faith he will help me through hard times. He is all we need to live a happy life. He is merciful to the end.*” Isn’t that beautiful? And doesn’t that say it all? **I truly hope that all of us can believe it and that all of us can say it too!** Amen.