

A Testimony

1 Peter 3:13-17

¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ 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; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may 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. (1 Peter 3:13-17 (ESV))

As I began studying through these words some weeks back, my first thoughts concerning this verse 15, the "preparation of a defense for the hope that I have within me", centered on "who" this defense was all about, the Lord Jesus, and rightfully so, because He truly is the "substance and the foundation" of my faith and hope. He is the one who through His shed blood on the cross has saved me to uttermost. He is the "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world". And it is by the ongoing presence of His Spirit within me that I can have the comfort of knowing that nothing can ever separate me from the love of God.

So then, Christ is ever and always to be at the center of our "hope".

And to know that "hope" itself is a precious gift from Him, so very, very crucial to our daily existence, because without hope we can quickly and easily get lost in discouragement and despair.

May we pause here for just a few moments and again give some consideration to this whole mystical concept of "hope, and begin by asking the simple questions, "what is hope, and how did you and I come to have such a precious and helpful and needful response within us?"

And may I begin by first reminding us that "hope" is not the vague and ambiguous concept that most people reduce it down to be. As I observe most all the people that I encounter each day, believers and unbelievers alike, when they express this matter of "hope" in their circumstances, their focus seems to almost always be on the belief that some uncertain "random occurrence" will take place that will bring them the desired result they are "hoping" for.

Much like a bingo player who watches the numbered balls floating around in the bingo dispenser, hoping that some random occurrence will take place causing the ball that they need to suddenly come up through the chute and give them the win.

Or as took place recently in the much publicized “Power Ball” lottery, people kept rushing out in droves to buy just one more ticket, hoping against hope, whatever that means, that one of their ticket numbers will be called and they will win hundreds of millions of dollars.

But even more common is the very casual use that most all of us make of the word “hope”. We say, “I sure hope that my boss will be kind to me today.” Or “I hope my paycheck will last until the end of the month”. Or, “I hope that my boyfriend will not cheat on me.” And on and on!

May I ask us to take just a moment and consider these kinds of uses of this word “hope” and to question what we are doing with that kind of thinking? Are we implying that we believe that all the matters of daily life are like those bingo balls, that with just one random poof of air, suddenly a circumstance will turn out better.

Are we implying that we believe that most everything that is taking place around us each day is a result of a series of random occurrences all working together to produce the next thing that takes place, that life is just a collection of random occurrences, and if we are especially “lucky” with the way in which all those random occurrences fall together, we will succeed or win or some other good thing?

Folks, think about this for a moment. If we allow ourselves to drift off into that kind of rationale, where does that leave the involvement of the hand of God. Are we, by our casual handling of this concept of “hope”, actually pushing aside and denying, even forgetting the ever-present, ever-loving, ever-working hand of God. Are we, by our behavior, casually pushing aside and denying that God is “sovereign”? Are we denying that He lovingly and providentially involves Himself in all the ordinary matters of our daily lives? Are we, by our behavior believing that God keeps Himself separated and distant from ordinary occurrences and perhaps only involves Himself in the “really big matters”?

May I say to us that whether we really mean to do it or not, that is exactly what we are doing! We are reducing God and His handling, His “sustaining” of all the things of His creation, down to nothing more than a casual, over the shoulder glance to see if we are doing OK, otherwise, all the rest of the matters of our day are like those bingo balls, floating around in that dispenser without purpose, bumping into each other and then

randomly popping out and either helping or hurting us depending upon our particular circumstance or need.

Folks, may I say that that kind of casual treatment of the Almighty God, the Lord Jesus, who created us, is an insult to His holiness. And perhaps that is the reason why God began this verse 15 with the words, “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy”. May I instead put forth some scripture truths that far better describe God’s real involvement in our daily circumstances. First in Psalm 139 we read,

¹ O LORD, you have searched me and known me! ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. ³ You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. ⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. ⁵ You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. ⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. (Psalm 139:1-4 (ESV))

These words should be humbling to us as we consider them, to find that God is not only immediately and intimately involved in all the matters of my day, my hopes and my desires and my wishes, He is also thinking ahead about all of my needs that are still yet to come.

And not only that, He is intimately involved in the very thoughts we think inside our minds, even right at this very moment, and at every moment.

And note the words in verse 5 of Psalm 139 that tell me that He “hems me in, behind and before and He lays His hand upon me”. Folks, that is intimate, loving, guiding and protective care, every moment.

And if we will only believe that these words given here are real, then all those good things that just “seem to happen” to us all throughout our day will take on a whole new meaning and we will know that they are not just “random good-luck occurrences”, but that they are really God’s own hand at work, making provision for us.

And why so many of us insist on living as if those moment by moment happenings of our life are just random occurrences, I’ll never know. I confess to you that I am far, far more comfortable trusting that I have a loving Father who is at every moment, knowing

my hopes, and inserting His big loving hand into my circumstances, than I would be just depending on some random occurrence to take place.

So then, may I convince you and me from these words of truth that our “hope” must never be casual, that we must never depend upon random occurrences for our provision, but rather instead, that our “hope” and our faith must be in the sovereign working hand of God.

Let’s again look at our scripture passage,

¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ 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; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may 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. (1 Peter 3:13-17 (ESV))

Again, at the heart of this passage is the instruction that we must stand ready and be “prepared to make a defense for the reason for the “hope” that we have within us”. And may I say that this readiness is not just the memorization of some scripture verses and a practiced presentation of what we know. It is that yes, and it is so very important. But we must also know that the validity our defense begins in other ways, sometimes long before we will be called on to actually voice our defense. In particular, our defense begins with our “character” that is shown to the people around us. Folks, our “character” must be able to match up to our words, else our argument for Christ will lose its power. If the evidence of our character, our “testimony”, can be brought into question, then so also will the validity of any defense that we might present.

So then, our “testimony”, beginning with the “silent witness” of our behavior and conduct and character that is first observable before it is spoken, is essential to the defense of this Hope that you and I have within us.

How does this work out in the ordinary matters of life? We see from these scriptures, and especially in the gospels, the word “hypocrite” mentioned often all throughout them, especially regarding the behavior and character of the Scribes and the Pharisees. Jesus said of them that they were “white-washed tombs”, looking so very good on the outside, while being clearly “rotted” from within.

Unfortunately for the average “hypocrite”, he is often the only one who cannot see his own failures. Everyone around him can clearly see the ambiguities and inconsistencies, but not so the hypocrite. That’s because there is a very special kind of blindness that afflicts a hypocrite.

And folks, such hypocrisy can reveal itself in many different ways. But is especially revealed in the manner in which we handle these truths of God, our saying that we believe one thing but then we live and act and talk and walk a different path. And it doesn’t even have to be a drastic difference, just enough off-center to reveal to those who observe us that we really don’t live what we say we believe.

And again, such things can especially be seen in our handling or mishandling of the Lordship of Christ. Do we say out loud that we really do believe the words we read a few moments ago about the intimate “hands-on” care and provisions of God, but then act in every other way like most of life is a series of happenstances.

Folks, other people, especially those that look up to us for guidance and leadership can see far deeper into our behavior and character than we might realize. It is then that our “defense of the hope that we have within us” will begin to be thrown into question and those that we want to minister to most, might then get discouraged and turn away. Or worse, they might decide to actually follow the path that we are on, and woe be unto them, and to us, if that takes place. One blind person leading another blind person is a recipe for serious failure.

One final point before we end this study for today. The need for our personal “testimony”, our “character” and our “behavior” to always be guarded carefully as we make our defense for the “hope” we have within us will be brought into strong testing on those occasions when we come under attack from those who would oppose us. And opposition is strongly suggested by some of these words in this passage today. Verse 13

¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ 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; yet do it with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:13-15 (ESV))

As verse 13 implies, in most of the daily transactions of life, if our witness and testimony and words of defense are right and righteous, then under most normal circumstances, we will not suffer serious harm for our “faith” and “hope” in Christ. But

then as verse 14 tells us, there will surely also be times and circumstances when we will suffer.

¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, (1 Peter 3:14 (ESV))

And then verses 16 and 17 also tell us,

¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may 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.
(1 Peter 3:16-17 (ESV))

Again, though we may not understand it or expect it, we will sometimes be called on by God to suffer. But here we are admonished that no matter what the circumstance or the cause, our response must always be with "gentleness and respect", at every turn demonstrating our testimony of "faith" and "hope" in Christ, and in Him alone.

Here again, just as our "hope" is not founded in a random occurrence, so also, the words of our "defense" must not be of a random nature, but carefully prepared and thoughtfully presented in the right way, at the right time.

So then, may we close with these reminders. Our daily witness, our daily behavior, our daily "testimony", will be the groundwork that will either help or will hurt our "defense of the Hope that we have within us". We must guard our daily "testimony" well, else the "defense that we make" will not be credible or effective. And we must present our defense with all gentleness and respect. Our listeners' eternity may depend upon our doing this thing right.

Finally, if we are called to suffer as we present a defense of the hope we have within us, then so be it! We will be blessed.

¹⁵ 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; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Peter 3:15-16 (ESV))