

IN YOUR HEARTS REVERE CHRIST AS LORD

1 Peter 3:8-22

Key Verse: 3:15

“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect....”

When we observe 1 Peter carefully, we find that it has an evangelical tone (2:9, 12; 3:1-2). For example, 2:9 says, “...that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” 3:15 says, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” This is the key verse of Christian apologetics. Based on this key verse, so many courageous Christians, such as Augustine, have defended the gospel truth. Together with them, all Christians are called to give the reason for our faith and hope. In today’s passage we find the words “evil,” “insults,” “deceitful speech,” “harm you,” “threats,” “speak maliciously,” and “slander.” These words imply that the early Christians were targets of attack both verbally and physically. In such a hostile environment, just to keep their faith was not easy. But Peter directed them to give the reason for their faith and hope in order to win over unbelieving people. There is a saying that the best defense is a good offense. In this February’s issue of Decision Magazine, Franklin Graham said this: *“Like the church in Thyatira that tolerated immorality in its midst, the evangelical church today has grown all too accepting of sin. The church is ducking the vital moral issues of our age. Rather than influencing our culture by being Gospel salt and light, the church has itself become influenced by the permissive culture in which we live.”* The moral and spiritual climate of America is becoming more anti-Christian year by year. We are all vulnerable to persecution; it could come at any time to any of us. We all need to be prepared. If we are not prepared, we can be wounded and defeated before fighting. But when we are prepared, we can turn the adverse situation into the time to glorify God. How can we prepare? Let’s learn from today’s passage how to prepare within the church, and how to live in a hostile world.

First, form a loving community (8). In an environment that is hostile toward Christians, forming a loving community is crucial; it is an essential part of evangelism. In verse 8, Peter exhorted believers, “Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.” To be like-minded means to have unity of spirit on the basis that

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Jesus is head of the church and Lord of all. We are members of Jesus' body. As each part of the body is related to all others and functions together with them for the good of the whole, so is each Christian. There should be harmony within the body of Christ. It does not mean that we all think the same or agree on every matter. But we do recognize that we are fundamentally one in Christ, and function in harmony—like an orchestra—to build up the church. To be sympathetic means to share the feeling of another, especially in sorrow or trouble. Sympathy and selfishness cannot coexist. People in the world are caught up in getting what they want; they are selfish and indifferent. To be sympathetic we need to overcome selfishness. We should not be indifferent, but aware of the struggles and trials of our brothers and sisters. When we share life together, sorrows dissipate and joy multiplies.

To love one another means to share brotherly love as family members. We are God's family members through new birth into a living hope. So we should not see each other as members of an organization, but as dear family members. Our relationships should be characterized by affection, trust, loyalty and faithfulness. To be compassionate means that in addition to sharing the sorrow or pain of others, we also desire to alleviate their suffering. This is the heart of God. God has compassion on us because he knows how we are formed; he remembers that we are dust (Ps 103:13-14). When Jesus saw people who were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd, he had compassion on them. So he healed the sick, taught the word of God, and gave them something to eat (Mk 6:34). He also taught his disciples to be compassionate toward the needy (Mk 6:37). To be humble is the key in forming a loving community. However, it is most difficult for sinful people to be humble because we are naturally proud. How can we be humble? It is possible when we have Christ's mindset. Though he is God, he humbled himself, came into this world, and became one of us. He served all kinds of people and finally gave himself up as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. When he rules in our hearts, we can be humble.

Why do we need to form a loving community? It is for our mutual edification. The world we live in is tough. People are selfish and greedy; relationships are superficial. With smiling faces, people take advantage of each other mercilessly. Naturally a lot of stress piles up as we live in such a world. But the Christian community, where our Lord Jesus reigns, is different. It is characterized by the love of God that builds each other up mutually. We

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can find understanding, healing, comfort and strength. This is the power source to overcome all hardships. Furthermore, a loving community reveals God's love to the world. This is the way God wants us to transform the world. Jesus said, "**By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another**" (Jn 13:35). In order to form this kind of community, each of us must learn how to deny ourselves, following Jesus' example. Let's make every effort to form a loving community.

Second, called to inherit a blessing (9-12). Verse 9 tells us generally how to live in a hostile world. It says, "**Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.**" It is common for Christians to experience evil or insults. The natural response is to repay them in kind, "**eye for eye, tooth for tooth**" (Ex 21:24). In fact, this may be just, but it fosters a spirit of revenge. Revenge begets more revenge in a vicious cycle that would leave the whole world blind and toothless. "**As the old saying goes, 'From evildoers come evil deeds'**" (1 Sam 24:13). Those who take revenge will become evil. Christians should be different. Peter said, "**On the contrary, repay evil with blessing.**" He echoed Jesus' words, "**Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you**" (Lk 6:27b-28). Jesus lived out these teachings. "**He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter...**" (Isa 53:7). On the cross, Jesus prayed for those who crucified him: "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing**" (Lk 23:34a). Jesus brought forgiveness, peace and healing to mankind and broke the cycle of revenge. His people are called to follow in his steps. This is the way of obtaining God's blessing.

In verses 10-12, Peter specifically supports his teaching about how to inherit a blessing by drawing on Psalm 34:12-16. Verse 10a says, "**Whoever would love life and see good days....**" Here, to "love life and see good days" is to live a blessed life. Everyone wants to live a blessed life. In order to live a blessed life, what must we do? **First of all, we must keep our tongue from evil (10b).** Living a blessed life is closely related to how we use our tongue. James says that the tongue is a small part of the body, yet it makes great boasts. It is like a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell...It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison (Jas

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3:5a,6,8b). Proverbs says, “**The tongue has the power of life and death...**” (Pr 18:21). Since the tongue can produce either death or life, wise people will guard their speech. **Secondly, we must turn from evil and do good.** Instead of spending our energy trying to repay evil and insult in kind, we must focus on doing good. **Thirdly, we must seek peace and pursue it.** This is the active process of bringing reconciliation and harmony in our relationships and environment. The word “seek” indicates lifelong pursuit. When we set our life purpose to seek peace and pursue it, we can become peacemakers.

When we hear the words “must...must...must” we may feel burdened. Someone may think, “Stop! I know this already but I cannot do it! I especially cannot control my tongue. I want to speak well of others, but blame and criticize instead.” Then what can we do? To begin with, we need to realize that the problem is in our hearts. Our words, desires and motives all come from our hearts. Jeremiah said, “**The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure**” (Jer 17:9). Jesus said, “**But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander**” (Mt 15:18-19). So our hearts must be transformed. How can they be? It would be great if we could wash our hearts with soap and water. When I was a boy, if I said a bad word at home, my parents made me wash my mouth out with soap and water. It left an impression, but it did not really change me. Then what can change our hearts? Hebrews 9:14 says, “**How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!**” Only the blood of Jesus can cleanse the stains of sin from our hearts. When our hearts are cleansed, we can keep our tongues from evil and do good. We can speak words of blessing and encouragement, and be peacemakers who bring reconciliation and harmony (11).

Verse 12 tells us why we should do good: “**For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.**” God watches over the righteous as the apple of his eye. He listens to their prayers. He provides for them, protects them and blesses them in many ways. He is their source of blessing and goodness. God is also the righteous Judge who sets his face against those who do evil. Many people do evil secretly, thinking that no one

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sees them. But God the Creator sees and knows everything (Isa 29:15-16). No one can hide their hearts or deeds from God. David said, “**Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there**” (Ps 139:7-8). Knowing God motivates us to live good lives that inherit his blessing.

Third, always be prepared to give an answer (13-22). In this part Peter tells us how to live a victorious life in the midst of suffering, remembering Jesus’ ultimate victory over all powers. In verse 13 Peter encourages eagerness to do good by asking, “**Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?**” In most cases, when we do good, it benefits others and they respond well. But sometimes when we do good, people will persecute us with evil intent. At such times we should have a conviction that we are blessed (14a). When the apostles proclaimed the full message of new life in the temple courts, they were arrested and flogged by the Jewish religious leaders. But they rejoiced because they were counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name of Jesus (Ac 5:41). This kind of suffering is blessed because it purifies our motives and cleanses us from false hopes. It produces perseverance, character and living hope in the kingdom of God (Ro 5:3-4). In this way we can participate in Christ’s sufferings. The problem is that when we suffer, fear creeps into our hearts. This fear may come through a parent’s threat to cut our relationship—including financial support—or through an employer’s threat to fire us, or through the threats of peers and loved ones to alienate us socially. When we are caught by fear, we become paralyzed and then compromise. So Peter said, “**Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.’ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.**” (14b-15a) What does it mean to revere Christ as Lord? It is to confess our faith in Jesus Christ: Jesus is my Savior, who saves me from my sins and death; Jesus is the Sovereign Ruler over all powers and authorities, including my life and future; Jesus is Almighty God who can protect us, provide for us, and empower us; Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords; Jesus is not one of the gods, but the only true God; Jesus is the only object of worship; Jesus is the only one we should fear (Lk 12:4-5). When we revere Christ as Lord in our hearts we are not afraid of anything else. Then we can be courageous to testify about Jesus anywhere to anyone.

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In order to testify about Jesus, we need to prepare. So Peter encourages us: “**Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have**” (15b). Since Peter wrote this, many people have engaged in apologetics in order to defend gospel truth scientifically, philosophically, anthropologically, and psychologically. But the most effective way is through personal testimony. Last Sunday night we heard the testimony of Dr. James Chin Kyung Kim. When he was 15, in the midst of fighting the Korean War, he accepted God’s love in Jesus while reading from John’s gospel. At that time, he made a vow to God: “If you save my life, I will give my life for the sake of China and North Korea.” God spared him. Later, he moved to the USA, became a citizen, and attained success in business. Then in 1988, he was invited to the Social Science Academy of China in Yanbean, as a visiting professor. He found many Korean Chinese young people who were living poorly. He remembered his vow made during the war. With a shepherd’s heart, he saw that they needed education and decided to establish the Yanbean University of Science and Technology (YUST). Though he was often misunderstood, he persevered until it was finished. He also worked to help North Korean people by providing food and clothes for those in need. When asked why he did these things, he was always ready to give an answer: “I am not a capitalist. I am not a communist. I am a loveist. I believe in Jesusism.” However, the North Korean government suspected him of being an American spy, arrested him, and sentenced him to death. Still, he was always joyful and full of hope in the kingdom of God. So prison guards thought he was crazy. Before his execution, he was allowed to write a last will and testament. In it, he appealed to the US government not to avenge his death. He also donated his organs to the Pyongyang Medical School. North Korea’s leader, Kim Jung II, heard of this and was moved by his genuine love. He said to Dr. Kim, “I respect your God,” and released him. When Dr. Kim arrived in China, he was met by hundreds of news reporters. But he did not speak ill of North Korea at all. He was gentle and respectful, keeping a clear conscience. Then those who spoke maliciously against his good behavior in Christ were ashamed (16). Sometimes, it is God’s will for Christians to suffer like this for doing good (17). Kim Jung II invited Dr. Kim back to North Korea and apologized to him. Then he asked him to establish a university in Pyongyang like YUST, giving him full authority to run the school. In this way the door opened for Christian teachers to go to North Korea and engage the best and brightest young people there with the gospel. Of course, not all of us are called to

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witness Christ in the same way as Dr. Kim. But we are all called to live with hope in God's kingdom and to be ready to give an answer to those who ask us about it. Let's pray that we may do so, and be prepared when the opportunity comes.

In verses 18-22 Peter reminds us of Jesus' suffering and victory. It is only because of what Jesus has done that our sufferings can have meaning. Jesus' suffering is different in quality than anyone else's sufferings because it is the only perfect sacrifice acceptable to God to atone for ur sins (18a). Jesus' life did not end with suffering and death. God made him alive by the Spirit. Verse 19 says that Jesus made proclamation to imprisoned spirits. This is controversial. But "spirits" seems to refer to the unsaved of Noah's day who heard the message of the Spirit of Christ through Noah's preaching (1:11; 2 Pe 2:5). They were disobedient, in spite of God's patience. They all perished in the flood. Only eight people, those in the ark, were saved through water (20). This water symbolized baptism which is the outward sign of the inward reality of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. This was made possible by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (21). After resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him (22). This victorious Christ is our Lord. So we can rejoice in suffering because we know that if we suffer with him, we will also reign with him (2 Ti 2:12). Let's listen to Peter's message: "**...in your hearts revere Christ as Lord...always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you....**" When we do, we can live a victorious life. We can be good witnesses of Christ for the glory of God and blessing of others.