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Living as a Sacrifice, Part 2

Grocery List: Evangelism, Apologetics, Defending the Faith, Cultural Engagement, Proselytizing, Bringing the face and affections of Christ to a lost and dying world, being a Witness...

These are just some of the expressions we use to describe our obligation to the lost. Most of these words denote an *offense-focused* strategy in which the Christian initiates a dialog with a non-Christian about the things of the Lord. While there is a legitimate place in our lives for this *active* approach toward ministry, nevertheless easily 95% of cultural engagement when it comes to the non-Christian will occur "*as we go*" -- and so it will be a response in the context of a dialogue with the non-Christian.

That clearly is the focus of 1 Peter 3. Peter addresses how we ought to respond when the non-Christian asks about our faith. Peter is writing at a time when the world in which he lived was about to turn its ire against Christianity -- and so the child of God -- so much so that many a

Christian would be "...deliver[ed] up to *the* courts, and scourge[d] in synagogues... brought before governors and kings for [Christ's] sake..." (Matthew 10:17-18a) And what was God's purpose in ordaining this providence? We are told in Matthew 10 that God ordained this persecution that the Christian might be in a position to give "a testimony to the [Jews] and to the Gentiles." (v. 18b).

And that soon would be the situation for those to whom Peter is writing. They too would stand before many a persecutor where they would be given the opportunity to give a testimony concerning Christ. As such, they needed to be, "...ready to make a defense to everyone who ask[ed them] to give an account for the hope that [was in them]..." (1 Peter 3:15b)

Yet, what does this mean? What goes into a ready response when it comes to the gospel? The elements which make for a ready response for the gospel teach us that being a witness of Christ will not be easy because it will involve conflict!

1 Peter 3:15b, "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense."

The word for "defense" references "a reply to an accusation" and therefore involves conflict. Truly, living as a Christian in this world will put you at odds with it; there is no way to avoid this! When God created this world, He established it to be a Kingdom over which both He and man would rule. Yet when Adam fell from the Garden of Eden, the kingdoms of the world were handed over to Satan (Luke 4:6). That is why when Christ came in His first advent, He re-established the Kingdom of God on this earth, yet NOT physically BUT spiritually in the hearts of His people (cf. Luke 17:21).

As such, this world is comprised of Two Kingdoms: The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan. Accordingly, today both the citizens of Satan's Kingdom and the citizens of Christ's Kingdom dwell side-by-side on this earth (cf. Matthew 13:30)!

In light of all of this, understand that any work for God's Kingdom is a violent attack on Satan's domain. *There are no neutral acts!* As Christ said, "He who is not with Me is against Me..." (Matthew 12:30a)! Accordingly, being a witness for Christ will involve conflict, whether you see it or not!

Secondly, being a faithful, bold witness comes not from looking within, but from looking upon Christ¹.

1 Peter 3:15a, "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts..."

It is no surprise that this exhortation was given prior to the call for God's people to be ready to share their faith. We've seen this now so many times... how an understanding of God's greatness makes us bold. We see it in Ten Commandments! Notice the basis for the second table of the Law is that we:

- Worship and serve exclusively the one and only true God.
- Do NOT bring Him down to our level and so make Him manageable.
- Come to know Him as He truly is- His character, purpose, plan, sovereignty, goodness, and grace.
- And so, delight in God!

The more we worship Christ, the more we will be emboldened in our service in Christ's Kingdom. Truly, boldness comes from looking upon Christ!

Thirdly, our witness must be focused upon "the hope" that is ours on account of the person and work of Christ!

1 Peter 3:15c, "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you..."

Our call is NOT to convince other people about Christ and His Kingdom (that is the job of the Holy Spirit). Our call simply is to be ready and so faithful "to share of the hope that is in us."

Now in this epistle, Peter at times uses the word "hope" synonymously with the content of our faith --- what we believe. And that is the case here. The essence of "the hope" that has and ought to continue to move us in Christ involves nothing less than the following:

- God indeed is Lord of the Universe! In the end, Satan and Satan's Kingdom will lose (1 Peter 1:2a; 3:15)!
- In the age in which we live, though it be one of conflict (1 Peter 5:8-9), God conquers Satan's kingdom by purchasing men and women out of slavery and so redeeming them at the cost of the death of His Son, Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:2, 20-21; 2:24).
- And so, on account of Christ's work on the cross, the sinner is reclaimed by God, forgiven his sin, and commissioned by God to be His servant for time and eternity (1 Peter 1:3-5).
- All of this will come to a head when Christ returns (1 Peter 2:12), conquers Satan, judges every man and woman who ever lived, casts Satan and His followers into the Lake of Fire (1 Peter 2:7-8, 12), renews this world, and so brings His people as His bride into a New Heavens and Earth where we shall reign with Christ forevermore (1 Peter 1:7; 2:9)!

Now if you believe this, if this becomes THAT which occupies your mind, determines your likes and dislikes, and drives you in your life (if this is your hope) -- you will be one who NOT ONLY is ready, BUT desirous of sharing this glorious news with those around you!

The fourth element is that our witness ought to be accompanied by grace and sobriety.

1 Peter 3:15d, “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”

It is NOT enough simply to give an answer; we must be eloquent-- says one commentary! And that which only will make us eloquent in our witness is a testimony backed by a life characterized by “gentleness and reverence.” Our witness is authenticated by our character and so our demeanor!

The word for “gentleness”-- *πραΰτης (prautēs)* -- is the word for meekness. It speaks NOT of weakness, BUT strength under control! The word for “reverence”- *φόβος (phobos)* -- is the word commonly translated in the Bible as “fear.” Yet here it does NOT speak of terror, BUT the genuine response of awe and reverence on account of the greatness of God.

Now notice that both words are NOT active, BUT *RESPONSIVE* words whose content is generated by something outside of us. In this regard, consider the inspiration for “gentleness” is the knowledge that the individual we are speaking with is a sinner, no different from ourselves. And so, we speak with compassion knowing that it won’t be easy to hear that one’s sin is offensive to God! David clearly learned this in His service for the Lord.

Psalm 39:11a, “When you discipline a man with rebukes for sin, you consume like a moth what is dear to him...”

And so, as we share, we endeavor to be “gentle” and this comes when we see that evangelism is NOT about presenting the gospel and so feeling good about ourselves, BUT genuinely loving God and loving people.

In addition, notice that the genesis of “reverence” flows from the knowledge that in Christ you stand on holy ground and therefore both your time and your activity as a Christian is set apart unto the Lord. When we witness knowing that God is the audience -- to whom belongs “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18) -- we proceed with a sense of awe knowing that each opportunity to share of Christ is a divinely ordained appointment chosen by God in eternity past!

These ideas combined and applied. Peter’s exhortation concerning the call that rests upon our lives as a living sacrifice is to speak with confidence and gentleness to any and all we might meet -- be they kind or harsh -- knowing that “this constitutes part of the day which the Lord has made”! (Psalms 118:24)

All of this is what is behind Peter’s call for you and me to “BE READY to make a defense to everyone who asks us to give an account for the hope that is in us.”

So, let’s put it all together. A ready witness involves living with the following conviction:

- Being a witness of Christ won't be easy; it will involve conflict! This addresses our expectation when it comes to life on this earth!
- A faithful, bold witness comes not from looking within, but from looking upon Christ! This impacts our objective and so what ought to be our focus as we endeavor to grow in Christ. In a phrase it is: Knowing and honoring Christ!
- The content of our witness is focused on "the Hope" that is ours on account of the person and work of Christ! This involves appropriating a biblical worldview by which our minds are renewed by the truth of God's word.
- Our witness ought to be accompanied by grace and sobriety!

This addresses the question of conviction. If our passion is knowing Christ and we are slowly "being transformed by the renewing of our minds" via the word of God, we will live authentic lives such that witnessing will NOT be a forced/staged activity, BUT the overflow of a passion for the Lord.

And yet Peter is not finished here. He has much more to say when it comes to being an effective witness for the Lord. Thinking of our ministry and so witness to the non-believer, in addition to being ready at all times to share of the hope that is within us, we must be true to the Lord and to ourselves.

1 Peter 3:16, "And keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame."

One of the things that can hold us back in our witness is a floating sense of guilt. We know we are sinners. That this might NOT detour us from being a witness, Peter takes on the question of "our conscience."

Biblically speaking, what is our conscience? One can use the analogy of a referee to describe what is meant in the Bible by our "conscience." The job of a referee is NOT to make rules for a game or to interpret the rules. RATHER, his job is to uphold the rules in order to provide for a fair competition. And so, it is with our conscience. The conscience is NOT the inward testimony of the law of God in our hearts NOR is it a functioning of the Holy Spirit. RATHER, it is human faculty that every image-bearer has which adjudicates an individual's thoughts, desires, and actions in light of a standard- whether that be the word of God, the mores of their culture, or a false religion.

As to the conscience's care, it may seem that the most important thing we can do as Christians is to be true to our conscience. And while indeed we do NOT want to get into the habit of violating our conscience (as we'll see), being true to our conscience ought NOT to be our chief concern. Listen to the warning given by Dr. Colin Kruse;

Seeing that all of human nature has been affected by sin, both a person's perception of the standard of action required and the function of the conscience itself (as a constituent part of human nature) are also affected by sin. For this reason, conscience can never be

accorded the position of ultimate judge of one's behavior. It is possible that the conscience may excuse one for that which God will not excuse, and conversely it is equally possible that conscience may condemn a person for that which God allows. The final judgment therefore belongs only to God (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:2–5). Nevertheless, to reject the voice of conscience is to court spiritual disaster (cf. 1 Timothy 1:19). We cannot reject the voice of conscience with impunity, but we can modify the highest standard to which it relates by gaining for ourselves a greater understanding of the truth. (*2 Corinthians*, TNTC, pp. 70-71)

Because our conscience is NOT the ultimate judge of what we ought to do AND because it is fallible (due to a misunderstood rule book), we conclude that the most important thing we can do as it relates to our conscience is to make sure that it is properly informed. Assuming that is the case, the second most important thing we can do when it comes to our conscience is be true to it -- which is what is behind the exhortation here to "keep a good conscience". Now, how does this relate to witnessing? It is very simple: the first step in any fall into sin is a wounded or neglected conscience!

In this regard, the objective when it comes to our personal witness as it relates to our conscience is "...that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame."

This tells us two things:

- (1) Once again living out the Christian life will involve conflict with the world.
- (2) We must ensure that whatever conflict we do have with the world it is on account of our upright behavior and not sin. That is what is behind verse 17.

1 Peter 3:17, "For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong."

In this regard, understand a very important truth: There is something far worse than living in the world and never opening our mouths to talk about Christ. And that "something worse" is opening our mouths and talking about Christ as one who has compromised their witness with unrepentant sin. Remember Paul's indictment of his countrymen in Romans 2.

Romans 2:23-24, "You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? For 'the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,' just as it is written."

We are all sinners such that a watching world will know that we are not perfect. But there is a massive difference between struggling with sin and giving in to it! When we endeavor to serve the Lord from the latter position, we dishonor God and compromise our witness!

Encounter with a Christian in Jail¹

A pastor was preaching in a prison. After his sermon, one of the prisoners came up to him, thanked him, and told him that he was a fellow minister; he worked as a youth pastor! When the preacher asked why he was in prison, the youth minister said, "I got fourteen traffic violations and so I'm serving three months." The preacher responded, "Do me a favor, will you? Don't let people know you're a Christian. It doesn't help the cause."

I think that preacher was right on here! We are the reputation of Christ in this world. Accordingly, it behooves us NOT to endeavor to be perfect (for that will never occur in our lives on this side of the grave). RATHER, it behooves us to "keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which we are slandered, those who revile our good behavior in Christ may be put to shame." This implies repentance and so the faithful handling of our sin -- which would involve at least these three things:

- (1) Confessing that what we have done is wrong/sinful, that it violates God's standard and so is against God, and that it truly is our fault.
- (2) Seeking forgiveness NOT ONLY from offended parties, BUT all who might have witnessed our sinful act or attitude.
- (3) Living in light of the joy and gladness that comes from the knowledge of forgiven sin! In other words, our witness is NOT that of a perfect people, BUT of a forgiven people!

When we prove faithful to this, we will be living and ministering with a good conscience!

¹ Shared by John MacArthur in his sermon, "How to Destroy Grace Church, Part 2" preached December 30, 1979.