

1 Peter 3:8-17 (ESV)

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

¹⁰ For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; ¹¹ let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.

¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

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.

Last Monday, was June 6th, the anniversary of D-day. A voluntary prayer breakfast was planned at Fort Riley Kansas. The speaker was to be retired American Delta Force hero General William Boykin.

However the event was cancelled because a freedom from religion group objected to General Boykin’s Christian convictions. In a statement the group’s founder said this: (picture)

General Boykin is a “homophobic, Islamophobic, fundamentalist Christian extremist.” He sows hatred and heinous divisiveness with his sickening creed of fundamentalist Christian supremacy, primacy, exclusivity and triumphalism.” Boykin, Weinstein complained, is nothing more than a “world class bigot”.

How do you respond to something that vitriolic? That’s what our passage today is all about. You may not ever be vilified in public because of your faith, but all of us will in some way have to be prepared to give a reason for the hope that we have in Christ, and sometimes that will come in a hostile environment.

This is the second part of a series titled “Seasoned with Salt”. That’s taken from Colossians 4:6.

Colossians 4:6 (ESV)

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

How we communicate with one another reflects what is going on in our hearts. JESUS said that “it is out of the overflow of the heart that the mouth speaks.”

This morning we’re dealing with how we can communicate Christ even at those times when what we believe is coming under attack.

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,

In a culture that is becoming more and more abrasive in its public and private discourse, how can Christians demonstrate civility?

The word civility means showing regard for others by being gracious and respectful to everyone, especially those that you have differences with.

As our culture becomes more and more secular, people are going to question what we believe and why we believe it. This is only going to intensify as we head toward the national elections.

This election cycle is going to be very different from the past. In all likelihood we’re not going to have a national spokesman who will articulate a Biblical worldview.

It will be our responsibility to give answer to those who question the reason for our hope in Christ.

In an increasingly more hostile culture that demeans Biblical Christianity, how can we season our words with salt?

Obviously this is broad subject that can be addressed from several different perspectives. We communicate with others in so many different ways.

- **Personal and family relationships** (our words hit very close to home)
- **Social conversations**
- **Political discourse**
- **Interactions with those in positions of authority**
- **Private communications/ including social media**
- **How can you communicate in a God honoring way with competitors, rivals, or adversaries in business, commerce and with those in the service industry?**

There are also the manifold emotions that we all experience when we interact with others. What does the Bible say about how we should handle:

- **Those who insult or belittle you?**
- **Those who are angry with you (or you with them)?**
- **Is there a proper way to deal with those who are duplicitous; who speak one way in front of you and another way behind your back?**

Then with today's passage; how should you interact with those are openly hostile to your deepest beliefs and convictions?

In other words, is here a Christ honoring way to speak the truth in love even when the subject matter is difficult and your emotions are highly involved?

There are three main categories that we'll use to approach these matters.

1. **Character** (humility; self-control, respect & gentleness)
2. **Wisdom** (discernment; propriety & understanding)

3. **Sanctification** (the battle between the flesh and the spirit)

There's far more to being civil than just being nice. There are millions of nice people in the world who do not know Christ. There's a higher motivation for believers than just getting along with others.

The highest motivation is our first point: **Honor Christ as LORD**. What we say and how we say it reflects our standing with the LORD.

1 Peter 3:8-11 (ESV)

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. ¹⁰ For "Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; ¹¹ let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.

When your faith is challenged, when you are vilified by those who attack your deepest convictions, then more than ever, **honor Christ as LORD**.

You belong to him, not to this world. JESUS said, "if the world hated me, it will hate you as well." He told us to "bless those who curse you and pray for those who abuse you."

Honoring JESUS as LORD means that our ultimate allegiance is to Him. Our standing with Him matters more than our standing with the world.

The hymn writer put it this way: Friends may fail me, foes assail me, He my Savior makes me whole.

Honoring Christ as LORD means that we live in such a way that our words, speech and conversations are seasoned with salt, showing graciousness and kindness to everyone. (everyone means everyone)

The ESV translation is especially helpful here. Peter speaks of suffering for righteousness sake. He says that you should have no fear of those who would bring you harm, "but in your hearts honor Christ the LORD as holy."

The Lordship of Christ is a matter of the heart. The heart is more than just your feelings and emotions. Your heart or your spirit is the guiding principle which governs your thoughts, words and actions. David put it this way:

Psalm 19:14 (NIV)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Honoring Christ as LORD involves your words, your thoughts and your motives as well as your actions. When you are angry, when you are offended, when you want to lash out at somebody, **what is controlling the words that come out of your mouth?**

Your emotions and your passions will lead you down one path, **honoring Christ the LORD** as holy will take you in a different direction altogether.

- **Public discourse** today is driven by the demeaning insult or the snappy comeback.
- **Social media** gives a forum to those who wish to vent their opinion and views without the nuisance of face to face interaction.
- **Private conversations** are far too often so trivial that they are void of any meaning or substance.

Honoring Christ as LORD means that JESUS is always relevant no matter who or what you're talking about. Every conversation, every interaction, every encounter is an opportunity to honor Christ by what you say.

With that in mind, we are to always be prepared.

1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)

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...

The admonition here is twofold.

1. Be prepared to interact with those who question or oppose what you believe;
2. Be ready to defend your deepest held convictions.

If you have more than a surface level faith, be prepared for those who will wonder if you're in your right mind.

People will question your views, your morals, and your lifestyle. But those things aren't the real issue.

The real issue is Christ. Why would you or anyone else place their trust in someone who lived over 2,000 years ago?

In years past, matters of faith were assumed without question by most people. There was almost a social expectation that you have some sort of belief in a higher power of some kind or another.

That is not the case today. People today don't mind being thought of as spiritual, but they don't want to be tied to any particular creed or doctrinal stance.

According to the Pew Research Center the number of Americans who do not identify with any religion is now at 20%. Among young adults it's up to 32%.

Those who consider themselves unaffiliated by any religious tradition are called the Nones. They are those who either agnostic, atheistic or indifferent to matters of faith.

The common view is that being spiritual but not religious allows one to pick and choose not only what you want to believe, but it allows for more flexibility in matters of lifestyle choices.

People in the west find it odd that anyone would limit their options based on a belief that we are answerable to God or anything that is metaphysical.

The ethics of the sexual revolution today categorically rules out any notion of right and wrong grounded on Biblical values. To thine own self be true is what guides our culture.

In today's world we have to be prepared to answer questions about our view of marriage, cohabitation, divorce, sexual expression, gender identity and a whole host of related issues.

But again, the real issue is always JESUS Christ. We don't argue for just a moral code, but for the Lordship of Christ. He alone is worthy of our worship and obedience.

What we must be prepared for is a defense of the Gospel. This is the classic text for Christian apologetics; the defense of the faith.

1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)

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...

Apologetics is not apologizing for the faith, but defending it. Why do we have hope, even in a world that can seem so harsh and cruel?

We believe that there is a God; we are not here by chance. We are separated from God because of our sin which has brought havoc into the world.

But the hope that we have in this world is found in the person and work of JESUS Christ. By his death, resurrection and ascension we can be reconciled to God. That gives life eternal significance, even if bad things happen to us.

So it's out of gratitude for what Christ has done, that we seek to honor Him in every aspect of our lives.

The good news of the Gospel isn't that if we're good enough, God will accept us in the end. That's not good news, because none of us are "good enough."

JESUS is the reason for the hope that we have. When that becomes the basis for how we look at the world, it affects the way we interact with others.

Let me give you an example from what I shared a couple of weeks ago.

Dr. Russel Moore is a theologian who wrote an editorial piece in the New York Times. It was critical of Donald Trump's lack of civility in this election process that we've had to endure.

Mr. Trump responded with a tweet that said: **"Russel Moore is truly a terrible representative of evangelicals and all the good they stand for. A nasty guy with no heart."**

The news media loves this kind of feuding, especially among conservatives. So Dr. Moore was invited to appear on several cable news shows.

They asked him to respond to Mr. Trump's tweet, fully expecting Dr. Moore to insult Donald Trump back and to escalate the feud. That's been the mode of operation throughout this campaign season.

Instead Dr. Moore said this: "Mr. Trump is correct. Of course I'm a nasty guy who has no heart. That's why I need forgiveness of sins and redemption through the Gospel of JESUS Christ. We sing hymns that say the same thing. Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me."

That completely stunned the interviewer on MSNBC. He was not expecting that kind of response. But the Gospel is just like that. It is counterintuitive.

We are to bless those who curse us. We are to love our enemies. We are to speak well of those who insult us. We are to outdo one another in showing honor.

That takes us to our last point. (outline) Always be 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.

In the beatitudes when JESUS said, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" the impression often is made that meekness is synonymous with being soft spoken and nonassertive (meekness means weakness).

But one can hardly say that of JESUS himself. He called the Pharisees a "brood of vipers, and children of the devil." He overturned tables in the Temple courts and pronounced judgment on the hypocrites.

The Apostle Paul asked for prayer that he might preach the Gospel boldly without the fear of man. That got him in trouble. In fact he got in such a heated argument that he had to apologize that he called the high priest Ananias a "whitewashed wall."

The imprecatory psalms called for the destruction of the writers enemies. "Do I not hate those who hate you?" (Psalm 139)

Speaking boldly in defense of the Gospel will sometimes cause all kinds of friction between people. Speaking the truth with love will not always make for pleasant conversation.

But God is the one who knows the thoughts and intentions of our hearts out of which our words flow.

When your faith is challenged; when you are in an unpleasant conversation, discussion or confrontation, your words must be seasoned with salt.

Speak in such a way that you convey respect to the one you're talking to. When you need to express your differences, do it with gentleness.

Galatians 6:1 (ESV)

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

The temptation here is to allow your emotions to control what you say and how you say it. That happens to the best of us.

The reason for your hope is that you belong to Christ. He is your advocate. He is your justification. He will vouch for you and defend your honor.

I want to close with one of the most eloquent examples of someone who defended the essence of our faith. It came as a letter from a mother of a special needs child to her doctor.

The doctor had recommended that this woman terminate her pregnancy. This mother weighed her words carefully, and she wrote the following:

Dear Doctor,

A friend recently told me of when her prenatal specialist would see her child during her sonograms, he would comment, "He's perfect." Once her son was born with Down syndrome, she visited that same doctor. He looked at her little boy and said, "I told you. He's perfect."

Her story tore me apart. While I was so grateful for my friend's experience, it filled me with such sorrow because of what I should have had. I wish you would have been that doctor.

I came to you during the most difficult time in my life. I was terrified, anxious and in complete despair. I didn't know the truth yet about my baby, and that's what I desperately needed from you.

But instead of support and encouragement, you suggested we terminate our child. I told you her name, and you asked us again if we understood how low our quality of life would be with a child with Down syndrome. You suggested we reconsider our decision to continue the pregnancy.

From that first visit, we dreaded our appointments. The most difficult time in my life was made nearly unbearable because you never told me the truth. My child was perfect.

I'm not angry. I'm not bitter. I'm really just sad. I'm sad the tiny beating hearts you see every day don't fill you with a perpetual awe. I'm sad the intricate details and the miracle of those sweet little fingers and toes, lungs and eyes and ears don't always give you pause. I'm sad you were so very wrong to say a baby with Down syndrome would decrease our quality of life.

Because, you see, Emersyn has not only added to our quality of life, she's touched the hearts of thousands. She's given us a purpose and a joy that is impossible to express. She's given us bigger smiles, more laughter and sweeter kisses than we've ever known. She's opened our eyes to true beauty and pure love.

Our words, written or spoken, are important because they reveal what is going on in our hearts. Yield your heart to Christ.

When you are in a tough situation, when it's tempting to use your words as a weapon, let people instead see the truth, goodness and beauty of your Savior.

When you could have been rightfully condemned, JESUS spoke in your defense. Now, stand for Him.