

1 Peter 3:15 Being Ready to Speak Up.

Context/ Background

- Persecution, suffering. That Christ suffered for us and for our sin. Through our baptism we have willingly associated ourselves not only with the resurrection but also the suffering of Christ.
- Presupposes an understanding of the hope we have in Christ.
- We are resident aliens – different from others.

1 Peter 3:15 'But acknowledge Christ the Lord as holy within your hearts always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is among you; yet do it with gentleness and fear'

Acknowledge the holiness of Christ the Lord within our hearts

Beginning of the verse is difficult to translate but means something like 'Declare or acknowledge Christ the Lord as holy'.

The important issue is that we must acknowledge Christ *within our hearts*. We can not begin to outwardly declare or acknowledge Christ as Holy if that is not within us.

"...preaching the gospel to ourselves every day"

..preaching the gospel to ourselves every day gives us hope, joy, and courage. The good news that our sins are forgiven because of Christ's death fills our hearts with joy, gives us courage to face the day, and offers us hope that God's favor will rest upon us, not because we are good, but because we are in Christ." Jerry Bridges 'Discipline of Grace.'

Are we acknowledging the holiness of Christ the Lord within our hearts?

Always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you

Here the language of the courtroom is being used suggesting that we are "on trial" every day as we live for Christ in a non-Christian society.

Jesus also warns us that we will meet hostility when we share our faith. There is a challenge to following Jesus, to changing the centre of people's universes from themselves (which is generally what the world teaches) to Jesus being the centre. We need his help to meet these challenges, to be authentic witnesses to his truth. There is a sense that, particularly in the UK, people haven't so much rejected Jesus, as simply don't know who he is. They have had no teaching about him, have never been to church, have never met any Christians, or at least any Christians who have explained their faith to them. See John 15:18-25 From 'Word-on-the-Web.'

How do we cope when people are hostile towards us because of our faith?

How do we respond to the fact that many people around us know nothing about the Christian faith?

[Give] a reason for the hope

Something is being said here about declaring outwardly what we know inwardly. Just as God's holiness is made known among the Gentiles through his people, Israel so Christ's holiness is made known by Christians who confess him as Lord, even in suffering and persecution. The task of a holy people is to make known to the world the Holy One who called them Through Christ's resurrection, we are reborn "to a living hope" (1 Peter 1:3). It is this hope that distinguishes Christians from non-Christians.

Have you been reborn to a living hope?

The hope that is *among you*.

We are a hopeful people.

Like the original readers of Peter's letter we have 'hope' in common and which identifies us as Christians. For people to question our hope they must know something of it in order to demand an explanation.

To what extent do people recognise us as a hopeful people here at USBC?

Do it with Gentleness and fear

'Never add your own offensiveness to the offence of the cross'

'Fear' – the same word used in v14 and v15 – don't be fearful about people but have fear of God. See Acts 5:29 - Peter said, "Fear God and not man"

Whom do we fear?

How may we declare our hope:

- When people are hopeless?
- When people are prejudice and make the assumption that some people are beyond hope?
- When people ascribe Christian hope to another source (luck, fate, the stars etc.)?
- When we are criticised for our faith?

Small Group Questions.

Spend some time quietly reflecting on 1 Peter 3:15

Nigel Coles WEBA Regional Minister wrote in a recent prayer letter, 'Peter highlights two words which seem to have gone missing in the vocabulary of the Church 'hope' and 'holiness'. Our own society continues to be increasingly focused upon the here and now, but increasingly also aware of the shallowness

and shortfalls of materialism. People have little hope it seems. In such a place surely the time is ripe for many people to hear good news which can translate hope into their lives. That's where our holiness in living out this good news found in and through Jesus comes in. Hope is caught and it's caught most easily when it can be seen in place in someone else's life. Now, how much of our Church life together enhances hope and encourages holiness in the life of a typical church member? Because it's there where the impact is to be made.'

What is your response to this?

Spend some time considering some (or all) of the questions which arose out of the sermon.

1. Are we acknowledging the holiness of Christ the Lord within our hearts?
2. How do we cope when people are hostile towards us because of our faith?
3. How do we respond to the fact that many people around us know nothing about the Christian faith?
4. Have you been reborn to a living hope?
5. To what extent do people recognise us as a hopeful people here at USBC?
6. Whom do we fear?
7. How may we declare our hope:
 - When people are hopeless?
 - When people are prejudice and make the assumption that some people are beyond hope?
 - When people ascribe Christian hope to another source (luck, fate, the stars etc.)?
 - When we are criticised for our faith?