

“An Answering Witness” Part 2

Holiness

1 Peter 3:13-17

Dr. Bruce Bickel

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Bruce: Good morning, men.

Men: Good morning.

Bruce: Let’s go before the Lord and know that He is God. In the silence of our stillness let’s recognize His marvelous love for us. (*Music.*)

Oh, how marvelous, oh how wonderful is our Savior’s love for us! Father, we are humbled by Your love, Your mercy, Your grace. We’re humbled by who You are in Your character and Your nature. Father, we just pray that You would remove all of the frustrations of this week, that we would have our minds focused upon You clearly this day, to think on those things that are lovely, beautiful and wonderful, as we ponder Your grace and mercy to us. Open our eyes now, Lord, that we might behold You more clearly for Christ’s sake. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: The passage I call to your attention this morning is found in 1 Peter chapter 3. We’ll be looking at verses 13-17, reading from the English Standard Version of the Bible. May God be pleased to open our eyes that we might behold Him more clearly for Christ’s sake.

“Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that when you are slandered those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.” This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Bruce: Amen and amen. If you wanted to go to somebody and ask him how to give the greatest testimony you could give of your life, in our culture today we would probably go to some marketer, somebody who could teach us how to use Power Point, somebody who could jazz up our comments to make sure that the testimony we were going to give would be the most excellent one possible. And we would go to somebody who we would say did it so well that every time that I’m asked, I ought to emulate him. I want to copy him.

What I find interesting is that in this passage today, the one who is going to teach us how to give a good testimony failed.—Peter. Peter is the one who, when somebody said, (*Paraphrase*), “Aren’t you a follower of Jesus?”, he says, “I don’t know Him.” That’s the last person we would want in our culture to go to to say, “Teach us how to give a testimony defending Christ,” because he was the one who blew it! More than anybody

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else he had the opportunity to give a good testimony about his following the Lord Jesus Christ, and he blew it.

Yet in the sovereignty of God’s mercy and grace and His wisdom, this is the one who is going to teach us how to give a good defense for the faith that we have in Christ Jesus. Peter, the one who failed, is the one who is going to teach us.

Sometimes I’m just amazed at the Scripture that the one who teaches us what we need to be is the one who wasn’t what he should have been. And that was Peter. And yet Peter is the one who says, as it were, “Look. I know what it’s like to fail. I know what it’s like not to do it correctly. Learn from me, and don’t reinvent the wheel.”

So Peter is going to be the one today, friends, who is going to teach us how to give a defense for the hope that we have within us.

Now previously Peter has been teaching us about holy living, about how to maintain holy relationships. He’s basically been teaching us in the previous chapters about how we are to relate to people inside the church with harmony, sympathy, brotherly love, with compassion and with humility. And he has also been teaching us how to have holy relationships with people outside the church, the people of this world and of the world system. And he says that you don’t overlook their evil. You overcome their evil with acts of goodness.

And now he says, as it were, “Look. There may be a time because of your holy conduct”—and notice that in the Scripture conduct precedes communication. Oftentimes when somebody says, “Are you a follower of Christ?” Why is it that they ask us that? Ideally Peter is saying that they’ll see the conduct that you have that is so holy in your relationships with people inside the church as well as outside the church. People see that and that might cause them to ask this question. “How in the world can you live like that?” Peter now says that here is how you give a defense for the hope that’s within you.

But you see, we need to understand this. Conduct, holy living, precedes communication about our faith in Christ. In other words, why is it that somebody wants to ask you that question? It’s not because you’re such a great speaker. It’s not because you’re such a great writer. It’s because they’ve seen something in your life. They’ve seen something in the way you relate to people inside the church with harmony, with sympathy, with brotherly love, with compassion and with humility. They see that. And they come to you and say, “How are you able to do that in the midst of how you’re being treated?” Peter is going to teach us how to do that today.

Somebody might come to you and say, “How is it that you’re overcoming evil by acts of goodness? How do you do that? What motivates you to do that? In the way that you’re being treated at work, how is it that you can overcome that evil without overlooking the evil? You overcome it with good works. How do you do that?”

Peter is going to teach us how to do that. This is what I call an answering witness. It’s an answering witness. Our witness is an answer to our conduct. It’s not an answer to our knowledge, to our theological position—although that is what informs our conduct, certainly; doctrine precedes conduct. But Peter is going to teach us this. When somebody comes up to you and says, “What’s the reason for the hope within you?”, the reason they’re doing that is because they are seeing something in you. They’ve not

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necessarily heard something from you but they’re seeing something in you, and that is how you maintain holy relationships.

So let me walk you through what Peter teaches us because Peter is more qualified than anybody else to teach us how to give an answering witness to the faith that we have within us. Let’s see what the apostle Peter teaches us. Look at your notes today, your handout number 19.

Last week he taught us that there’s a protection within the believer that all starts with this, that you and I have a right view of goodness, we have a right view of suffering. And if you have a right view of suffering and a right view of goodness it’s based upon your right view of Christ. He says that you honor Christ as Lord. Christ already is Lord, friends. You don’t make Christ anything. You accept Christ on His terms. He is Savior and He is Lord. You don’t trust Him as your Savior and make Him Lord later by a second event. God has already beaten you to the punch. (*Laughter.*) Christ *is* Lord, and what he is saying is to recognize that. Treat Him as who He is. Set Him apart. Sanctify Him.

That doesn’t mean that you make Him holy. It means that you treat Him with all the dignity and respect that you can because you recognize that He is your Lord. It means that you stand in awe and reverence of Him. You and I have to have the right view of Christ.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: And when you and I have the right view of Christ we’re going to have the right answer when somebody comes and says, “What is the reason for the hope that you have within you?” It’s because you have a right view of Christ. It’s because you have a right view of suffering. It’s because you have a right view of goodness. You see, those things precede your answer, And that’s why I call this section “An Answering Witness.” Here is how you and I are to answer someone who says, “How can you do that?” You see, something in your conduct has caught their attention. And by catching their attention you are now positioning yourself to explain the reason for the hope that’s within you.

Notice the passage again. “Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. But in your hearts honor Christ as Lord.” That means sanctify Him, set Him apart. Treat Him with reverence, dignity and respect because of who He is in His Person as well as who He is in His position.

“The Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that is within you.”

Now notice. The reason you give a hope is because of this. You have a right view of Christ! Notice what precedes you having a good defense for your faith. It’s because you have a right view of Christ.

Some of you had the opportunity to hear me speak at the prayer breakfast several months ago, and I appreciate your being there with me. I was basically describing why I know that I can trust God. Somebody came up to me afterward and said, “You say that you know that you can trust God, but I can’t. I don’t trust God.”

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My question was this. “Which God are you trusting?”

Men: Amen. Come on, sir!

Bruce: “Tell me who you’re trusting. Describe for me the God you’re trusting.”

You see, you deflect that with another question. Tell me about the God that you say you want to trust. He couldn’t describe that. He said, “I’ve never thought about that.”

I said, “I described the God that I can trust. Tell me about the God that you can’t trust, and we’ll compare the two.”

Now you see, that’s just being able to give a defense for the hope that’s within you. You don’t have to be perfect.

Peter is going to teach us several things about giving the right response. But it all hinges first of all, guys, on this. You’ve got to have a right view of Christ. Do you recognize that He is holy? Do you treat Him with respect, dignity and reverence, rather than flippantly saying that He’s the great Dodger in the sky, or the great Pirate in the sky?

Participant: That’s right.

Bruce: You see, there’s a sense that where you have to give a defense for the hope that is within us is based upon the right view of Christ. Yes, Don?

Don: Yes. I’m sure you’re going to come to this. I’m probably getting ahead of you. But in verse 15 my translation says to “be ready.” Yours says, “prepared.”

Bruce: Mm-hmm.

Don: But I think the problem,. When people say, “Well, I can’t trust God,” is that they don’t really know very much about the God whom they supposedly trust. And because they’re not prepared, they’re not in the Word. Biblical illiteracy, as you know, is a plague in America, in American Christianity today.

Bruce: Absolutely.

Don: Unless you’re prepared, unless you spend time in the Word and with Christ in prayer, you’re not going to be prepared. We have to know what we believe and why we believe it.

Bruce: That’s what Peter is going to teach us, exactly what Don is suggesting. Notice the first point in your outline, *the explanation of the believer*. We saw that the protection for the believer is having a right view of goodness, a right view of suffering and a right view of the Person and work of Christ. That’s your protection, because now you’re going to proclaim what you’ve been protected from because you have the right attitude. You think right because you act right. When you act right you feel right.

Notice the very first thing that he says. You must have a *prepared* answer, a *ready* answer. That’s verse 15. It’s a ready answer, a prepared answer. Our witness depends upon what has happened beforehand in our lives. And when fear does not prevent us from doing good or living according to God’s standards, there’s a reason for that. And you and I must be prepared to do that.

One of my Puritan friends describes it this way. “Jesus never wants people talking about Him who are not living for Him first.”

Participant: Hmm.

Bruce: Jesus doesn’t want us talking about Him unless you’re living for Him. That’s why I asked the man, “Tell me about the God you can’t trust.”

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You see, you and I must be prepared. It’s a ready answer. It means that you’ve given it some thought. It’s not just some flippant response. You’ve pondered. Do I have the right view of Christ, so that when somebody asks me I can give them accurate information on my personal experience, not somebody else’s. Why is it that we have a tendency to always want to talk about somebody else’s experience? “I’m a follower of Christ, yes. Now let me tell you about John. He has a great testimony.”

Now why is it that we are fearful about talking about our own personal experience? Be honest. Why do you think you have a fear of doing that?

Participant: It’s intimidating.

Bruce: Somebody else, we think, is better. What is that? Comparison.

Participant: Mm-hmm.

Bruce: Whenever you compare, two things are harmful to you. You’re going to find somebody who in your mind has a more glamorous, exhilarating, marketable testimony than you, and so you don’t want to give yours. You’re going to be discouraged because they can do it better than I can. Or you might say that theirs isn’t as good as mine because mine is more marketable. Mine is better. Mine is more glamorous, more exciting, more exhilarating. And it gives you pride.

You see, one of the things is that we try to compare ourselves with somebody else’s testimony.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Peter says no!” You’ve got to be prepared for your own testimony, your own description of what the Lord Jesus Christ, who you have the right view of, has done in your life, and you’re going to give a first hand report of your experience, not somebody else’s. It’s a prepared answer. Yes, Bob?

Bob: Yes. I think some of us, Bruce, don’t think enough about what He’s already done for us. We don’t think enough about that. It’s just something that we sort of take for granted. We don’t stop and think about it.

Bruce: Well that’s the word right here, which is exactly the point that Peter is making. You must have a prepared answer. Think about this! You need to have some preparation for it. It’s an answer that’s a ready answer, that you’ve given it some thought.

I’ll tell you the reason why I think we don’t like to give our own personal testimonies because we don’t think they’re big enough. It’s because we don’t think we’ve been bad enough to be good enough.

Participant: Come on, sir.

Bruce: I don’t think that I’m bad enough to be good enough. Because who do we always want to talk about? We want to talk about the converted drug addict, the murderer who came to Christ in prison. That’s much more glamorous than this. I’ll tell you what, folks. Do you know what the most powerful, glamorous, exhilarating personal testimony is? It’s this. Somebody who’s been raised in a Christian home. That’s the most glamorous, glorious testimony you can have.

I was raised by godly parents. That is far more powerful in the kingdom of God operation than somebody who is converted to Christ in jail. I’m not belittling that. Please understand what I’m not saying. All I’m saying is that I have people saying, “I’m

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not saved because I’m not bad enough to be good enough to have a testimony that’s going to be exhilarating and exciting.”

You see, the issue is not being bad enough. The Holy Spirit will take your personal testimony and use you as one who can describe and be ready to give a defense for the hope that is within you. It’s a prepared answer. You think about it. What can I say? And your testimony is the one God wants you to give, not somebody else’s. It’s your own. Yes, please?

Participant: Thus you have the living body of the church, His people.

Bruce: I’m sorry?

Participant: When you see that individual testimony—

Bruce: Oh yes.

Participant: It’s the living body of the church.

Bruce: Yes. It’s the Word becoming flesh. Peter, in effect, is saying, “Describe how the Word is becoming flesh in your personal life. Be ready to give an answer.” It’s a prepared answer. It’s something you think about.

Now this is not to be done indiscriminately, or without discernment or discretion. It’s knowing when to talk. It’s knowing whom to talk to and how much you need to say. You’re prepared for that. It’s a ready answer. We are to be ready, Peter says. We are to be prepared to give an explanation for the hope that is within us as a result of how we have handled difficult situations in our lives.

The word “answer” is the word *apology*, the word *apologetics*. It means defending your faith.

(*Paraphrase.*) “Are you a follower of Christ?”

Peter says, “I don’t know Him.” You see, he’s the perfect one to teach us how to do this. And he’s saying, “I wasn’t prepared, because at that point in my life I did not have the right view of Christ. Now I do! Let me tell you how to do it correctly now.” It is empowering you to be a witness for Christ, you see, because my view of Christ wasn’t correct at the right time when I gave that answer. I was not prepared because I didn’t view Him correctly.

You see, friends, the way that you have a prepared answer is, do you have the right view of Christ? That’s what Peter says right before. Honor Him as Lord! Treat Him with respect, dignity and honor! Do you have the right view of Him? Now you can say something about Him because you’ve thought about who the Person and work of Christ is in your life. It’s a prepared answer. It’s a ready answer. It’s one you’ve thought about, not done indiscriminately.

It means this. A couple of insights on this. You need to think it through. What am I going to say? Why am I going to say it? What’s the reality of it? I’m not going to embellish it. I’m just going to give them who I am in Christ because this is how I view Christ and what He has done in my life. I’m not going to embellish it to make it more exhilarating and exciting. I’m just going to tell them the truth of what it is. This is who Christ is and this is who I am and this is how I know I’m in Christ. You think it through. Give it some thought. Be prepared. It’s a ready answer.

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Secondly, be able to state it clearly. You want to teach to the point of understanding, not agreement. You’re not trying to get somebody to agree with you.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: You’re proclaiming truth and you want to state that clearly. So think it through, be able to state it clearly and teach to the point of understanding.

They might say, “I disagree with you.”

“But do you understand what I said?”

“Yes, but I disagree.”

“That’s fine. You’re accountable for what you believe. I’m just telling you why I have the hope that I have within me.” State it truthfully and clearly.

So think it through. Be able to state it clearly. Also, be able to state it intelligently. That doesn’t mean that you need to be a polyglot and speak in many languages, or be an English major. All I’m saying is, take it seriously. Think it through. Be able to teach to the point of understanding. And make your conversation intelligent so it’s reasonable. You’re trying to reason with somebody. You’re giving them a reason that you have.

Remember this. Information beforehand is a reason. Information afterward is an excuse, and nobody likes excuses. You’re giving them a reason, so do it intelligently so they can follow you. Remember, you’re not trying to convince them to agree with you. You’re just proclaiming truth and letting the Holy Spirit work. Yes, Don?

Don: If I may give a plug for our lending library, there’s a book I’m now reading called *I’m Glad You Asked*, which really is doing what you just said. It has all the standard objections that people have, like “How do I know there’s a God?”, or “Is the Bible true?”, or “How do we know that Christ is the only way?”, and it’s done very intelligently. And so when I’m done with it I’ll bring it back and you can read it too.

Bruce: Excellent.

Don: But we need to really know how to answer people today who have them. We’ve got to be discerning, as you said. We don’t want to cast our pearls before swine. But neither do we want to avoid talking to people who have sincere questions, either.

Bruce: Absolutely. Yes, please?

Participant: Bruce, I agree with you wholeheartedly that preparation is primary. But I also would suggest to be alert for the opportunity to exercise your testimony, and to be discerning enough to pick it up and move forward with it.

Bruce: That’s an excellent point. The word is to have a ready answer. *Ready* or *prepared* are synonyms here. You’re ready because you’ve got a prepared answer.

That means this. I want to be discerning to know *when* to say something. I need to be discerning to know to *whom* I should say something. And I need to know and to be discerning as to *what* I need to say. You need to be ready for that.

It’s like you’re walking down the road and somebody asks you a question. I’m ready to go. Put me in, Coach. You need to be ready for this. So be discerning about it.

So you need to think it through, state it clearly, state it intelligently. And lastly I would offer this, men. I think Peter would say this also, which he has said, which is why I’m saying it. (*Laughter.*) Because it’s from him, not from me. (*Laughter.*) Be able to state it *personally*.

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Participant: Amen. Oh, yes.

Bruce: Be able to state it personally. It’s not about John. It’s about me.

I’ll just give an example in my own life. As you all know, I wanted to go to the Naval Academy to become an admiral. So as a very young man I knew the difference between being an enemy and being an ally.

And one day I was reading Romans chapter 5 verse 10. “If, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled by His death, how much more will we be saved by His life!” I was struck by that phrase “enemy.”

I went to my dad, and I said, “Dad, am I God’s enemy?” I was thirteen years old. And I’ll always appreciate the fact that my dad had the courage to tell me the truth.

He said, “Yes, Bruce. In your unregenerate state you’re God’s enemy.”

“Dad, I don’t want to be.”

He said, “Read the rest of the verse.” And we talked about that.

So that’s my testimony. It’s personal, nothing glamorous. The great thing about it is this. I was raised in a Christian home! That’s the best testimony a person can have, because my dad was the one who said, “Bruce, read the rest of the verse.” Then he took me down to my pastor and we talked about that. And that’s when God was pleased to open my eyes, take the shackles of blindness off of my head and my mind and my heart, and God granted me saving faith.

You see, that’s all I can say. Nothing glamorous. But that’s who I am.

Make it personal. Let the Holy Spirit take your personal experience that you’re speaking intelligently. You’re speaking it clearly and you’ve thought it through. And let Him do the work of grace.

Remember this. You and I are seed planters but He is the harvester.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: He’ll water it.

Be confident. Be trusting. Remember this. It all starts with if I have the right view of Christ.

Let me ask you a question about your testimony. Are you more concerned about what the world thinks of Jesus Christ or are you more concerned about what they think of you when you give your testimony? Are you more concerned about what the world says about the Person and work of Christ, what they think about Him, or are you more concerned with what they think about you when you give your testimony? Now brothers, when you answer that question, Peter would say that here’s what you do. Speak personally, speak intelligently, speak clearly and think it through.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Be prepared. Be ready, because you never know when God in His sovereign mercy and grace is going to have you be the one who is going to defend the Person and work of Christ. And hopefully our lifestyle will be one where somebody will come along and say, “You’ve got my attention by the way that you’re living. Explain that to me.” Be ready. Yes, please?

Participant: I find myself often answering the question before I know what the person is asking. (*Laughter.*) To ask one thing, until you know the person a little bit,

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you’ve got to ask that question. “Why do you think that,” etc. And I’m jumping in before I know what the real question is or what the person believes.

Bruce: That’s a great observation. That’s why I’m saying that you need to be discerning as to know *when* to say something, discerning to know *what* to say to somebody, and to *whom* to say it.

It’s like the gentleman who came up and said to me, “You said that you can trust God but I can’t.” Now I’m not going to say, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. Do you know that?”

I asked him another question. Leadership is not having the right answers, men. Leadership is having the right questions.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Because when you take one question it takes you down the road to understanding where the person is, because now I’m ready to give an answer based upon what I know about him. You’ve got to be discerning. It’s not just some formula that you just dump on somebody. You’re talking about your personal experience. Remember, it’s all based upon relationships. And so ask a questions so you can find out. Yes, please?

Participant: Peter describes here what happened to him. Paul wrote about it in Philippians 4:13.

Bruce: Absolutely.

Participant: I—personal—“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Bruce: Absolutely. You see, we’re learning from somebody who failed.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: That’s the beauty of this passage.

Participant: Wow!

Bruce: Peter wasn’t successful. Yet he’s the one instructing us.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Be hopeful, men! You may not be perfect when you give your testimony. But God can use it. We just need to learn from those who are our instructors. So give a ready answer.

Now notice. There are a couple of other things we need to learn.

Why is it that Peter uses the word *hope*? Be able to give an explanation for the hope that’s within you?

Look at Ephesians chapter 2 verse 12. The reason the nonbeliever asks that question about your life is because they have no—

Participant: Hope.

Bruce: Hope. Notice. Would somebody read 2:12 of Ephesians?

Participant: “Remember that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”

Bruce: Stop right there. What’s a non-Christian? They’re without God because they have no—

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Bruce: Hope. The reason they have no hope is because they are without God. That’s why they’re asking you the question, men. They might not even use the word *hope*. But they’re seeing something in your life that’s so radically contrary to the system of this world that it gets their attention. And they come along and say, “Explain that!” They may not use the word *hope*. But the reason they’re coming is because they have no hope! And the reason they have no hope is because they are without God. The reason that you and I do have hope is because we are with God. It’s very logical. That’s the reason they’re asking you the question.

Just be prepared. Think it through. State it clearly. State it intelligently. And do it personally. Yes, Dale?

Dale: I have a question. Do you find fault with reversing the two words that are so common—hope and pray—to pray and hope?

Bruce: Do I have a problem with that? No.

Dale: Thank you, because in my life I know I must pray, and, well, Ted Wood has told me, “Dale, there is something else that comes before that. You’ve got to have the Word.” And I agreed. If Christ is in my heart and in my life then I can pray with hope.

Bruce: Absolutely. The reason you have hope is because you’re in Christ. If you’re not in Christ, you don’t have hope. That’s why they’re asking you the question! That’s why they ask the question, because they are hopeless without God.

Now prayer is preparation for a proper response. Prayer is the other thing I would say we need to do. State it personally, but bathe it in prayer. Ask the Lord to give you the wisdom. As the Scripture says, He will give us what to say when we are brought up at the judgment. He’ll do that. So prayer is very important to our personal testimony and proclamation. Prayer is preparation for a proper response. Prepare yourself by thinking through what you’re going to say and bathe it in prayer so the Holy Spirit will be the One who will use it.

The second thing Peter says is this. Not only must it be a prepared answer or a ready answer, but it must also be a *gentle* answer, or a *meek* answer—verse 15.

Meekness. Meekness is the quality that trusts God to do the work of changing attitudes. Meekness is power under control. It’s the quality that trusts God to do the work of changing attitudes.

You and I giving our personal testimony is not to convince anybody of anything. We are defending our right view of Christ.

Participant: Hmm.

Bruce: That’s all we’re doing. We’re just defending our right view of Christ. If you don’t have the right view of Christ, men, you’ll not have anything to say that’s going to be of any significance. Yes, Don?

Don: Yes, and that is something that I need to pay attention to. It’s a real challenge to me. I have a neighbor, for example, who I’ve witnessed to. She lives down the street from me. And, you know, she’s in her eighties and her heart is hard as a rock. And she’s never read the Bible but she has an opinion about it. And she’ll say, “Well, Jesus was just the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier.”

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And it’s very easy for me to get on the defensive. “No! Come on! How can you believe that?” And I’ve got to remember. Hey, do it gently. Do it with respect, even though it’s hard.

Bruce: It’s very, very important that we understand what Peter is saying. It’s a ready answer. It’s a prepared answer. But it’s also a meek or gentle answer.

Let’s look at 2 Timothy chapter 2, down to verse 23. 2 Timothy 2:23-25.

Paul writes to his young protégé Timothy and says this beginning at verse 23. “Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies.” Jesus was just the son of a Roman soldier. That’s a needless controversy. I don’t even want to get involved in that. Paul says, (*paraphrase*), “Don’t even get involved in that. Don’t engage in that stuff!” You’re telling them what you believe because you have a right view of Christ. Yes, please?

Participant: And you said earlier that we’re not trying to get them to agree with us.

Bruce: That’s correct. You’re defending what you believe.

Participant: Right.

Bruce: Let’s read on. “Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies. You know that they produce quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.” Now notice. “God may perhaps grant them repentance, leading them to the knowledge of the truth.” Yes, sir?

Participant: Yes, we have an obligation to tell of the reason for our faith. But it’s the Holy Spirit who takes that testimony and who will change their hearts. It’s not our job to do that.

Bruce: That’s why we give a gentle answer because we know that the Holy Spirit is the One who is going to change attitudes, not me. You and I can’t change anybody’s life.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Just grow up and realize that. We can’t do that. Yes, Jim?

Jim: I want to make a point. It’s a double conditional. If, perchance.

Bruce: If, yes.

Jim: Or may.

Bruce: Maybe.

Jim: Maybe.

Bruce: It might just happen. Now notice. That means this: that we are witnesses, not prosecuting attorneys.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: We’re witnesses, not prosecuting attorneys. We must be certain that our lives back up our defense. There’s no need for ignorance or a know-it-all attitude, but a gentle proclamation of truth to explain the conduct of your own life.

Now notice. The purpose is not to win an argument. It’s to proclaim truth. And what is the role of the Holy Spirit? To guide us into all arguments. (*Laughter.*)

Men: Truth.

Bruce: No. To guide us into all—

Men: Truth.

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Bruce: You and I are not trying to win an argument. You’re just trying to proclaim truth. And it all hinges back on that key verse. You have a right view of Christ. If you don’t have a right view of Christ, you’re not going to be saying the right things with the right attitude at the right time and for the right reason. It all starts with this. Do I have a right view of Christ? Now that’s why I’m able to say something with a ready answer and a gentle answer. It’s not to win an argument but to proclaim truth.

The third point Peter teaches us now in verse 15 also is a respectful answer, or a reverential answer. This is reverential, all for God.

Now notice this. The divine truths that you and I are expressing because of a right view of God are never to be spoken of in a light, trivial, half-hearted manner. Now this is showing a reverential or respectful answer. It’s not respect for the person. It’s respect for what you’re saying about the Person and work of Christ.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: It’s your reverence for Him that determines what you say and how you say it. Where awe of God prevails, and your right view of Christ, one is careful to represent the mysteries of God. In other words, I’m going to give an answer for the hope that’s within me that’s going to be respectful of the Person and work of Christ. The respect is not for that person you’re talking to. That’s a given. But this is a respect for what you’re saying about your Savior, about your Lord. You’re showing reverential awe and respect for who He is. That comes from a right view of Christ.

There are two messages—one that sells and one that saves—one that sells (marketing), and one that saves (messaging.) One that saves, one that produces life.

We need to have a spirit and a tone which God can hear with joy. What that means is that you should have a respectful answer, that I have the right spirit in me, and that I have the right words and the right tone so that God can receive what I’m saying with joy because I’m showing my reverence for Him in the way that I’m giving my answer by the faith within me. Yes, please?

Participant: I think we’ve got to keep in mind that when you’re doing this, that we’re in a spiritual battle.

Participant: Amen.

Participant: It says in 2 Timothy 2, as you pointed out in verse 26, “that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been held captive to do his will.”

Bruce: Amen. This is a spiritual battle. That’s why you and I are not prosecuting attorneys. We are witnesses in what we are doing. We are not winning an argument. We are proclaiming truth.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: That’s why you must have a ready answer. You must have the right spirit, a gentle answer. But it also shows reverence for whom?

Participant: Christ.

Bruce: For God. It’s reverence for Christ. The way that I speak about it shows reverence for Him, so that He can receive my words with joy because I have the right spirit and the right tone when I’m speaking about Him. But if I don’t have the right view

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of Christ, men, I’m going to be a marketer. I’m going to want something that sells rather than something potentially, through the work of the Holy Spirit, might save and bring them to repentance. You see, God just might use that.

But let’s say that He chooses not to use it at that time. What does that say about your testimony? You were successful. And why were you successful?

Participant: Because you proclaimed truth.

Bruce: Because you proclaimed truth. You see, that’s how you evaluate any ministry. It’s never on the response of the hearer. It’s always was truth proclaimed? Every time you give your personal testimony, a ready answer, a gentle answer, a reverential answer—every time you do that, you are successful because you did what? You proclaimed truth! That’s what we do! That’s what a witness does—proclaim truth. We’re not winning arguments.

So many times people ask me, “How many people have you led to Christ?”

I say, “None that I know of. But I’ve been the OBGYN who has presided at their new birth.” I’ve been there when the Lord was pleased to take the blinders off of their eyes, transferring them from the darkness of the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of the Son He loves. I’ve been there and watched that happen. Can I say I did it? No. That’s the work of the Holy Spirit.

You and I proclaim truth, not arguments. And every time, men, when you have a chance to give your testimony in whatever environment it is, think it through. Let it be a prepared answer, a gentle answer, a reverential answer. And if nothing happens, you were successful even if someone didn’t come to repentance, because that response is not up to you but up to the Holy Spirit.

You are successful. And don’t let the evil one come and say, “Well, you can’t do it as well as Sig does. You’ve got to listen to Sig’s testimony. He’s a real twit.” (*Laughter.*)

Sig: Amen! (*Laughter.*)

Bruce: “Listen to his testimony.” You see, because I’m not bad enough to be good enough. You see, we really don’t think that we’re bad enough to be good enough. But you are bad enough to be good enough because the Holy Spirit will use it. It’s a personal testimony.

So it’s a ready answer, a gentle answer, a respectful answer. And lastly I would call this a *confirmed* answer. It means this. You have a clear conscience.

Notice in our passage in 1 Peter chapter 3. “Having a good conscience, so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior”—there’s your conduct which comes before your communication—“they revile your good behavior.” If they don’t revile your words, they’re going to revile your good behavior. “In Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.”

You need to have a clear conscience. A clear conscience means this: living before God and man in purity. What we say without a corresponding lifestyle has very little weight. What you and I say without demonstration of a holy life has very little weight because all it is is words. And our culture is very, very skeptical of words. They’re not looking for words. They don’t believe words. Our culture is so skeptically oriented because all we

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hear are words that have no meat behind them—no example, no demonstration, no expression.

And so the words that we give in our testimony that are not backed up by a holy life are going to have very little impact. The best proof of your life is a clear conscience before God and before man. That’s where you get your sense of liberty, your sense of freedom, and you get your sense of boldness because you know this. To the best of my ability and by the grace of God and through the power of the Holy Spirit I’m living a life of purity before God and before men.

There is Paul before Felix the governor. And Acts chapter 24 verse 16 says this. “I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.”

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: I always strive to keep my conscience clear. You see, that’s the power of your witness and your words. It’s because people see the conduct of your life, that you have a clear conscience. And they see that because of the way you treat them and the way that you respond to who God is in your life. A clear conscience means living a life of purity before God and before man.

So quickly, how do we keep a clear conscience? It’s critical that we understand this.

First of all, you acquire a clear conscience through repentance. “Lord, have mercy on me, the sinner.”

I was asked by a young woman the other day who is a seminary student, doing her work on prayer. And she said, “Bruce, what do you think the most important prayer in all the Bible is?” Is it the prayer of Jabez? Remember how popular that was years ago?

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: Is it the Lord’s Prayer? What prayer is it?

I said, “I think the most important prayer in the Scripture is this. “Have mercy on me, the sinner.””

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Have mercy on me, the sinner, because it always puts me in a position of realizing who God is and who I am.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: And everything, you see, comes out of that flow of understanding the right view of Christ. I need to understand how His life is sinlessly perfect and mine is not, how His life is sinlessly and perfectly obedient and mine is not. In my judgment, my answer to her was the prayer of the publican who said, “Lord, have mercy on me, the sinner.” So how do you acquire a clear conscience? First of all, through repentance.

How do you maintain it? Through obedience. You acquire it through repentance and you maintain it through obedience.

You will have a more powerful witness in that you may have less skilled words in a holy life than more fluent words in a disobedient life. You’ll have a more powerful witness, even though your words may be less skillful, if you have a holy life than you would if you had fluent words and a disobedient life. You acquire a clear conscience through repentance and you maintain it through obedience.

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So Peter reminds us, dear brothers, that the most compelling argument is the argument of a holy life. Live so that your conscience is clear. Live so that you’re above reproach. Such conduct will silence slander and will also disarm criticism. They may disagree with your words but they can’t criticize your life.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Our conduct precedes our communication. May it be so that you and I, when the Lord gives us the opportunity, will have a ready answer. It’s a gentle answer with a right spirit. It’s a reverential, respectful answer, demonstrating your understanding of the right view of Christ. And it’s a confirmed answer because of your clear conscience. You and I have an answering witness to the glorious gospel of Christ. We have the answer to what people are saying because they have no hope. Be ready to give an answer for the hope that’s within you.

Let’s pray. Heavenly Father, thank You that Peter was the one who instructed us in how to defend our faith. We learn from one who did not do it right the first time because he had a wrong view of Christ. But when You changed his heart through the work of Your Spirit, you changed the way He spoke about You because his view of You was different. Give us a right view of Christ, Father, that our answer will be a prepared one, a gentle one, a reverential one, and one based upon a clear conscience. And may it be so for Your glory. And all the Brave men said, “Amen.” Thank you, brothers.

Men: Thank you, Bruce. (*Applause.*)