

*13Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?
14But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are
blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT
BE TROUBLED, 15but 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;
16and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are
slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to
shame. 17For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for
doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. 18For Christ
also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might
bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in
the spirit;*

We began looking at this important encouragement last week and we'll pick it up again this week where we left off last week.

This passage is written for christians who are living in a pressure cooker. This is for the church in distress. It's written to exhort and encourage people who are paying the price for being a christian. And it's completely foreign to us.

Someone has well said that the church in America is 3000 miles wide and an inch deep. We come to passages like this and we shrug and think to ourselves, that's not applicable to me. I don't need this particular exhortation.

I woke up in America. The best country in the best global neighborhood with a high fence around it. We are impervious to this sort of bullying. There is no cost involved to be a christian here. In fact christians are mostly held in high esteem. They leave us alone. We leave them alone. We live side by side in comfort and security. We have everything we need in abundance.

So, perhaps we should just give Peter's words a quick glance and move on to something more pertinent to our experience.

Kirk Cameron was in the news this week. Causing outrage on the

huffington post and the daily mail and the daily beast and of course, facebook. He made people really mad because he was insensitive. He said hurricanes like Harvey and Irma are sent by God to cause us to respond with repentance and awe and humility.

Kirk quoted from Job 37

*11 "Also with moisture He loads the thick cloud;
He disperses the cloud of His lightning.*

*12 "It changes direction, turning around by His guidance,
That it may do whatever He commands it
On the face of the inhabited earth. (nas)*

*13 "He brings the clouds to punish people,
or to water his earth and show his love..(niv)*

He had the audacity to say, God sends the storms. Maybe for punishment. Maybe to water the earth that belongs to Him, or maybe as blessing. We respond with awe, humility, and repentance. We are tiny, He is awesome.

Well, of course, Facebook and the internet lit up with plenty of response to Mr. Cameron. Mostly negative. How dare he. Who does he think he is. Somebody that insensitive deserves to be run down by your car.

But one response got my attention. Todd Friel on Wretched Radio said, here's an interesting thing. The storm looms and the government, everybody from Mike Pence to county officials is in your business telling you to run for your life. Get out of harms way. Get to high ground. Get to shelter. Do it now. The police cars come and order the evacuations in some cases. Get out. Run for cover. Hurry.

There's no outrage. They have our best interest at heart even if they're perhaps too pushy and bossy. They encroach on our freedoms and our judgement. We are perhaps too stupid to run for cover ourselves and the authorities get right in the middle of our business. Do it now.

Where's the outrage? And yet one christian goes on Facebook and says,

the storms are just a tiny preview of the coming judgement and should cause you to bow before a Righteous and Powerful God, in repentance and humility, now, not later, and he is demonized for sounding that alarm.

This book says that a firestorm is coming. We see the signs and believe it's soon. Yet I don't warn anybody. A tidal wave is a few miles out and I'm not sounding the alarm. To anybody. Why is that?

Well, for one thing, if I went door to door with that message, the folks on my block would kick me to the curb sort of like the internet did to Kirk Cameron. If I did that, I might be persecuted. These words of Peter's might become real in my life. I'm guilty as charged.

The church in America is in a strange place. No cost christianity. It's perfectly acceptable to be like me and just quietly be a christian. I've got my fire insurance. My flood insurance. Jesus paid my debt. I'm good to go.

And the other folks up and down my street, destruction is looming for every one of them, and it's OK with the church in America if I just mind my own business and let it happen.

Perhaps God will force the issue. What if our house of cards economy collapsed in on itself? Or what if crazy "*Rocket Man on a suicide mission*" cripples our computers and electricity. That would cause the economy to collapse fairly quickly. What if? What if it pleases God to pop our easy believism evangelical bubble before He comes to receive His church?

Perhaps we should pay attention to Peter's helpful words after all. Just in case. Peter tells us how to glorify Christ in times of pressure. How to respond to a world that is hostile to God.

Just to review what we looked at last week, the first thing we do, is we are a positive force in our world. *13Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?* We aren't subversive. We don't respond like a normal opponent. We are zealous to do good to all

peoples. We repay evil against us with good. We seek to diffuse evil by responding with good.

That's our first line of defense. Meet the negative with a positive love.

Next Peter reminds us that we live outside the battle. He does that with a reminder. *14But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.* It's an honor to endure the wrath that is actually not directed at us. It is directed at God. Peter says remember, these beloved enemies aren't striking you, they're striking Christ, and it's an honor for you to bear the marks directed at Him.

Remember that the Saviour said it is a special honor to receive the lashes intended for Him. Great is your reward in heaven if you suffer in this world because of your association with Christ. You belong to Him.

Then Peter says *AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, 15but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts*

There's a higher power than the folks who are intimidating you here. You march under the ownership of a power mightier than anyone here who is intimidating you. You belong to Christ. Don't fear any opponent here. He numbers the hairs of your head, and not one will be touched unless He allows it so.

It's interesting to consider a parallel that the church shares with the jews. After the holocaust, books were written trying to understand how that happened. And the reason that the different thinkers came up with is that the jews are aloof. They are and have always been, a nation within a nation.

They don't assimilate. They have their own unique culture within the culture. They don't intermarry. They are a seperate people, living within the borders of other nations, but seperate. And the world hates that.

No matter where they go, scattered and dispersed among the nations, they are always seperate. They don't assimilate.

And Peter comes along and says, how much more so for you. You are the elect. God has chosen you and called you out of this world. You belong to Him. You are a holy nation. A people for God's own possession. A new ethnos, a new race, called out of this world.

All of the things that caused the world to hate the jews, we should have . . . on steroids. The church should be far more distinctly owned by God than the jews ever were. Far more seperated. Far more non assimilated. Distinctly different from this world.

And that righteousness that God has shed upon us should be a conviction to the world. Of course they would hate us. The way we live should be a rebuke to how they live. How are we doing? Is the church distinct? Or have we been assimilated into the world so that there is no difference.

I have to say that Kirk Cameron is my champion. He takes a cell phone and makes a video selfie and reads verses from the Word of God that state that God is sovereign over the hurricanes and that He directs where they go and accomplishes His multiple purposes perfectly . . . and the world goes nuts.

And if you go and watch the video clip, take note, there is humility present. He isn't combative. He isn't disrespectful. He does a wonderful job of fulfilling in the present, a living example to us of Peter's next point.

15but 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;

Mr. Cameron was gentle. He was reverent. The world is talking about hurricanes and he seized an opportunity to tell the world, the storms belong to God. He is sovereign over storms. He fills the clouds with water. He tells the clouds where to go. He changes their direction and sends them on their path. He distributes the water on the earth.

You can almost picture the collective world with fingers in their ears so they don't have to hear about a sovereign God who is in control of every atom, every molecule. It all belongs to Him.

That's one example of one christian doing what Peter directs us to do as we interface with this world. We are to be salt and light in this world which is in darkness and which is perishing. Peter says;

always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you

You know I'm going to camp here for a couple of minutes, don't you. This is such a great verse, and so important for christians today. We need to be ready to make a defense.

The first word to consider here is ready. And it's the same word Jesus used when He told his disciples you need to be ready, because the Son of Man will return when you aren't expecting Him to. Be prepared. Be about the Masters business because you don't know when He'll return.

And again, Jesus uses this word in the parable about the wedding feast and the 12 virgins. The bride groom comes and the ones who were ready go into the celebration. They were prepared. Ready. They had the oil of the Holy Spirit burning in their lamps. They went into the celebration when the bridegroom called for them. They were ready.

And Paul uses this word in his parallel passage with the one we are studying. The christians survival armor. Ephesians 6. We are warriors who have defensive and offensive armor in order to survive.

And the first piece of offensive armor, so that we can advance into the battle, is our footwear. Tell me who would win in a battle where one side is barefoot and the other has boots on.

Some of our armor is survival mode. Sometimes we just need to hold our ground and not be killed. But sometimes we can gain ground. We can advance toward the enemy and make gains for our Glorious King. And the first thing, the decisive thing for offensive gains is

preparedness. Readiness.

Paul says; *13Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, 15and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; 16in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

15and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE That word for preparation, is the same word Peter uses for always being ready. Same identical idea. We have some homework to do before we go into the battle.

Paul says doing that preparation is like putting your boots on before the battle. Peter's version is more like a courtroom drama. *always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you*

Peter says, you need to be like a lawyer who burns midnight oil getting ready for the courtroom. *always being ready to make a defense*

Prepare ahead of time for the defense, the argument that will win the case. We love to watch those shows on TV. Right now me and Pam enjoy watching that show, BULL. It's about a guy who gets hired because he is an expert at winning courtroom battles. And part of what he does is he has people all over the place getting the information he'll need for the courtroom defense.

That's exactly what Peter is saying. You need to work hard preparing your defense.

Now I know, that's like a 22 year old on TV telling me I should work out so I can be fit like he is. And my first thought is, that's easy for you to say. You're 22 and you obviously have some good gene's working

for you. Not so easy for me. I'm 65 and one of the worlds best pleasures that hasn't diminished like so many others is yummy food. And some 22 year old comes along and says I should be like him.

That's how it is for some of you. This book has always been easy for me in one sense. The knowing and understanding is easy. The doing is impossible. OK, not impossible, but I'm lazy and easily overwhelmed. So I understand it quickly, and implement it painfully slowly.

I think I can identify with Solomon when he wrote in Ecclesiastes 1:17,18 *17 And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after wind. 18 Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.*

The knowledge comes easy. The implementation is painfully tediously slow. And yet, whether it comes easy, or whether you have to attack it with great difficulty, the knowledge of this book is imperative.

God cries out in agony about His people through the prophet Hosea. This is what He says; Hosea 4:6 *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.*

Every attack of Satan is directed at revealed truth. From the garden of Eden when he said to Eve, "hath God said" up to today where we have myriads of false information bombarding us constantly every day. It always always always is an attack on God's revealed truth.

And christians who don't know anything, are like tin ducks in a shooting gallery. It's so easy to knock them down it almost takes the fun away. I think Satan is bored by our stupidity. He doesn't need fiery darts. We're like blowing out candles on a birthday cake.

Peter says, you need to be ready to make a defence. *apologeia*. We get our word *apologetic* from this greek word. The image of a courtroom lawyer is apt. He prepares with long hours of difficulty. It's hard work

getting prepared. All the research. Every possible angle considered. Every book is read. The knowledge is in place; before he walks into the courtroom.

Then when the argument ensues, the lawyer presents his defense. *always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you*

OK, we're lawyers who have spent midnight oil studying and preparing, and we're in the courtroom, and what is it that we're arguing for? *the hope that is in you*

What is that. What is the hope that is in us? What is it that gives offense to this world that we need to defend?

Really? You're really going to ask that question? It's everything Peter has taught us so far.

1Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who reside as **aliens**, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are **chosen 2 according to the foreknowledge of God** the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

3Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy **has caused us to be born again to a living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, **4to obtain an inheritance** which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, **5who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.** **6In this you greatly rejoice**, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, **7so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;** **8and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,**

9obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

10As to this salvation, . . . Ch. 2 9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; **10for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.**

Our living hope is that God has chosen us out of this world, and forgiven us and placed us in His family. And we have an inheritance waiting for us in heaven. And we have a downpayment living inside our hearts, the Holy Spirit of God indwells us. This is our hope.

Now, if you want to see the normal response to clearly defining that hope, it's in Acts 7 *54 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him. 55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; 56 and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." 57 But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. 58 When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.*

Perhaps that's why Peter says; *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;*

No point in getting stoned to death at your first defense. We can be winsome. We don't back down, but we can present this defense with love and respect and winsomeness. We don't have to do it like a vicious dog.

We don't attack our enemy, we love them. If it's possible. But God may have other plans at play in His sovereign will. Stephen's stoning didn't catch God by surprise. It was no accident that the apostle Paul was there

that day. His name was Saul and he watched the garments of those who carried out the stoning. And in God's timing, He called Saul to be Paul.

16 and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. 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.

It's Saturday afternoon after lunch and I need a couple of more pages of notes in order to use up my accustomed amount of teaching time. And I need to hurry up and finish this because christian numerologist David Meade says today is the end of the world.

And that's the perfect lead in to my final point. The world wants to do battle with us. We don't have to make it so easy for them. I mean, wouldn't it be nice if christians wouldn't work so hard to make other christians look ridiculous?

I looked for the quote, it's from the 1970's Jesus People movement and I couldn't find it. But I recall that someone said something to the effect that Jesus gets so much bad press because His followers are so stupid. It's like Jesus is a lot classier than the people who claim to be his followers.

And that's what Peter's saying in these 2 verses. Quit making it so easy for the world.

Suffer for doing what's right = treasure in heaven. We never look more like our leader than when the world is trying to nail us to a cross for doing what is correct. Doing what this book says. That's the clear conscience thing.

I was listening to a conversation between 2 veteran pastors, 2 of my hero's, John MacArthur and John Piper. And they were talking about the worlds criticism, because both of them have weathered plenty of the worlds storms.

And MacArthur said; When criticism comes, I do a review of my

conscience. He says, and sometimes they're right, and I have it coming. But he says, when I review my conscience and it's clear, then I ignore the criticism.

And that's Peter's point in these 2 verses. If the world is persecuting you because you didn't pay your taxes and then you burned down the court house, well, maybe that isn't persecution.

If you play weird numerology games with the Bible and come up with stupid theories and the world thinks you're ridiculous, it's probably because you're ridiculous.

The problem is, now the world thinks I'm ridiculous too. Because we've both got the same last name as far as they're concerned. Christian. We get lumped in with the wacko-philes. Satan loves that. He loves it when stupid christians do stupid stuff and he can lump us all together.

Satan loves it when nazi's claim to be christians. Loves it!

16and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. 17For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

These verses are important because we bear the honor of our family's name. Jesus is honored or dis-honored, in part, by what we do. Keep a clear conscience. And then if the world comes and persecutes you anyways, count it like treasure in the bank of heaven.

The world is throwing accusations at christians in perfect ignorance. Christians are evil because they discriminate against people who are born with different sexual preferences than what the world says is OK. Christians are haters. Jesus said to love everybody but you christians are haters. And on and on ad infinitum ad nauseum. That stuff comes at us like sewage coming out of a sewer pipe.

You need some knowledge to give a defense to that. And you need to check your conscience against those accusations. What does the Word

of God say about those kinds of accusations.

Well, the book says, if we don't warn someone who is in danger of hell, then we in fact do hate them. But if we are controlled by the love of Jesus, we must lovingly and respectfully warn those folks. That's just one example. That stuff gets thrown at us all day long.

Knowledge, what does this book say. A clear conscience. *No I don't hate you.* And then a winsome response. *In fact I love you and you need to understand what God has proclaimed about whatever the issue is.*

Peter in chapter 2:17 said that we are to respect all men. Part of a clear conscience is to meet these questions head on with honor for the person who is in danger. We respect the person, we warn about the consequences of sin. *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*

Are we ready. Are we prepared to have those conversations, to make those defences. Are we ready to give every man an answer? When Peter wrote that down, he didn't do it as a suggestion. He wrote it as an imperative. We are under orders.

Nobody's really asking. No one has knocked at my door asking me to explain the things I believe. But in a changing world where we don't have any idea what's going to happen next, we need to be prepared. Ready to give an answer about the hope that is in us. Those are our orders.