

Discipleship: Witness

1 Peter 3:15-16

Jesus gave the Great Commission to the church, to go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing and teaching them all things He commanded (Matt. 28:18-19). Not everyone actually baptizes, but everyone participates in the rite of someone's baptism—before, during and after. Similarly, not everyone in the church is an evangelist proper, but every Christian is a witness to the work of Jesus on the cross, and what it has done in his life.

Always Ready

Peter's letter is all about suffering faithfully (1:6; 2:12, 20; 3:9). He wants the exiles to not be surprised when they suffer (4:12). It's unlikely to suffer for doing good, but if so then it's a blessing (3:13-14). He says not to be afraid or troubled, but to sanctify Christ in their hearts. When trouble comes from outside, have Jesus enthroned inside, ready to make a defense to anyone who asks why you are full of hope (v15). If we're focused on Christ, suffering throws our hope into sharp relief. Then the questions come. Our answers should not feel like a tornado to the one who asked, but given gently and respectfully (v15). This evidences a good conscience that isn't desperate to defend itself, but instead shames those who actually revile good conduct (v16). Peter makes it plain that witnessing is driven by holiness. Holiness in life produces hope, and hope leads to questions. Questions are opportunities to give a reason for that hope. This is not the only way to witness, but it is a wonderful one.

Biblical Witness

There's an evangelical tradition of promoting crazy testimonies. When the testimony is a genuine Damascus Road conversion, glory to God, but it's important that it doesn't come off leaving everyone wishing they had a heroin problem and did a stretch in San Quentin Prison before coming to the Lord. Many Christians trump up their "testimony" because of this tradition. In more biblical churches, false and silly testimonies are rightly rejected, but too often so is the discipline of witnessing. This is tragic because every Christian is a witness of what God has done (1 Jn. 5:10). You don't testify about yourself, but about Him. Moses put the Ten Commandments, the "testimony", into the Ark of the Covenant, which is also called the Ark of the Testimony (Ex. 40:20-21). The entire tabernacle is referred to as the tabernacle of the Testimony (Num. 1:50). Joshua setup a large stone as a witness to Israel that they heard the words of the Lord, to remind and keep them from denying God (Josh. 24:27). Isaiah says to settle a question, "To the law and to the testimony!" (8:20). We are witnesses to what God has done, above all that Jesus the Son of God lived on earth and died for our sins, and was raised again (1 Jn. 1:1-3). This requires no particular experience beyond believing God's testimony, what He has done and said, is true.

Get Ready

Being a witness is powerful. In the Ten Commandments, we're told in the context of a court, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Ex. 20:16). Witnessing is taking a stand. It divides people. It forces a decision. It sticks your chin out. The apostles were locked up for witnessing in Jerusalem, and after the Lord sprung them from jail, they went right back to it. Brought again before the authorities, they witnessed again, not just to make them mad, but not holding back either (Acts 5:27-33). You don't have to be a scholar or good debater to witness effectively (Jn. 9:25). Much of the time, you shouldn't even be willing to debate. You just to testify to the gospel, knowing Jesus died for you, and wanting His grace for others (1 Jn. 1:4).

NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

Today's Passage: 1 Peter 3:15-16

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with gentleness and respect; 16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.

1. “Sanctify” means to make holy, to make special and to honor. What does he say to sanctify, and where do you sanctify Him, in verse 15?
2. What are you supposed to be ready to do in verse 15? Why should we be full of hope?
3. Sometimes people will think and say bad things about us. If we've done something wrong, we should be willing to admit it and seek forgiveness. If we haven't done anything wrong, what kind of conscience should we have? By giving a gentle and respectful defense for your hope, what will happen to those say bad things about you (verse 16)?
4. Draw a picture of the apostle Paul sharing the gospel in Athens (Acts 17:16ff.).

Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear. —1 Peter 3:15