

Before the reading

Practical part of Peter's letter, about living as God's people in a hostile environment, 'living such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds, and glorify God on the day he visits us.'

After sections addressed to particular groups of people, like slaves and masters, wives and husbands, at v8 he puts to everyone a final, climactic point of this section.

The translators have put a new heading here, **NIV title: Suffering for Doing Good** but it really belongs before v 13.

cf 4:12 Suffering for Being a Christian

READING

8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. (Quotes Ps 34...)

Suffering for Doing Good (section really begins here)

13 Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?

14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.

15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. **Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,**

16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

17 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil

18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit...

Sermon

You will all have heard the accusation that Christians and members of other religions are guilty of blind faith, of believing something despite the lack of evidence, perhaps even because of the lack of evidence..

One atheist scientist, in an open letter written to his daughter Juliet on her tenth birthday (and published in *A Devil's Chaplain*), advises her to only accept beliefs supported by evidence. 'Have you ever wondered how we know the things that we know?' [\[11\]](#), asks Dawkins. The answer, he says (and he does seem to mean *the* answer), is 'evidence.' [\[12\]](#) Dawkins advises Juliet:

Next time somebody tells you something that sounds important, think to yourself: 'Is this the kind of thing that people probably know because of evidence? Or is it the kind of thing that people only believe because of tradition, authority or revelation?' And next time somebody tells you that something is true, why not say to them: 'What kind of evidence is there for that?' And if they can't give you a good answer, I hope you'll think very carefully before you believe a word they say. [\[13\]](#)

I don't have time today to show that we have hundreds more copies of the New Testament documents than other docs of that era, and they are far older, so closer to the original and

therefore less prone to copyist's error. So we have better evidence for believing the witnesses to the life and death of Jesus than, say, Shakespeare's version of Julius Caesar.

Evidence for Resurrection of Jesus

Evidence-based faith

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks

A 'Asks' is an everyday word, which suggests the envisaged situation is not being brought to a court and cross-examined. Jesus did give a promise about that:

Luke 12:11 When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.'

No, Peter means just normal conversation, and the words 'always' and 'be prepared' back this up. I mean, we are not always being made to answer in court; but if we were, we'd know the date of the hearing, we'd have time to make ready.

In everyday life, on the other hand, when you are hunting for something in the supermarket, or filling your car with fuel, or tending your front garden, and your mind is on that task, you never know when someone might stop and chat to you; and you never know when there is something bothering them that they want to talk about, talk to *you* because they know you are a Christian. At any moment, unexpectedly, we might get a chance to speak up for Jesus.

The way to be ready is to tune in to God at the start of the day, with Bible reading and prayer, and deliberately 're-tune' to God through the day.

Put it this way: If I ever look back and see that God has used me to speak to somebody, it is always straight after I had been praying, being open to God and his plans for whom I'd meet and what I'd say to them.

So, always be prepared, in everyday life,

To give an answer

Greek word is 'apologion' which usually makes people think of the derived English word, Apology. 'I'm sorry I was late.' That's a shame, for we are not apologetic about believing; we are not sorry or ashamed of having faith in God.

It also gives a different English word 'Apologetics': Reasoned arguments in justification of something, a speech in defence of e.g. a belief, a theory. Universities in their Divinity Faculties might offer a course in 'Christian apologetics' - how to argue the case for the truth of Christianity.

But this is not addressed to undergraduates. Peter means all Christians. To everyone who asks you Christians about the hope you have, always be ready to give the argued case showing not merely your hope, but the reason for holding that hope.

The word translated reason is Logos, which gives the English word, Logic. We are to answer logically.

B Time for a break: let's hear one person's attempt to meet this challenge: here is E....

I can't say that there was any one point in my life when I suddenly became a Christian. As a child I was nurtured by my parents and by the congregations I grew up in, going to Sunday School, Bible class etc. When I misbehaved and made the usual excuses to my mother - Honest it wasn't me somebody else did it and ran away - she always answered quietly - Oh well You know who did it and so does God - that worked better than a smacked bottom - believe me, the guilt was awful. She always knew what I had been up to, so if *she* knew then it was easier for a child to understand that *God* knew.

This may sound as though I have just drifted into being a Christian, as though I just followed

in my parent's footsteps, but this is not true. I was a member of a very active and a very argumentative Youth fellowship and at age 17 I decided that the time had come to stand up and be counted. Some of the members with me at that time have since become Elders, like me, or Lay preachers, two missionaries and a couple of ministers.

There are many passages in the bible to console, comfort or strengthen, but I have only been allowed about three minutes so I would like to read one of my favourites from Isaiah Ch. 43 which begins "But now this is what the Lord says - he who created you O Jacob, he who formed you O Israel - but he is also saying - Listen Elizabeth, Pay attention it is *you* I'm talking about - Fear not.....and because I love you. (Isaiah 43:1-4 NIV)

I have had prayers answered, not always in the way I expected. Once when I had been badly hurt, I prayed in despair that I had tried everything, nothing worked. This person (my future mother-in-law) just refused to even try to like me, hardly spoke to me, ignored me, I wasn't going back. On the following Sunday the minister read the lesson - 'How many times shall I forgive my brother?' - I smiled and said O.K., God, you win; I'll go back. She eventually decided I wasn't all that bad and we got along fine.

Over the years I have made mistakes like everyone else, made wrong decisions, some of them real whoppers but always I knew that God was by my side saying everything was all right. It doesn't matter, you're safe I've got you, I'm in charge. The words of Anna Bartlett Warner in the early 1900's summed it all up when she wrote - Jesus loves me this I know for the bible tells me so.

E..., thank you so much. Did you notice:

- a) personal story; this is what happened to me. A witness.
- b) An awareness of holiness in God, and the lack of it in her.
- c) the coming together of her need/the Bible meeting that need
- d) answers to prayer
- e) reconciliation on a human level that was not in her power, but God brought it about.
- f) the last bit, about relying on the Bible, is not a blind acceptance of an imposed authority, but a reliance on a book whose promises she has tested, verified, found to be true.

C How we speak is important:

But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience,

You remember how the wives of non-Christian husbands were advised to act in 3:1-7. By their behaviour, they were to win over their husbands without words.

So here, we are to be ready to answer when asked, but that does not mean we are to pounce on every unsuspecting stranger and ram our arguments down his or her throat.

We all know people who can turn every comment into an excuse for a joke, or sing a pop song whose words echo those spoken. We may admire them at first for their wide repertoire, but eventually it becomes very wearing.

So with Christians who over-use words.

Be ready to answer when the other person asks a question about your faith or hope.

And do so with *gentleness* - that refers to your manner, tone and arguments. You may think you have an unassailable case but it may not seem like that to an atheist or agnostic, or someone who had a bad experience of church or churchianity.

And yet, when they ask, we are to use words to answer them.

In the book Cheaper by the Dozen, about the family of a time and motion expert, one of the Galbraith children quotes her English teacher telling her after she'd won a debate, 'You're only meant to *stump* your opponent, not *tree* them.'

Answer with gentleness *and respect*

That must mean, respect for the person asking the question, respect for their views, their abilities, their understanding.

16 keeping a clear conscience

A second-hand dealer may be prone to exaggerate his product's virtues and gloss over its failings. Christians are witnessing to Jesus, the Way, the Truth, the Life; we cannot be content if we knowingly misrepresent the gospel.

Have your prayers always been answered with a 'Yes'? Of course not, and we have to say, God sometimes answers with a wait, or No or Not that way, here's something better.

A clear conscience comes from accepting Christ's forgiveness daily.

D Laurie's answer: My problem with the question was whether to deal with it as a Religious hope (e.g. heaven) or a worldly hope. I chose the latter:

'My hope is in verse 8 of the same chapter. "...all of you, live in harmony with one another..." It is understandable why some people believe that this can come about without there being a guiding hand from GOD. After all you can try and live in harmony with everybody else without a belief in GOD. However, there comes a time where you can be provoked beyond your good intentions and if there is not true belief guiding and helping you when you need it even the best of intentions will crumble. I believe that GOD shows the way in this.

I also have other hopes but they all lead to the conclusion that you, alone, cannot meet them and that you need help and guidance."

E Free church elder at funeral of Cathie Russell this week; off the cuff:

My hope of meeting God in heaven is not based on any goodness in myself, but entirely on what God has done for me through his son, Jesus Christ. He lived a perfect life, but then took the penalty for sin - my sin - so that I could be reconciled to God.

I live in touch with him just now, on earth, by faith; one day the rest of his promise will come true and I will live in his visible presence.

I can't remember all he said, but it was clear he had grasped the gospel and was ready to explain it in simple, intelligible words. Off the cuff. Just like Peter said.

F I wonder, lastly, why Peter made this point? Do you think it might have been because he, as a rookie disciple, managed to blow the chance when *he* was questioned by a servant girl as he warmed himself at that fire outside where Jesus was being questioned?

He denied even knowing Jesus, with oaths. Let the failure that is recorded in all four gospels teach us to be ready, to give a reason for our hope, when asked.

Finish by quoting v 18

For Christ died for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit...

Another day we'll look again at the evidence of his death and resurrection.