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ALWAYS PREPARED

Why are you afraid to speak up for Christ? Fear? We live in a world of fearful things – cancer, terrorism, teetering economy, civil turmoil, the list goes on. But knowing Christ makes it possible to live with confidence in this uncertain world – because whether or not you suffer for your faith, you are here to help others find new life in Christ.

That's the message of 1 Peter 3:14-17 – and it's good news for any believer who feels personally rejected, oppressed by tyranny, exploited at work, or harassed at home. That was the lot of most 1st-century followers of Christ. Not much has changed in the 21st century – especially for the 200 million persecuted Christians in 55 countries today (42 of them Islamist).

Peter personally experienced imprisonment, beatings and more, but his words exude confidence: *“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 (give an answer) to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”*

The reason? Christians are merely pilgrims on earth – but citizens of heaven, and ambassadors for our Lord Jesus Christ. Even if you are falsely accused or mistreated, you are accountable to Him, and you entrust yourself to Him, your Lord and Savior, for life and eternity.

Living for Christ will naturally result not only in persecution, but in questions. People want to know what gives you hope in the face of trouble or despair.

As God speaks both visually and verbally to you – through His creation and through His scriptures, so you must speak both visually and verbally for Him. Living out faith by your actions must be accompanied by speaking out faith with your words. You must both show and tell the good news.

Many people say “but people will get the Christian message just from my actions.” No. Actions can always be misinterpreted. Many non-Christians live good lives and are kind to others. But the issue isn't behavior – it's whether or not people are saved by trusting in Christ who alone gives salvation.

Likewise, if you are always talking about Jesus, but living like the devil, who can believe your words? You witness for Christ by both your walk and your talk. Both and. His truth transforms your thinking and your living – and you must show and tell it by your whole life.

“Being prepared” means you've worked out ahead of time what you're going to say. It means you know the essential nuggets of how faith in Christ has changed your life – and how it can change someone else's. “Make a defense” means the reasons for your faith, in spite of the difficulties.

You may not be able to answer every question every time – but “the answer” you give to those who question you is one word: JESUS. Your transformed life is not the result of some amazing religious experience, or some intellectual understanding or some ritual or prayer or decision of your will. You don't trust in works for salvation, you trust with all that you are – in a living person – the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christian workers recommend writing out your personal testimony of faith in Christ so that you can say it in less than 10 seconds. Then do a 30-second version, and have it ready too. That's all the time most people will give you – until they are genuinely interested in hearing more, once they've seen your changed life and heard you talk about Jesus more than once.

And then, trust the Holy Spirit to communicate through your stumbling words what that needy heart really needs to hear. That's how you keep a clear conscience no matter what you suffer – because you're always prepared to show and tell the good news about Jesus!