

**HOW TO HAVE THE COURAGE TO DO RIGHT  
REGARDLESS  
I PETER 3:13-17**

**NEED:** **COURAGE TO DO THE RIGHT THING REGARDLESS OF THE CONSEQUENCES.**

**PROPOSITION:** **COURAGE CAN BE FOUND THROUGH A SURRENDERED HEART, A PREPARED MIND, AND A CLEAN CONSCIENCE.**

**OBJECTIVE:** **TO EQUIP GOD'S PEOPLE TO OVERCOME THEIR FEARS AND TO LIVE COURAGEOUS CHRISTIAN LIVES.**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Simon Peter would never forget the night that he lacked courage. It happened in an unexpected moment. He was attempting to be a part of the crowd that was waiting outside while Jesus was on trial before the Sanhedrin. When on three different occasions he was asked if he was not a disciple of Jesus, his courage failed him. He was so afraid of the consequences of taking a stand with the arrested Jesus and becoming identified as His disciple that he blatantly denied any relationship with Jesus. He would never forget the shame of that night. When Jesus later caught his eye that evening, just after the rooster had crowed, it broke his heart. That experience may well be in the background of this word of encouragement to each of us.

The courage of the recipients of this letter was being tested again and again. Some of them were being arrested and subjected to false accusations simply because they were Christians. Where do you find the courage to do what is right regardless? Halford Luccock made the observation some years ago that the symbol for the Church in the past

has been a lion because of her courage, but he wonders if the fitting symbol for our time might not be the rabbit, scampering away at the first gun shot. Could he be right that this is a generation of Christians who are dominated by their fears rather than their courage?

Winston Churchill once said, “Success is never final; defeat seldom fatal, in the end it is only courage that counts.” Howard Butt, Jr. writes, “Courage is hope’s walking shoes, the protection we need for taking that next stout-hearted unfaltering step, the next ordinary secular step.”

My understanding of this paragraph in this letter of Peter is that he points the way toward courageous living. Courageous living is the result of three very important things being present in the life. They are things that you can make a part of your life today with the result that you will have what it takes to do what is right regardless of the consequences tomorrow.

## **I. ENTHRONE JESUS CHRIST AS LORD IN YOUR HEART.**

It may well be that Peter remembered that he failed to have courage because his relationship with Jesus was not what it should have been. He writes these words, “But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened. But in your hearts set up Christ as Lord.”

Peter has a keen understanding of the nature of courage. He knows that courage is not the absence of fear. One Christian psychiatrist has written in our day, “Most people think

courage is the absence of fear. The absence of fear is not courage; the absence of fear is some kind of brain damage.” Peter realized this. He realized that the night he denied his Lord he was the victim of fearing the wrong thing. His fear that night was what the crowd might do to him if they knew that he was related to Jesus. In this quotation and statement, Peter is giving us the secret of overcoming that kind of fear.

He is actually quoting from the prophet Isaiah. In a time of national crises, God had said to His people, “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” They feared other gods and other things and thus their behavior was inappropriate. The word of admonition is that we are not to give place to the fears that dominate the world around us, nor are we to be afraid of that the world might do to us. But the way you overcome this is by “set apart Christ as Lord” in your heart. What does Peter mean by this statement?

1. The place of enthronement.

The place where Jesus is to be enthroned is “in your hearts.” This means that you are to give Christ his rightful place in the very center of your being, in your hearts. The thing that will determine your actions will be what is supreme in your heart. What is most important to you in your heart. The heart is the place for Christ to be enthroned.

2. The person to be enthroned.

This text from Peter gives us an interesting insight to his understanding of the identity of Jesus. He very deliberately substitutes the Lord Jesus Christ for the God Almighty of the Old Testament. In the understanding of Simon Peter they are one and the same. So the

person to be enthroned is the Eternal God revealed to us in the person of Jesus, the Christ. If you and I are to have the courage to act regardless of the consequences we must have Jesus Christ enthroned in our hearts.

### 3. The act of enthronement.

Peter uses an interesting word which is translated in this text, “set apart.” The old version translates it “sanctify.” The word used in the Greek text is the word commonly translated “sanctify.” The word means to set apart to, consecrate. In this context the word which seemed to mean that you and I are to enthrone Christ by giving him his rightful place in our lives. This involves making him the supreme fear of life.

The reason Simon Peter failed on that unforgettable night was that he did not have Jesus Christ in his rightful place. He was more afraid of what the world might do to him than he was of disappointing the Christ. Courage will be found to do the right thing regardless of the consequences when the supreme fear in your life is that you might disappoint and displease your Lord. You will remember that Jesus said that we are not to fear what other human beings might do to us, but rather we are to fear what God might do to us. The only thing the world can do to us ultimately is kill us, but God has the power to cast our souls into hell. God as revealed in Jesus Christ is the only one who should be the object of real fear in our lives. Can you not see the implications of this? Which is more important to do an illegal act that the boss has ordered you to do and thus protect your job, or to refuse to do the illegal act and please your Lord. Having Jesus Christ in the proper place in your heart will give you courage.

Sam Shoemaker was probably right when he said, “If you are shy in religion you are shy of religion.” Our crippling fear that keeps us from moving confidently to do the will of God is a symptom that we have not given Jesus His proper place in our lives.

## **II. BE READY TO GIVE AN ANSWER FOR YOUR CHRISTIAN HOPE.**

The second word of admonition from Peter is, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asked you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” He may well have in mind a situation in which an early Christian would be confronted and may even be arrested. In the confrontation a demand would be made, “Why are you a Christian? Why do you follow such a foolish course of action when you know it puts your life in danger?” Or he may have had in mind a situation in which someone had been impressed with the life of a Christian and they raised the question, “What does it mean to be a Christian? How did you come to put your faith in Jesus Christ?” What ever the situation in which a question arises concerning your hope in Christ, you are to be ready with an answer.

### **1. A ready answer.**

The Apostle says, “Always be prepared to give an answer.” The word prepared means just that, to be ready! You are to so live your life and understand your faith that a question concerning your hope will be welcomed. You have made preparation ahead of time and you are ready to give an answer.

2. A reasonable answer.

The word in the text that is translated “answer” could be literally translated, “a defense.”

While the text does not seem to suggest a person standing before a judge to make a defense, this would be the word used if you found yourself in that circumstance. It is the kind of answer one gives after they have thought about it very carefully. If you knew that you were going to be put on a witness stand tomorrow and you had to give an answer concerning some critical matter, you would give forethought to what you might say when you sat on that stand. This is the kind of answer that we are to be ready to give to the world when they ask us questions concerning our faith. Another word used in the text points us in the same direction. The word “reason” means just that. It means that our answer is to be a reasonable, logical, meaningful answer.

This does not mean that we have to answer like a scholar or a philosopher. But it does mean that we are prepared to set forth the basis for our faith in Jesus Christ and our hope of eternal life in simple and understandable language. Knowing that you are prepared, that you have an answer, can give you courage in the witnessing situation. The one greatest reason that we fail to do the right thing when an opportunity to witness presents itself is a fear that we are not prepared. If you want to overcome your fears and to be full of courage that will enable you to do the right thing in a witnessing opportunity, then be ready to give an answer.

3. A reverent answer.

The manner in which we give the answer is very important. We are to do it with “gentleness and respect.” This means that we are to respond to those who raised the question in the proper way. Gentleness is usually translated meekness in the New Testament. It is the opposite of that arrogant, know-it-all attitude. Meekness is strength that is under control. Respect is the word for fear. It probably means here the fear of God and the fear of doing the wrong thing. It is the opposite again of pride and arrogance. We are to be ready to give the right answer, but it is important that we give it in the right way. They will listen not only to what we say but how we say it as well.

An example of what this means came to my attention a few days ago. The 19<sup>th</sup> century agnostic Aldous Huxley once spent a weekend at the home of some friends, and when Sunday arrived everyone decided to attend church, but Huxley stayed at the house. On that Sunday morning, however, he approached a rather plain man who was known to have a simple and radiant faith. He asked the man to stay home from church and to tell him what his Christian faith meant to him and why he was a Christian. The man replied, “Oh, I can’t do that. You could demolish my arguments in a minute, Dr. Huxley.” But Huxley said, “I don’t want to argue with you. I just want you to tell me simply what this Christ means to you.” So, the man stayed home and told Huxley his faith.

When he was finished and there were tears in the eyes of the brilliant agnostic, and he said, “I would give my right hand if only I could believe that.” What has touched the heart of this man. It was not a debate, but a genuine faith expressed by one who knew the

Lord and was not ashamed to invite others to know Him. This is what we must be prepared to do.

### **III. MAINTAIN A GOOD CONSCIENCE.**

The third admonition given by Peter in this text says, “Keeping a clear conscience so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.” “Clear” is probably better translated “good” conscience. A good conscience is a wonderful, wonderful possession for the Christian.

A good conscience is possible for the Christian. You acquire a good conscience by having it renewed by the Holy Spirit in the new birth; having it cleansed by the blood of Christ from all dead works and defilement; and having it informed by the Holy Scriptures as you study and read them day by day. When the conscience within you has been renewed by the Spirit, cleansed by the blood of Christ, and enlightened by the Holy Scriptures, then you will have a good conscience. A good conscience will produce in your life courage.

The reason the good conscience is so important is rather obvious:

1. A good conscience will warn you about the wrong way.

All of us need this. We will often be faced with situations in which we have to make quick decisions about what is right and what is wrong. A good conscience will give you a warning about a wrong, a temptation to do evil. We need that quick kind of inner response to a situation that a good conscience can give us.

2. A good conscience is able to approve the good.

This is just the opposite of a warning about the wrong. A good conscience will help you discern what is right and what should be done. It is important that you and I maintain this good conscience so that we will not miss those opportunities to do good.

3. A good conscience is able to comfort when accused.

This may well be what Peter has in mind in our text. It is important that when you have done what you believe to be the right thing and you are accused of doing the wrong thing that you have the comfort of a good conscience within. A good conscience will be a tremendous source of comfort when someone has falsely accused you or misjudged you.

Maintaining a good conscience requires constant spiritual discipline in your life. Whenever you have consciously violated your conscience, if you are to maintain a good conscience then you must confess that sin and find cleansing from it. A defiled conscience will not function within you as a good conscience. And if you are to maintain a good conscience it is important that you act and speak in such a way that you will not offend that inner voice.

Do you see the relationship between these three things and courage? Our courage often fails because we fear man more than we fear Christ. Our courage often fails because we have not prepared ourselves to give the right answer or to do the right thing. Then, our courage often fails because we do not have a good conscience. There is stored away in our memory occasions where we have violated our conscience and the enemy take

advantage of this. He causes us to be afraid to do the right thing lest we be exposed as being a fraud or a hypocrite. Maintaining a good conscience is very critical.