

Week of November 25-December 1

PROVE IT

Scripture Reading: Read 1 Peter 3

C.S. Lewis. Josh McDowell. Lee Strobel. Ravi Zacharias. What do these four men have in common? Each, in their own way, has been an able defender of the Christian faith. They have taken on the challenges of the skeptics and the cynics to prove the gospel message and they have responded in a forceful, credible and intelligent way. To any fair-minded seeker of truth, their body of work supplies enough evidence to support the truth claims of the Bible and the gospel.

While we may never rise to the level of these apologists, the apostle Peter expects that all believers will be equipped to give an answer or defense for our faith. Just look at verses 15-16 of today's chapter reading: *"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..."*

Much of what Peter has to say in his first epistle deals with the believers' response to suffering, particularly unjust suffering, at the hands of those who oppose the gospel. Such seems to be the case with Peter's instructions here. Peter assumes the possibility that believers were going to be persecuted for their faith, either verbally or physically (3:14, 16-17). For those Christians who had set Christ apart as Lord in their hearts, however, there was no need to be afraid (3:14-15) because they knew the redemptive nature of suffering, Christ's example in the face of unjust suffering, and God's ultimate triumph over evil. These believers could respond with hope, joy, patience and forgiveness no matter what the circumstance.

Unbelievers, expecting a negative response from the believers when they are forced to endure suffering, are shocked to see their hopeful response instead. Naturally, the question would arise in their hearts, "Why?" It is this "why?" that would lead the unbelievers to ask the Christians for the reason for the hope within them. Notice, before these Christians had uttered a word, their lives had already served as living proof of the faith they had. It was after they had lived hope that they were called upon to provide a reason for that hope. It was this answer that Peter wanted to make sure the believers were prepared to give with gentleness, respect and a clear conscience.

The church has been blessed with the work of the apologists, those men and women who have labored to provide a credible defense of the faith. The church has also been blessed by faithful men and women, boys and girls, who simply possessed a living hope and knew enough about Jesus to share him with others; who through their lives and their lips proved the gospel to those who were looking for answers.

Action Step & Prayer Focus: When unbelievers look at your life, do they see Christ's hope radiating from you? If not, why not? If they do, are you prepared to give an answer for that hope? If not, take some time to reflect on what you would say. How could you share a Christ-honoring response that would be balanced with both truth and grace, gentleness and respect? Plan now so you're ready when they ask. Pray for the Holy Spirit to direct you in your preparations since it's his job to glorify Jesus.

Take-a-way: *One of the greatest proofs for our faith is a godly and hopeful life.*