

Intro: Responding to critics.

- Fear and Danger. Fight or flight? Anger or fear or both.
 - **Me and haunted houses.**
- We also respond like this to people who criticize us or hurt us.
- We are called to respond without fear and with gentleness.

Trusting Jesus Makes Us Fearless and Gentle Defenders of the Gospel

Consequences of Doing Good:

The World

- Most people will not physically harm you; though some will.
- Slander and talking about you; mocking you.
- Western persecution v. persecution in the world.

God

- God blesses those willing to do good no matter what.
 - Primarily assurance of your hope; though possible immediate provision.
- God uses our suffering to shame our persecutors. Possibly to even bring them to salvation. **(2:12)**

How Peter wants us to respond:

- Honor Jesus and don't fear man: Jesus is Lord means
 - He's in control. (God's will to suffer) Lord = God.
 - He's worthy of obedience. **(i.e. Like any other authority)** He can/will fulfill His promises.
- Defend your hope with gentleness and respect. Don't fight; be gentle. Don't flee; defend.
 - Hope = confidence. Defend = apologetics, the act of legal defense.
 - Personal defense: **Why do you believe in this? Act this way? Is it worth it?**
 - Your response is rooted in obedience to the Lord (respect = fear) and gentleness toward them.
- Easy to hear, difficult to do. Why? Fight or flight

How we respond instead:

We either fight or hide and how we do that depends on who we see as the enemy: Is it the culture or the gospel message?

- If it's the culture:
 - Fight: **We'll be harsh and angry. Try to conquer them. Use our defense as an attack. Us v. Them.**
 - Hide: **Our fear of the possibility of suffering or experience of it will cause us to close up in our Christian cul-de-sacs.**
- If it's the gospel:
 - Fight: **We'll fight the offensiveness of the message. Water it down, explain away hard topics and truths.**
 - Hide: **We don't share it with others. It's our personal truth and we don't see the need for our friends to hear it.**

- All of these are responses to FEARING AND BEING TROUBLED by people more than TRUSTING JESUS AS LORD.
 - We don't believe that God will bless us.
 - That He will use it for our good.
 - That He will use it for others' good.
 - We don't trust God to be faithful to His promises.
- Ultimately, in order to defend our hope...we have to better understand our hope.

The hope of 1 Peter 1:3-5

- You have been born again to a living hope. (Sin's penalty)
 - We are the prodigal son (**Luke 15:11-32**)
- You have a future inheritance. (Sin's presence)
- You are being guarded. (Sin's power)

How does this impact us now? (**1:6-9**)

- It matures us. We have a deeper assurance.
- We know more of God. We have greater love for Him.
- We experience freedom. We have greater joy in Him.
- In short, the more we suffer for our hope - the greater our hope becomes.

This means, when we fight or hide from the possibility of suffering we actually limit our growth and knowledge of God. Think about it:

- We dishonor Jesus because we are afraid of man more than Him. We trust ourselves more than Him.
- We misrepresent the character of God. Jesus is a missional God of love and grace. We become hostile and isolated. (Caricature of the church)
- We lack growth in our faith, our hope loses its power, and the joy of our salvation wanes. Eventually, we will start to question the need for the church and we will walk away.
 - We've seen this in the past 5-10 years.

What now?

- Gospel: Do you know the hope you've been saved to? Which of those elements is most difficult to believe? Why?
- Community: Being a gentle and respectful people. How do you/we respond to suffering? Fight or hide? Trusting Jesus more than fearing man. We must keep the hope of the gospel always in front of us.
- Mission: Who are you afraid of? Who or what situations cause you fear? Pray for God to help you overcome.