

1 PETER 3:15-17

DON'T GO MAKING TROUBLE

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 behavior 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.*

The last thing you should want to do is get in the way of your own witness. This seems so obvious, and yet there is a universe of pit falls. In fact, as our zeal increases, the opportunities for getting in the way of the message increase exponentially. It happens to committed believers all the time. In our zeal we bore our friends, get impatient with the slow response of our family members, exhibit anger toward the government and culture, criticize those who don't measure up, shake the dust off our feet and move on to a better church, and talk a much better story than we walk. Over the last ten years, my prayer has become, "Lord, if I am to suffer, may it be for your Gospel and not for my obnoxiousness."

One antidote for this disease of obnoxiousness is love. Now you really have me pegged as a child of the 60's. Of course, the love I'm talking about here is the other-centered love of Christ. While I am to witness to Christ with my life at all times, my words must be used in relationship with the hearer. Peter puts it this way: *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* (v 15). First you live the truth and then you answer the inevitable question as to why you live the way you do. Anyone who has mentored a younger colleague or raised a child knows that giving answers to questions they have never thought to ask is a waste of time, at best. When a person asks a question, he will listen to the answer. And whether or not he agrees, it is unlikely that he will attack you. But if he does, the people will see his action for the evil it really is, and God will be glorified.

Father Almighty, the battle is yours and not mine. The battle has already been won by Jesus and I am only a messenger of that news to the world. Help me to remember to be me, the messenger, and not try to be you, the Savior. Empower me to walk the walk and to be ever ready to give the reason. Amen.