

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas  
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## The Best Defense of Faith

1 Peter 3:13-17

3:13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

3:14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,

3:15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

3:16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

3:17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

### **1. Sufferings of Believers**

This letter was addressed to the elect exiles of the dispersion. They were forced to get out from the homeland and live in a foreign country. Among them, some were deprived of land and property and became exiles. The letter was written to encourage those believers in painful situation. Apostle Peter told believers, “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials” (1 Peter 1:6) Apostle Paul also said “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22) People want to have faith because they want to be released from sufferings and troubles. Why do believers have to go through pain while those

believe in Jesus Christ can be released from sufferings?

Pain is rooted in sins. Even if you have to go through the painful experience, you can endure it if you don't do anything wrong. You can be proud of yourself and live the rest of your life. However, if you are exposed under the light of the truth, you realize that your sins hurt yourself and make others suffer. And you realize how big your sin is. You can avoid blaming yourself, saying, "Society is bad, others are problematic, others are causing the troubles" and make them responsible for your sins. But there are no solutions to it. Until you realize that the real problem is you and admit your sins, repent it, and being forgiven, your soul cannot experience true joy or peace.

You cannot get rid of your sins by yourself. It is only Jesus Christ who took all the people's sins with his own sufferings and won forgiveness of sins. When you come to Jesus and receive forgiveness, you can experience the biggest joy. When amnesty is granted to death-row inmates, they are given a tranquilizer beforehand to avoid going into a shock and die. To hear the salvation and grace of Jesus Christ is equivalent or far greater than what death-row inmates feel when they hear the news of amnesty. Those who receive the Gospel and believe in Jesus Christ will be accepted as God's children and filled with joy of being pardoned. They will also be filled with peace coming from being accepted and loved by God.

Therefore, believers don't have to suffer for themselves. However, there still are sins and evil in this world. It is not easy to live straight in a crooked and twisted generation. Those who are forgiven will be exposed to evil power, so they have to fight with sins and defeat it. It is well predicted that when you believe in God and follow Jesus Christ

in this world, there will be friction and pain. However, the pain is not derived from your own sins. The pain is through which you will be cleansed; the pain is necessary to inform people the good news of Jesus Christ and God's love. Good things will be born from pain, similar to so-called labor pain.

Jesus Christ experienced the ultimate pain to redeem sins of men and women. We, humans, cannot add anything to the pain of redemption. Even if we suffer from our own sins, we cannot redeem our sins because of the pain. Only Jesus Christ could pay the redemption for us. This is exactly as is sung in Hymn 297 "Jesus Paid It All". Believers cannot share the Christ's redeeming pain. But believers can share the pain which comes from living in love of redemption and witnessing His love.

Paul said in Galatians 4:19 "My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!", and in Colossians 1:24 "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, ....". Even now, Lord Jesus has "labor pain" for churches and for this world. Therefore, those who are in Christ share Christ's sufferings. But the pain will not end in pain. It will lead to overflowing joy. As 1 Peter 4:13 says, "But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."

## **2. Defense of Faith**

The Early Christians had been blamed and complained for no reason; people called Christians "atheists" because they didn't worship idols

and emperors. Others reported, “inbreeds” since they found the loving relationship among Christians calling “brothers” and “sisters” each other. Christians at the Lord’s Supper eat the breads as “the body of Christ,” and drink the wine as “the blood of Christ.” It was called “cannibalism,” likewise other cases. And, Christians didn’t play around with people and involve with over-consuming, then people said, “They hate society and human.” Those are all just “attacks” rather than misunderstanding, yet they had to make a defense against them when they were in courts. Christians didn’t let their bills go, they used the opportunity of apology for witnessing Christ.

Christians were learning the truth of faith and training themselves for speaking up what they believed in church. They prepared themselves for witnessing as verse 15 says, “always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” They put on the strong attitudes of faith and the knowledge to resist their opponents.

We wouldn’t be blamed just like the first century Christians had been, yet we sometimes need to make a defense even now; we might face it sooner or later. People would ask you, “What kind of relationship do we have with the guy died 2000 years ago?” “If we are pure heart in our faith, can we be saved by any religions?” “If Christianity was the religion of love, why Christian countries involve with wars?” We must ask ourselves, “Do we ourselves have the answer of these questions?” “Do we have the words to answer them?”

Those who discuss against us sometimes try to solve personal troubles or specific problems inside of their mind, rather than pursuing the direct answers. So we need the knowledge to help them

personally and the love to sympathize understanding. “Defense” that we, Christians, prepare is not for the victory; it’s meaningless if we cannot show Christ. “Defense of Faith” is not for us, but for them. That should be out of love, willing to answer their deep questions through the Word of God.

### **3. Witness Through Life**

For the defense of faith we need intellectual trainings and love to those who haven’t yet had faith, but the most effective defense is good and righteous life of Christians. It is written in verses 13, 16 and 17. “Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ... When you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.”

We, Christians should logically response to the ungrounded charges. The leaders of the early church did so. Justin Martyr and Tertullianus, who are known as apologists, did so. They also appealed Roman emperors to abolish the laws for persecutions against Christians. However, if they did it only by academic discussions or political games, the church never overcome the persecution. The defense and apology of faith had power by the righteous and good life of the believers.

Justin was martyred with other six fellow Christians in 165. When he was young, he sought the truth through studying various schools of Greek philosophy. He finally learned at the school of Plato, but he couldn’t get the answer. But he met an elderly Christian and had faith after a long journey of seeking truth. Not only the deep truth, which

God entrusted Christians, but also the higher standard moral life of Christians led Justin to his conversion. As the Lord said “The tree is known by its fruit,” (Matthew 12:33) sound doctrine produces righteous life and the truth brings truthful behavior and the righteous life and truthful behavior testify the truth. Even Christians are not perfect. They have weaknesses and make errors. However the true believers seek always higher and holier life. Such life and behavior have been influenced many people like Justin.

The persecution against Christians grew increasingly severe under the third Shogun, Iemitsu in Japan. “Fumie” was introduced to find Christians in 1629. January 12 of the year, 53 Christians were martyred for their faith in Yonezawa, now called Yamagata. The magistrates of Yonezawa execution ground said, “Everyone, they have to die for their faith. Everyone, please bow to them.” And said, “We know what they have done to us. They took care of lepers, they had mercy on children and elderly, and we truly need them in Yonezawa; however, in this time this country doesn’t allow them to believe in Christ, even though they are the God-like people for us. So please bow to them.” People cried for Christians loving them and regretting for killing them by the pressure of Shogunate. Though Christians couldn’t share the gospel in public under edicts banning Christianity, but they were witnessing Christ by their good life.

Good people are suffering disadvantage and bad people is exercising their power as they wish. We’ve seen such reality in the past and we see it now. Many of us become angry, or are disappointed, and want to escape from the reality. But, the Bible teaches us, “Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend

faithfulness.” (Psalm 37:3) Our good life in Christ is the best and the most effective defense and apology of our faith. Let us do good and witness Christ through our life.

**(Prayer)**

Heavenly Father, people make the light of the truth dim in our generation. Give us the wisdom, knowledge, and word of You, and make us the witnesses of Jesus Christ. And give us good life in Christ that supports our witnessing by words. It’s the most powerful witness in any generations. Make us to seek earnestly and faithfully both of words and deeds in Christ. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.