

## IX. For Good

January 4/6/7, 2021

1 Peter 3:8-17

**Aim:** To live the ‘good life,’ that is, a life dedicated to Christian good works, and to be prepared to explain to outsiders about our Christian hope that makes us zealous for good.

DSB Note: This passage reminds me of the old adage, ‘doing well by doing good.’ Also, of the song ‘For Good’ from the musical *Wicked*:

I've heard it said  
That people come into our lives for a reason  
Bringing something we must learn  
And we are led  
To those who help us most to grow  
If we let them  
And we help them in return  
Well, I don't know if I believe that's true  
But I know I'm who I am today  
Because I knew you...  
Like a comet pulled from orbit  
As it passes a sun  
Like a stream that meets a boulder  
Halfway through the wood  
Who can say if I've been changed for the better?  
But because I knew you  
I have been changed *for good*.

*Helm:* Imperceptible, beginning with 3:8, something begins to change. A shift takes place; and by the close of 3:17 we suddenly find ourselves on untried ground.... The literary framework that has carried us from 2:13 is suddenly gone. Submission has receded with the tide, and in its place *suffering* is about all there is to see.

### A. Living for Good (1 Peter 3:8-12)

*McKnight:* The fifth and final section of Peter’s ‘Guidelines to Social Groups’ (i.e., household codes) expresses his concern with everyone in the churches, and his regulations exhort Christians on how they are to behave in general. (Peter begins with *to telos*, ‘Finally.’ One might translate this: ‘The sum of the matter is this....’. Here he re-expresses what he said in 2:11-12, the various virtues listed in 3:8-11 being specific instances of ‘good conduct’ and ‘abstaining from sin.’) Accordingly, this section records the general ethical principles required of believers who want to live circumspectly in a world that opposes both their lifestyle and their existence.

*Dorani:* If we live by God’s standards, we will never quite fit into any human culture.... Nonetheless, 1 Peter 3:8-13 states the norm. A good life allows peace. Whatever we may say about life in an alien culture, under hostile authorities, the greater part of the Christian life concerns the character and disciplines that shape daily actions and our universal responsibilities. So Peter describes the virtues that bless everyone: harmony, sympathy, love, compassion, and

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humility. Later he mentions forgiveness, hospitality, and generosity (4:8-10). Earlier Peter said that holy women used to adorn themselves with ‘the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit’ (3:4-5). Now he mentions traits that make everyone attractive.

### 1. Christian Love (3:8)

<sup>8</sup>*Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.*

*Gardner:* The second great command is to ‘love your neighbor as yourself’ (Mt. 22:39). Nowhere is this more important than in the family of believers where we are to see each other as brothers.

*MacArthur:* The apostle concludes his discussion on the Christian’s conduct in an ungodly world, which begin in 2:11, starting with the phrase in 3:8a *to sum up (to de telos)*, which actually could be translated by the single word, ‘finally.’ It does not signal the end of the letter, but the conclusion of the current section. After specific references to civil relationships (2:13-17), workplace relationships (2:18-20), and relationships to unsaved spouses (3:1-7), Peter gives all believers a general exhortation, which will open them to the life of blessing God desires for them to enjoy. Everything begins with the right attitude. Five spiritual virtues constitute this God-honoring perspective.

*McKnight:* While the previous three sections were addressed to specific kinds of people (slaves, wives, husbands), this exhortation is for *all of you....* The focus in these virtues is on how Christians demonstrate these virtues as they live with one another in a hostile world.

*Dorani:* First Peter 3:8-12 begins with a phrase that sounds as though the author were wrapping something up: *Finally, all of you...’*. Indeed, Peter is concluding something—not his entire epistle, but his survey of the principle duties of Christians, which he began in 1 Peter 1:13. Peter has moved from general duties to specific obligations and back to general duties.... St first glance, Peter seems to list five random virtues. On closer inspection, a pattern emerges. The first and last are mental or intellectual, the second and forth are emotional, and brotherly love stands at the center. Further, all these traits have a social dimension. Together, they keep relationships healthy.

#### a) Harmony

*Gardner:* First, they should be of one mind, living *in harmony with one another* (cp. Rom. 12:16).... When we insist on our own way, there is no space to be of one mind together and so living in harmony. The harmony being called for may simply be general. That is, there should be no divisive arguments among Christians. However, it may refer specifically to Christians working towards sharing the same mind about how God would have them live and think together as the church.

*MacArthur:* First, believers are to *be harmonious*. The compound word rendered *harmonious (homophrones)* literally means ‘same think.’ Believers are to live in harmony together maintaining a common commitment to the truth that produces an inward unity of heart with one another. They must not be in conflict with each other, even under severe persecution.

*McKnight:* They must begin with *harmony* (cp. Acts 4:32; Rom. 12:16; 15:5; 1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 2:2; 4:2) in both mind and spirit. When this virtue is present, what results from this is not uniformity but unanimity.

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*Doriani:* Strong relationships begin with *unity of mind* (*homophrones*). To have one mind is not to have identical opinions about politics, philosophy, ethics, business, food, music, and leisure. Rather, unit means that we are agreeable and sensitive to each other's concerns. Unity comes not from a creed or a law laid upon us, nor from a pretense that we agree when we actually disagree, but from relationships, respectful dialogue, and common causes.

*Sproul:* Here Peter tells us that it is imperative for the health of a church that its people be of one mind. This does not mean that the people are to set aside their own perceptions and viewpoints and slavishly embrace everything that everyone else in the congregation believes. That is what you expect to find in a cult, not in a church. We all come from different backgrounds, and we bring to the church different perspectives; discarding those differences is not required for unity. Peter's plea here is that believers have agreement on substantive matters. We are to share one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.... He is saying that we should be single-minded in our understanding of the person and work of Christ. We can—and must—be united in our confession of the essentials of the Christian faith, but there is plenty of room for differences in lesser matters.

*Sproul:* Bringing our minds into conformity with the mind of Christ by submitting to the Word of God is a lifelong enterprise. The Word of God gives us the perspective of God, and that perspective is radically different from the perspective of the world. Because we want to share the perspective of God, and because our thinking is being formed by that, this should lead us to a very important like-mindedness as we share our common faith in the truth of God. The like-mindedness that is to mark the communion of the saints is so precious that we need to guard it carefully.

### b) *Sympathy*

*Gardner:* Second, we are to be sympathetic. Here Peter is concerned with their ability to understand and empathize with each other. They are not just to share pain together, though this must be part of what is in mind, but also to listen to each other carefully and share in each other's emotions, whether of sadness or of joy and praise (see 1 Cor. 12:26).

*MacArthur:* *Sympathetic*, the second factor in experiencing the fullness of Christian life, is virtually a transliteration of *sumpatheis*, which means 'sharing the same feeling.' Christians are to be united on the truth, but also ready to sympathize with the pain of others, even of those they do not know.

*McKnight:* Harmony is, in part, a development of being *sympathetic* (cp. Rom. 12:15; 1 Cor. 12:26; Heb. 4:15; 10:34). It is both compassion and understanding.

*Doriani:* First Peter 3:8 mentions three forms of love—sympathy, brotherly love, compassion. Sympathy and compassion are emotional virtues. Sympathy is the ability to feel what another feels, whether in joy or in sorrow (cp. Rom. 12:15; 1 Cor. 12:26).... To sympathize is to enter the experience of others and, if possible, to act on what we feel. Jesus sympathizes with us in our weakness (cp. Heb. 4:15).... Among humans, sympathy largely rests on shared pains, but Jesus is both strong and empathetic!. He doesn't merely sympathize with us in our battle against evil; He defeats Satan and the powers of evil. He feels *with* us and acts *for* us.

*Sproul:* The second virtue, he says, is having compassion for one another. Other translations read 'having sympathy for one another.' The idea here is not so much one person's feeling sorry for another; the etymology of the words is more specific. To have compassion is to share

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common feelings. ‘I feel your pain’ has become a trite expression in our day. However, the ability to feel another’s pain and joy is what we are called to do (cp. Rom. 12:15)... To have sympathy is *pathos*, or passion that is shared. We should share each other’s passion. We have various passions about various things, but passion for the virtuous things of God is a contagious matter. If one of us has great feelings of worship, we should share that with one another.

### c) Love

*Gardner*: Thirdly, we are to *love as brothers*. Familial love is at the heart of Peter’s comments here and was always at the heart of the Christian faith right from the earliest days (cp. Jn. 13:34-35).

*MacArthur*: Third, Peter used the term *philadelphoi*, translated here as *brotherly*. The first part of the word stems from the verb *phileō*, ‘to love,’ and refers to affection among people who are closely related in some way. Those who demonstrate that affection will do so by unselfish service for one another.

*McKnight*: In addition, believers are to *love as brothers* (1:22; 2:17; 1 Th. 4:9). Such a virtue characterized much of early Christianity, though because of human nature, it was always under threat. Christians are to love one another and any whom they encounter as good neighbors.

*Dorani*: The term translated *brotherly love* (*philadelphos*) could be rendered ‘brotherly affection.’ The command to love one another is foundation (Jn. 13:34-35; cp. 1 Th. 4:9).

*Sproul*: Then, Peter says, we are to love as brothers. The love enjoined upon us by the New Testament is one that transcends the earthly sort of love.... The family is the chief metaphor that the Scriptures give for the church. God is our Father, and we are His adopted children. If Christ loves you, and you are in Christ, and Christ loves me, and I am in Christ, then what could possibly be more natural that to have at the bottom of this pyramid a connection of love between us? We should love one another if for no other reason than that we share the same Father.

### d) Tenderness

*Gardner*: Fourthly, they are to *be compassionate and humble*. Pride destroys humility and self-centeredness will ruin attempts to be compassionate. Compassion and humility are also Christ-like characteristics. His humility enabled Him to go to the cross to bear the sin of His people (Phil. 2:8). His compassion led to His weeping for the people of Jerusalem so caught up in their sin and pride that they could not see God Himself reaching out to them (Lk. 19:41-44). God’s people should reflect this deep concern for the other person that comes from a heart that is humble and leads to true compassion for others.

*MacArthur*: *Kindhearted* translates *eusplagchnoi*, the root of which refers to one’s internal organs and is sometimes translated ‘bowels’ or ‘intestines’ (e.g., Acts 1:18). Affections and emotions have a visceral impact, hence this word signifies a powerful kind of feeling (Eph. 4:32; cp. 2 Cor. 7:15; 1 Th. 2:8). Much like *sympathetic*, the expression calls for being so affected by the pain of others as to feel it deeply, following the kind of tenderhearted compassion God, through His Son, has for sinners.

*Dorani*: The final aspect of love in 1 Peter 3:8 is compassion. *Compassion* is the emotion or feeling of love, tenderness, generosity, and warmth. Compassion and sympathy come naturally to some. Others have to work to open themselves to it. Some of us are drawn to babies, lonely old people, and sad emotional stories. Others want to run away from all three.... Jesus is kind and tender, and He expects us to grow toward conformity to Him (Eph. 4:32; Rom. 8:29).

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*Sproul:* We are also to be tenderhearted. Other translations supply a different word here, but the thought is that, in the church, there should be a certain shared tenderness. Tenderness is the opposite of roughness. The word Peter uses does not describe a physical touch but a visceral one, something that comes from the deepest chamber of our hearts. We know what it means to be kind, and we all have known people who manifest a remarkable degree of kindness. When we recognize someone as being kind, we are recognizing a tender heart—not a hardened, mean, thoughtless heart.

### e) Humility

*MacArthur:* The final factor in Peter’s list for enjoying the goodness of the Christian life, *humble in spirit*, is actually one word in the Greek, *tapeinophrones* (‘humble-minded’). Humility is arguably the most essential, all-encompassing virtue of the Christian life.

*Doriani:* The final blessed trait of 1 Peter 3:8 is humility. It is easy to see that humility, listed last, corresponds to unity. To be humble is to suppress the desire to be important and to put our interests first. Since most quarrels come from a desire to have our way, we see that humility fosters unity. Jesus is the supreme model of humility (cp. Phil. 2:5-7)... Humility must not be confused with a poor self-concept. It’s a willingness to take the lower place, to perform the less exalted service, and to put the interests of others ahead of our own [cp. Phil. 2:3-4]. As John Calvin said, self-denial is a good summary of the Christian life. This has nothing to do with personal style. One can be humble *and* assertive. The problem is not assertion; it is *self-assertion*.

*Sproul:* The fifth value is courteousness. The word *courtesy* came into common usage in England during the Elizabethan period. It was derived from two words, *court* and *etiquette*. Court etiquette, shortened to ‘courtesy,’ was defined in terms of how honor and respect were to be given to the royal family, and those principles of etiquette were practiced in court. Honor and respect became the ideals for those who served the crown... To be courteous means to respect other people. We are to respect their feelings and their position, which is simply an extension of the principle of honor. The ethic of the church is that we are to honor others above themselves.

*MacArthur:* The joys of their lives in Christ are maximized when believers are united in truth and life with one another, peaceful in disposition, gracious toward those who need the gospel, sensitive to the pains of fallen sinners, sacrificial in loving service to all, compassionate instead of harsh, and above all humble like their Savior.

*Sproul:* These five virtues to which we are called as a church describe the ideal church. We are not an ideal church. We do not always share feelings with our friends. We are not always of one mind. We do not always love each other as family, nor are we always tender, courteous, and respectful, but these are the values God loves.

## 2. Christian Blessing (3:9)

### a) Give a Blessing (3:9a)

<sup>9</sup>*Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless...*

#### (1) Revile

<sup>9</sup>*Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling...*

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*Gardner:* Peter now turns from relationships within the Christian community to those with unbelievers. Following the Lord's own very clear teaching, for example in Luke 6:27-28, Peter asks that Christians who are insulted or reviled or have evil done to them or spoken about them should not respond in kind. He has already reminded his readers of the Lord's example of not retaliating when insulted (2:23).

*MacArthur:* A godly approach to life incorporates not only the right action motivated by the right attitude, but the proper reaction when mistreated. *Not returning evil for evil* begins with an imperative present participle expressing a negative command (*mē apodidontes*), which can also mean 'stop returning.' If a believer is not retaliating to evil with more evil, he must not start; if he is, he must stop.... *Evil* is from *kakos*, which denotes the inherent quality of badness, not just bad words or actions.... Turning to the matter of speech, Peter warned his readers not to return *insult for insult*. The term *insult* (*loidoria*) means 'an abusive railing against,' 'cursing,' or 'speaking evil of' someone and is the root of the word translated 'reviled' in 2:23. To engage in such vengeance is an unacceptable response for believers.

*McKnight:* Since it is difficult to imagine Peter thinking of Christians throwing hostile barbs at one another, we are probably justified in thinking he has here moved from 'inter-Christian' ethics to 'outsider' ethics—to how believers should relate to the hostile world in which they live. *Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing*, just as Jesus lived (cp. 2:21, 23). Once again, Peter sees the Christian response to pressures from the outside world as one of passivity and grace, not aggressive retaliation.

*Dorani:* First Peter 3:8 and 9 present contrasting commands. The opposite of love (3:8) is mean-spirited justice, the cycle of insult and counter-insult, blows and counterblows, retaliations and retaliation for prior retaliation (3:9).

*Sproul:* Then Peter changes from the positive to the negative, first telling us what we should do, then telling us what we should not do.

### (2) Bless

*...but on the contrary, bless...*

*Gardner:* But now he says that their response should be one of *blessing*. The original meaning of 'bless' means 'to speak well of,' but then it came to mean asking God's favor for someone. It may be that this would involve a believer praying for an unbeliever who has insulted him or even speaking to him of God's blessing of salvation (cp. Acts 7:59-60).

*MacArthur:* Rather than retaliating when treated in a hostile way, believers are to respond by *giving a blessing instead*. The term translated *blessing* is the word from which the English word *eulogy* derives. It means to praise or speak well of others (cp. Lk. 1:42). Peter's admonition suggests several practical implications. First, believers can bless people by loving them unconditionally.... Second, they can give a blessing by praying for the salvation of an unbeliever...or the sanctification of a fellow believer. Third, believers can bless people by expressing gratitude for them.... Finally, and most crucial, believers are to forgive those who persecute them.

*Dorani:* Instead of cursing, we should bless. There is a time for silence, as Jesus showed during His trial (Mt. 26:63). But ordinarily we should be ready to bless those who curse or persecute us (Rom. 12:14; 1 Cor. 4:12). In Scripture, this blessing could be a general word of kindness *or* the

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word of blessing, the gospel. Jesus commanded us to love our enemies, to pray for them, and so to bless them (Mt. 5:44). He practiced what He preached, speaking words of blessing from the cross. We can do the same in politics and work, in families and relationships.

*Helm:* We are called to bless. Shockingly, the uniqueness of Peter's thought in this section isn't that we are called to bless God (1:3), but rather that we are called to bless those who persecute us. We are to bless the ungodly ruler, the unjust employer, the difficult husband. He wants us to bless those who are in authority over us. A Christian community, says Peter, is a community that *blesses*.

### b) *Gain a Blessing (3:9b)*

*...for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.*

*Gardner:* Peter gives a more personal motivation to behave like this. *They were called to this so that they might inherit a blessing.* God's people are called to be a people who image their creator and who therefore seek to be like the Lord Jesus who Himself turned the other cheek and did not retaliate, but rather blessed those who persecuted Him. He even asked the Father for their forgiveness as He died on the cross. This is a hard calling that will often involve persecution and suffering as Peter will go on to describe. But the promise for all Christians is that they do now and will in the future inherit God's most wonderful *blessing*. This blessing reaches its climax when, on the last day, they meet their King in glory (cp. Mt. 25:34)... Remembering their eternal inheritance also reminds despairing, persecuted, and reviled Christians that in the end God is the judge and He and His people will be vindicated. They will be comforted.

*MacArthur:* Believers have been *called for the very purpose that they might inherit* (freely receive) *a blessing* (a gift). The apostle's point is that believers have received the divine, unmerited, and eternal blessing of complete forgiveness of an unpayable debt to a holy God and heavenly life forever with Him, rather than His deserved wrath and vengeance for sin. A believer's freely granting forgiveness to someone who has offended him should be an easy consequence, since both that believer and the offense are so small compared to God's greatness and how He has been offended.

*McKnight:* Why? *Because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.* Peter anchors their relationships to outsiders in their calling and promises them a 'blessing.' While some have seen this blessing as the final state of salvation, others find here a promise for some kind of blessing in this life, perhaps a longer life or greater toleration for Christian faith. In light of Peter's citation of Psalm 34, where the beginning emphasis is on 'see[ing] good days' (3:10), he likely has in mind a prolonged life on this earth because of Christian goodness, in spite of persecution. In line with his emphasis at 2:11-12, he imagines it will be a much better life for the churches if they are quiet, humble, and gentle, and if they refrain from retaliation and vindication. One might dub this orientation as 'optimistic,' but it is a conclusion drawn by a victim of persecution who knows, from tough times, how life works.

*Doriani:* Peter declares, 'Do not repay evil with evil,' but bless *that you may inherit a blessing.* In the Old Testament, the blessing was the Promised Land. In 1:4-7, Peter says that the blessing is now eternal life, which begins when Jesus returns.

*Helm:* Thankfully, the text goes on to show that when we live in the world in this way, our actions will be rewarded. The text says we will *obtain a blessing*. Isn't that encouraging? When

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we bless, we will receive a blessing. Interestingly, that blessing will come at times from God and at other times from men. Certainly verse 9 indicates that it is God who blesses us. Take note then: without blessing others there is no guarantee that any of us can obtain the approval and smile of God. Can there be any higher motivation for us to bless than to obtain a blessing *from God*?

### 3. Christian Peace (3:10-12)

*Gardner*: As Peter draws this part of his teaching to a close, he turns to Psalm 34:12-16 for lengthy Scriptural support.

*MacArthur*: The word *for* at the beginning of verse 10 connects verses 8 and 9 to Peter's quotes from Psalm 34:12-16, support his exhortation that believers must have a right response to hostility.

*McKnight*: Peter supports his exhortation by quoting an Old Testament text that describes the close relationship between one's life and God's assessment of that person. Knowing that God knows everything and is [in] control of everything gives Christians a serenity and acceptance of injustices while they await the truthfulness of God's final assessment.

*Dorani*: First Peter 3:10-12 is essentially a long quotation from Psalm 34.... The psalm moves from the blessing of God to the fear of God, and the fear of the Lord plays itself out in daily life. David's God-fearing counsel for life nicely fits Peter's interest in discipleship in difficult times. Peter knows that persecution causes troubles, but there are ways to minimize trouble.

*Helm*: When Peter arrives at verse 10, he makes an appeal for encouragement from Psalm 34. This particularly Psalm is the ideal reference to encourage Christians to get on with the difficult task of godly living.... This Psalm...was written when David was under great duress. It was the season of his life when, although anointed by Samuel as king, he was nevertheless forced into hiding by Saul.... David, the humble follower of the Most High God, submitted himself to God's timing and continued to bless God (and Saul) in the most difficult times and under the most unfair circumstances. Clearly, this is why Peter picks this Psalm to support the point he has been making on submission, suffering, and blessing.

#### a) Our Responsibility (3:10-11)

<sup>10</sup>For "Whoever desires to love life  
and see good days,  
let him keep his tongue from evil  
and his lips from speaking deceit;  
<sup>11</sup>let him turn away from evil and do good;  
let him seek peace and pursue it.

*McKnight*: Psalm 34 is particularly suitable for a situation of being harassed and persecuted. Its theme is that the one who wants to 'get along in this world' must be peace-seeking, gentle-spoken, and good.

#### (1) Love Life (3:10a)

<sup>10</sup>For "Whoever desires to love life  
and see good days,

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*Gardner:* God’s righteous people will be blessed as they find that they *love life and see good days*. Loving life and seeing good days is not dependent upon all going well (see 1 Th. 5:16-18). Rather, it is dependent on living the life that we are called to live. The apostle Paul talks of ‘learning’ to be content in all situations (Phil. 4:11-12), and so it will be for all Christians.

*MacArthur:* A Christian—described here as *the one who desires life, to love and see good days*—must refrain from speaking anything that comes from the underlying evil of an immoral disposition.... *Life* (*zōēn*, rather than *bios*, connotes all the experience and richness of living to the fullest, not merely living as opposed to dying. Love (*agapan*) is from the strongest word for that emotion and denotes a strong-willed affection or desire.

*Dorani:* *Life* in 1 Peter 3:10 refers to life on earth. The prospect of *good days* shows that Peter momentarily put aside the specter of persecution. He considers how the disciples might live when life is fair, when skies are blue, when justice and peace prevail. How might we keep the peace in ordinary times? Peter answers with a short blast of wisdom literature. If you love live and want good days, do things that facilitate peace.

### (2) Control Speech (3:10b)

*let him keep his tongue from evil  
and his lips from speaking deceit;*

*MacArthur:* The *tongue* is often unruly and prone to sin (cp. James 3:6).... In addition to refraining from verbal retaliation, believers must stop their *lips from speaking deceit*.... These matters of speech are controlled, not at the mouth, but on the inside—as Jesus said in Matthew 12:34....

*Dorani:* First, then, to enjoy *good days*—and good relationships—we must control our tongues. Previously 1 Peter mentioned verbal sins such as accusing, denouncing, blaspheming, and ridiculing. Here Peter mentions deceit and *evil* speech, which judging by all Scripture, would include gossip, slander, boasting, bragging, lying, making false promises or vows, rudeness, and abuse of God’s name. The opposite is to speak the truth in love, to praise God, and to bless humanity.

### (3) Do Good (3:11a)

<sup>11</sup>*let him turn away from evil and do good;*

*Gardner:* As we follow Christ, keeping our tongues from evil and retraining them from being deceitful, as we determine to *turn from evil to do good*, so we shall find a life of contentment in the Lord’s will.

*MacArthur:* Verse 11, drawn from Psalm 34:14, contains four straightforward imperative commands. First believers are to *turn away from evil*. The verb *turn away* (*ekklinatō*) connotes an intensely strong rejection of what is sinful—in this context, sinful treatment of others, even those who persecute the saints. Second, Peter commanded his readers to *do good*, what is excellent in quality, what expresses deep-down virtue.

*Dorani:* Second, we must *turn from evil and do good*. Peter talks about the right behavior of a disciple in two ways. First Peter 1 says that we must be holy because God is holy. Holiness signifies consecration to God and separation from sin (1:15-16; 2:5-9; 3:5). The statement ‘Be holy in all your *conduct*,’ or way of life (1:15), provides a bridge to the other aspect of right

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behavior, which is *doing good* to others. The language of ‘doing good’ appears just twelve times in the New Testament, and six of them are in Peter. (The family of terms is *agathopoieō*, *agathopoiia*, *agathopoiios*. They appear in 1 Peter 2:15, 20; 3:1, 6, 17; 4:19). Doing good is the active, outward-facing aspect of Christian conduct. Holiness signifies *separation*, even withdrawal, from the evils of this world. By contrast, when we do good we engage the world, seek to reverse evil.... To *do* good is to *bring* good to all. By doing good, Peter says, believers silence the accusation of foolish men (2:14-15). Three times Peter urges readers to continue doing good in the face of suffering.

### (4) Seek Peace (3:11b)

*let him seek peace and pursue it.*

*Gardner:* As we *seek peace and pursue it* with all people, even with those who are opposed to us, so again we shall experience God’s blessings now and in the future.

*MacArthur:* The third and fourth imperatives appear together in the command for believers to *seek peace and pursue it*. The verbs translated *seek* and *pursue* both convey an intensity and aggressiveness of action. (Implicit in the phrase is the analogy of the hunter vigorously tracking down his prey). *Peace* (*eirēnēn*) denotes a constant condition of tranquility that produces permanent joy and happiness.

*Dorani:* Third, life will be good if we *seek peace and pursue it*. This theme runs through New Testament epistles. Like Peter, Hebrews 12:14 links holiness and the pursuit of peace (cp. Rom. 12:18).

*Dorani:* To summarize then, we find the good life when we follow Peter’s five imperatives: stop evil speech, turn from evil deeds, do good, seek peace, and pursue it. The core command is to do good to others.

### b) God’s Response (3:12)

<sup>12</sup>*For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,  
and his ears are open to their prayer.*

*But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”*

*Gardner:* Verse 12 in this quotation sums up all that Peter has said about receiving God’s blessing. The *righteous* in this context are those who are in a right covenantal relationship with the Lord. They are the ones who are His people and they are forgiven and saved by His grace alone. One of the blessings they receive even now is that, as they plead with Him in prayer, He hears them and is attentive to their needs. In other words, even as they cry out because of persecution and hardships, Peter is showing them for Scripture that the Lord both sees their situation and hears them. In the end vengeance is His. Because He *is against those who do evil*, His people need to be sure that they reflect their status as His covenant people in the lives they lead.

*MacArthur:* Peter’s quote here of Psalm 34:15-16 vividly fixes the reality that ought to motivate believers to live lives pleasing to God.... For Peter, the primary issue here is not judgment but God’s gracious care for His people. *The eyes of the Lord* is a common Old Testament phrase that relates to God’s special, caring watchfulness over His people (Pr. 5:21; Zech. 4:10).... God is also looking *toward the righteous* so that He can *attend to their prayer*. The word translated *prayer* (*deēsīn*) means ‘entreaty,’ ‘petition,’ or ‘supplication,’ and relates to believer’s crying out

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for God to meet their needs... On the other hand, *the face of the Lord is against those who do evil*. In contrast to the *eyes of the Lord*, which refers to watchfulness, the Old Testament concept *face of the Lord* refers to judgment (cp. Gen. 19:13; Lam. 4:16; [DSB: contrast Num. 6:24-26]). His *eye* represent His all-seeing omniscience, whereas His *face* in this context represents the manifestation of His anger and displeasure (cp. Ps. 76:6-8). God's wrath *is against those who do evil* and those who disobey His Word.

*McKnight*: Yet the fundamental point Peter makes is that God is omniscient and omnipresent—He sees all, knows all, and is always present. People must not think that they can get by with evil behavior, for God is watching and evaluating, His eyes are on the righteous. Moreover, He hears their prayers—that is, God is on their side, protecting and shielding them. At the same time, the Lord's face is turned against those who are wicked. Once again we are drawn back to 1 Peter 2:12: Those who live righteously before God will, in the end, be vindicated by God on the great day of glory, but those who live sinfully and oppressively will receive condemnation from God Almighty on that same day of His glory.

*Doriani*: Then, Peter concludes, we will experience God's favor (3:12)... This sounds much like the classic benediction of Numbers 6:24-26... Yet we notice that there is more here than blessing. The Lord *is against those who do evil*. This is vindication, not vindictiveness. For the faithful to enjoy peace, their accusers must be silenced and their enemies stopped, even judged.

*Doriani*: So Peter has explained how we might find a good and peaceful life. If we avoid evil words and deeds, do good to all, and submit to proper authorities, it will ordinarily lead to a good life in the present. That does not always happen, as Peter soon points out. We might still do good and suffer for it. If so, at least we know that the Lord's eyes see the righteous, that His ears hear our prayers, and that the same faces that favors us opposes evil.

*Sproul*: This couplet is also synonymous. It says, in the first place, that the eyes of the Lord are watching His people. His eye is upon us—not a jaundiced eye but a tender one, This is not the stare that destroys but the gaze that lifts up. He keeps an eye on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers... God puts His fingers in His ears when the wicked speak, but He gives an attentive ear to the prayers of His people. James says: 'The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much' (James 5:16). It avails much because God turns His ear to the prayers of His people.

### B. Suffering for Good (1 Peter 3:13-17)

*McKnight*: Peter has now instructed various groups with specific guidelines on how to live in a world that is hostile to their presence. What has surrounded the discussion has been the problem of suffering, that is, his guidelines for these groups have been shaped under the fire of persecution. Peter now gives his principles for enduring suffering in a way that is thoroughly Christian. His first guideline, that good behavior will ultimately lead to victory (3:13-22), is followed in chapter 4 with the present value of suffering (4:1-6).

#### 1. Rhetorical Question (3:13)

<sup>13</sup>Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

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*Gardner:* The comfort of verse 12 for those who are persecuted and facing trials is developed in the next sentence [i.e., v. 13].... Possessing the promises of God’s comfort and care for His people, it is surely impossible that harm should come to them. The Greek (LXX) version of Isaiah 50:9 asks an almost identical question: ‘Behold the Lord God helps me. Who will do harm to me?’ The next sentence [i.e., v. 14] makes it clear that Peter does expect harm to come to Christians at one level. They will be persecuted. But his mind is moving in the same direction as Paul’s when he wrote in Romans 8:31: ‘If God is for us, who can be against us?’

*Gardner:* Peter assumes here that those who are the Lord’s and hence ‘righteous,’ are ones who will be *eager to do good*. The Greek word gives rise to our word ‘zealous.’ The evidence of God’s mercy and grace at work in a Christian’s life will be that he or she seeks always to do the will of the Lord. The fruit of the Spirit’s work in a person’s life will be seen in obedience to Jesus (1:2). In a stark and pointed manner, Peter is developing what he said in the introduction in 1:14-15.... The fact that Peter seems unable to envisage a Christian who is *not* eager to do good is a strong reminder to us to examine the fruit of our lives and to respond with action in our day to day lives, for we live before the one whose eyes are always on us (v. 12).

*MacArthur:* Peter’s rhetorical question shows that it is unusual for most people, even those hostile to Christianity, to harm believers who *prove zealous for what is good*.... *Good* refers generally to a life characterized by generosity, unselfishness, kindness, and thoughtfulness toward others.... Such a lifestyle has a way of restraining the hand of even the most ardent foe of the gospel.... *Prove (genēsthe)* means ‘to become’ and points to believers’ basic character quality, which should be *good* and above reproach (cp. Rom. 13:2, Phil. 2:14-16; 2 Tim. 2:20-22). *Zealous (zēlotēs)* means ‘intensity’ or ‘enthusiasm’ and describes a person with great ardor for a specific cause. In New Testament times, there was a radical political party of Jewish patriots, called the Zealots (from *zēlotēs*), which pledged to free the Jews from all foreign rule by whatever extreme measures (lying, stealing, assassination) were necessary, even if those efforts resulted in their own deaths. Peter was surely familiar with that group—Simon the Zealot, one of his fellow apostles, had likely been a member (Mt. 10:4; Mk. 3:18; Lk. 6:15; Acts 1:13)—and he wanted his readers to be zealots for what was noble (cp. 1 Cor. 14:2; 2 Cor. 7:11; Titus 2:14; Rev. 3:19).

*McKnight:* While it may be naïve for someone to think that good behavior will *always* save the Christian from persecution, such naiveté does not characterize Peter here. To be sure, he asks this question somewhat rhetorically (*Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?*), but he is clearly aware that believers will nonetheless have to endure suffering (cp. 1:6-7; 2:11-12, 15, 18-25, 3:9). But this pragmatic argument fascinates Peter; he has raised the issue in different forms already and uses it particularly as a tool for evangelism (2:11-12, 14-15; 3:1-2, 9, 10-12). The followers of Jesus have been taught this (Mt. 5:16), and early Christian experience for the Petrine churches confirmed it (2:11-12, 3:1-2). What we have, then, is a stance of hope that is baptized into a context of realism (cp. 3:14, 16-17). But ultimately, Peter’s assurances are grounded in his final hope: God will eventually (even if not now) establish complete justice.

*Doriani:* If a man lives with zeal and devotion for all that is beautiful, just, and good, how many enemies can he have? The question might be translated: ‘Who is going to harm you if you are an enthusiast, a partisan, for the good?’ (The Greek is *zēlotēs*—one who is eager, avid, ardent, enthusiastic, zealous). Again, if you are passionately committed to what is beautiful, just, and good, how many enemies can you have? Few, if any.... Nonetheless, Peter concedes, it *is* possible to suffer for doing good. At times oppression is commonplace. When corruption and

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deceit rule a society, the good are not welcome. For that reason, Jesus said, ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (Mt. 5:10). Then the righteous should call to God for vindication (Ps. 34:19)... First Peter 3 leads us through such a time.

[DSB: consider the response of many die-hard liberals to Franklin Graham and Samaritan’s Purse setting up a free COVID-19 hospital in Central Park, New York. They constantly questioned their motives, worried about proselytizing, suggested they discriminated against homosexuals or others, demanded close scrutiny of their efforts, and forced them to leave without any thanks or gratitude when the peak of the crisis was past, simply they were a racist and bigoted organization that did not have ‘shared community values’ in support of issues such as gay marriage, etc.]

### 2. Righteous Suffering (3:14-15a)

#### a) Blessing (3:14a)

<sup>14</sup>*But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed.*

*Gardner:* Peter knows that some will suffer in this world *because* they have promoted *what is right*. Their actions and the subsequent suffering follow in the path of the Lord Jesus Himself (cp. 2:20-21)... Nevertheless, Christians belong to the Lord and are recipients of His love and favor. Even in suffering they are *blessed*. While Peter could be thinking of the future blessings of the inheritance of eternal life, he is probably thinking here of God’s *present* blessings. These will include His listening ear and His attention to them as well as His help and protection for them.

*MacArthur:* Having a passion for goodness is certainly not a guilt-edged guarantee against suffering; it may only make it more unlikely or less frequent. Jesus Christ ‘went about doing good’ (Acts 10:38; cp. Jn. 10:32), yet a hostile world eventually killed Him (Mt. 27:22-3; Lk. 23:24-25; Acts 2:23; cp. Is. 53:9). Jesus Himself made it clear that believers cannot presume to escape all suffering if their Lord did not... *But even if* conveys the idea of ‘perchance’ or ‘contrary to what is expected’ and fits with the verb *should suffer* (*paschoite*), which in this Greek verb form (optative) expresses a fourth-class condition implying there is no certainty that suffering will happen, but it might. Many Christians in the early church, including some of Peter’s readers did *suffer for the sake of righteousness*—their upright, godly behavior. Likewise, faithful Christians today should not be surprised or afraid if such suffering comes, because that becomes a means by which they *are blessed*.... Peter is not the only New Testament writer who expressed the blessing in suffering (cp. James 1:2-4; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; Rev. 2:10)... *Blessed* (*makarioi*) here does not emphasize the effect—happiness or joy—but the motive for such ‘privilege’ or ‘honor.’

*McKnight:* Showing that he is not naïve about this issue of suffering, Peter continues by saying that *even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed*. (Its likelihood is lessened in this text by Peter’s use of the optative mood. By 4:12, the likelihood of suffering seems greater.... In Greek, the optative mood is used to describe an action that is only remotely possible.) While he believes generally in the rule that good behavior will alleviate suffering, he knows that not all opponents will be lenient. Even here he finds something positive: as Jesus taught, those who suffer because of doing what is right will be blessed (Mt. 5:10).

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*Doriani:* Peter intends to prepare the church for persecution. Ordinarily, he maintains, if we live well, life goes well. Yet he must concede that irrational persecution is possible.... The phrase *even if you should suffer* has a rare grammatical feature. The verb is in the optative mood, which signals that the event—the suffering—is viewed, at least for now, as a remote or doubtful possibility. Peter wants to prepare his readers for trouble by gently suggesting the possibility: ‘Don’t *expect* anyone to harm you if you are enthusiastic about goodness, but if it *should* happen, respond this way. First, the mistreated should count themselves blessed.

### b) Fearlessness (3:14b)

*Have no fear of them, nor be troubled...*

*Gardner:* Suffering Christians must, above all, trust in the promises of the gracious Lord. As they suffer for their faith, the words of Scripture (Is. 8:12) should ring in their ears. *Do not fear what they fear.* That passage goes on to say that the Lord is the one to fear, not the enemies of the Lord. But in fearing the Lord, the Christian will find Him a ‘sanctuary’ (Is. 8:14). If we believe that Christ is the Lord of all, then He can be trusted even as Christians suffer.

*MacArthur:* Peter’s admonition for his readers to *not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled* is an allusion to Isaiah 8:12b-13.... With an impending invasion by Assyria, Ahaz king of Judah faced a crisis. The kings of Israel and Syria had sought to make an alliance with him against the Assyrian forces, but Ahaz had refused. Israel and Syria therefore threatened to invade Judah. Meanwhile, Ahaz had allied Judah with Assyria, but the prophet Isaiah warned him against such an ungodly alliance and told him not to be afraid. Ahaz and the people of Judah were not to fear Assyria as Syria and Israel did, but rather they were to fear the Lord by trusting Him. Likewise, Peter wrote that Christians must *not fear their intimidation*, literally, that they should ‘not fear their fear,’ that is, be intimidated by unbelievers who would persecute them. Furthermore, they must *not be troubled*, literally ‘not shaken or stirred up.’

*McKnight:* Peter’s exhortation to his readers, when they do have to endure suffering, is not to fear the oppressors. Once again, he draws this teaching from Jesus (Mt. 10:26-33).

*Doriani:* Second, we should neither fear the persecutors nor be troubled within. God rules the future—in the short term, at the midterm, and for eternity. If anything, we should fear God, not with craven fear, but with the fear of respect. We should fear disappointing One whom we love and revere. This is the fear that the Bible commends.... The key clause literally reads, ‘Do not fear the fear of them.’ The NIV, NRSV, and others take the phrase to mean that we should not fear the same things that they fear. That is, a disciple does not have the same fears as a secular person. But the ESV, KJV, NASB, and others say that we should not fear *them* as they try to frighten or intimidate us. Translators and commentators disagree because both translations (or interpretations) are grammatically and theological plausible. (The Greek reads *tōn de phobon autōn mē phobēthete*. The debate hinges on the fourth word, the genitive pronoun *autōn*, which can mean ‘their’ or ‘of them’)... Even though both views have strengths, we conclude that Peter means we should ‘have no fear of them.’ First, he is quoting Isaiah 8:13, where the prophet tells flawed King Ahaz that he should fear God, not an Assyrian invasion. Second, in the immediate context, fear of persecutors is far more prominent. So, then, Peter concedes that we can suffer *for righteousness’ sake* even if we are *zealous for what is good*. But even if that happens, we should not be frightened by persecutors.

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### c) Honor (3:15a)

<sup>15</sup>...but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy...

*Gardner:* When Peter writes, *in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord*, he is still thinking of Isaiah 8:13, which begins ‘The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy.’ Literally, he writes, ‘make holy Christ the Lord in your hearts.’ The Lord Almighty of Isaiah has become Christ the Lord in the New Testament. It is vital for any Christian, but specially for those who may face persecution, that at the very heart of their lives is Christ the Lord.... Knowing that the power of Christ’s Lordship extends even over those who would question believers, and perhaps persecute them, will enable them to stand firm. Here is one of many places in the life of a Christian where his or her commitment to Christ *the Lord* is put to practical test. Are we prepared to commit our lives to the promises of Scripture and the statements in Scripture about God’s sovereign protective care of His people?

*MacArthur:* Here the apostle again alludes to Isaiah 8:13, ‘Sanctify the Lord of hosts.’ When believers *sanctify Christ as Lord* in their *hearts*, they affirm their submission to His control, instruction, and guidance. In so doing they also declare and submit to God’s sovereign majesty.... *Sanctify (hagiasate)* means ‘to set apart,’ or ‘consecrate.’ But in this context it also connotes giving the primary place of adoration, exaltation, and worship to Christ. Believers who *sanctify Christ* set Him apart from all others as the sole object of their love, reverence, loyalty, and obedience.

*McKnight:* Instead of fear, believers are to honor the Lord Christ by being ready to speak boldly about their hope. That is, they are to acknowledge as holy the Lord Himself and refuse to profane His name or breach His covenant with them by fearing someone else more than Him. But such a disposition is not relegated to one’s spiritual or mental attitudes. Rather, to set apart the Lord is a dimension of Peter’s exhortation to holy living (1:2, 13, 22; 2:1-2, 5, 24; 4:1-6).

*Dorani:* Rather, we should *set apart Christ as Lord*. ‘Set apart’ translates the Greek word *hagiazō*. *Hagiazō* is normally translated ‘sanctify’ or ‘make holy.’ Since God is already holy, the word has the sense of setting apart or recognizing that God is holy. To set Christ apart means, first, that since Jesus is sovereign over all, we should not fear whatever might befall us. Second, since Jesus is Lord, we should fear *Him*, not what any lesser person or power can do (cp. Lk. 12:5). If we have the right fear, the fear of the Lord, we can overcome lesser fears. Peter hopes his people will not even begin to fear persecution. The threat is yet distant, so they need not worry about future possibilities. But even if persecution comes, they must not be intimidated or succumb to fear of possible harm.

### 3. Ready Defense (3:15b-16)

#### a) Apology (3:15b)

...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you...

*Gardner:* Peter now anticipates the interrogation that his readers may have to go through for the sake of their faith in the Lord. While there is a general application of this for all Christians at all times, namely, that we should be prepared to take advantage of any opportunities that come our way to speak of the Lord, this is more likely a reference to a trial or a similar investigation.... *Be prepared* reminds all Christians that we must know the gospel and *why* we believe it, if we are to give a good account of our faith. The opportunity to speak for Christ may happen at any time,

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and often in unlikely situations, including times of persecution, and so Peter's insistence that we should *always* be prepared is timely for us all.

*MacArthur:* The Greek term for *defense* (*apologia*) is the word from which the English terms *apology* and *apologetics* derive. It often means a formal defense in a judicial courtroom (cp. Acts 25:16; 2 Tim. 4:16), but Paul also used the word informally to denote his ability to answer those who questioned him (Phil. 1:16). *Always* indicates believers' need for constant preparedness and readiness to respond, whether in a formal courtroom or informally, to *everyone who asks* them to *give an account* for why they live and believe the way they do.

*Dorani:* Of course, believers should always be ready to make a case for the faith, but Peter's term for *defense* suggests a formal event, in court, answering charges. We can prepare to defend the faith in several ways. Peter assumes that the saints are willing to be known as God's people. Further, we should know that the way to *always be prepared* is to prepare continually.... We prepare for unseen challenges by preparing daily for what we can foresee. The path is obvious. We read Scripture daily and meditate on it so that its truth sinks into mind and soul. We listen to our secular friends and to our culture. How do they object to the faith? What offends or seems senseless to them, and what resonates? We also look for answers to the objections as we read, converse, and listen to Christian teaching. Finally, while we must not fall into mere subjectivism—who Jesus is *for me* and what He does *for me*—we should be ready to speak personally and tell people why *we* hope in Jesus. The answer we give can be a formal self-defense: Peter's term fits a hearing, whether before Roman authorities, Communist officials, secular scholars, or neopagans. Yet we should also be ready to defend the faith informally, with friends.

*Sproul:* Peter says that we are to stand ready to give what the English translation calls *a defense* to everyone who asks for a reason for our hope. The Greek word translated 'defense' is *apologia*, which may be translated as 'apology.' Every Christian is to be prepared to give an apology to all. This does not mean that we are to apologize to people—'Please excuse me for being a Christian; I'm sorry that I'm so irrational; I just can't help it'; it means that we are to give a defense.

### b) *Account* (3:15c)

*...for a reason for the hope that is in you...*

*Gardner:* The full content of the gospel of salvation in Christ is summed up by *the hope*. This is what differentiates Christians and non-Christians.

*MacArthur:* *Account* ('reason') is simply *logos*, 'word,' or 'message,' and it calls saints to be able at the time someone *asks* (present tense) *to give* the right words in response to questions about the gospel. The gospel is identified as *the hope that is in* believers. *Hope* is synonymous with the Christian faith because the motive for believers' embracing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is their anticipation of escaping hell and entering eternal glory.... Thus *hope* becomes the focal point of any rational explanation believers should be able to provide regarding their salvation.

*McKnight:* This implies a constant willingness to speak up for Him, to confess one's allegiance to Him, and to witness fearlessly to His saving grace. The defense of the Christian concerns their hope. This term is not to be thought of specifically in categories like 'millennium' or 'rewards.' Rather, it is to be understood comprehensively, as all that drives the present history

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toward its destined future. Thus, this term includes terms like ‘salvation,’ ‘inheritance,’ ‘hope’ (e.g., 1:21), and final vindication (3:18-22). Christians are, in other words, expected to be prepared to speak at any moment about God’s salvation of His people through Jesus Christ and how that salvation will manifest itself at the end of history. This very hope sustains them through persecution and gives them strength to carry on when everything looks dismal.

*Doriani:* Peter further describes this defense or answer to accusers in a second way.... *Hope* does not have the sense of a wish—‘I hope this storm won’t spoil our picnic.’ For Peter, *hope* means the sound expectation of eternal life.... The apostles link hope to the resurrection of Christ and His people. We rejoice and reign with Jesus, spiritually and physically renewed, in a restored creation, called the new heavens and new earth (Is. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pe. 3:13; Rev. 21:1). Peter says that believers are reborn to ‘a living hope’ (1:3) and connects this to Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.... Our hope is not disembodied life in the clouds. We hope for a perfect physical and spiritual life, with Christ, on a renewed earth.

### c) Approach (3:15d-16a)

...yet do it with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup>having a good conscience...

*Gardner:* How Christians handle themselves in these situations, which will often be confrontational, will be a clear demonstration of the faith that lies within them. Thus, they should defend themselves *with gentleness and respect*. This could mean that Christians should be humble and respectful before God as they defend themselves publicly, remembering that they are witnessing to their Lord, or it could mean that they should be gentle and respectful to their persecutors. Either way, their behavior in the face of antagonism and even physical violence will always seek to witness to Jesus Himself who was gentle (2 Cor. 10:1). The idea recalls what Peter has already said to wives about how their lives may win husbands for Christ (v. 2). *Keeping a clear conscience* means fulfilling our duty before the Lord and being sure in our hearts that we have sought to behave and speak as He desires (see 2:19). The opposite would be to be angry and to fight back, something the Lord has not asked of His people.

*MacArthur:* The believer’s defense of this hope before the unbeliever who asks must be firm and uncompromising, but at the same time conveyed *with gentleness and reverence*. *Gentleness* refers to meekness or humility, not in the sense of weakness but in the sense of not being dominant or overbearing.... *Reverence* expresses devotion to God, a deep regard for His truth, and even respect for the person listening (Col. 4:6; 2 Tim. 2:24-26).... The final thing that will allow believers to be secure in a hostile world is a pure *conscience*. The conscience is the divinely placed internal mechanism that either accuses or excuses a person, acting as a means of conviction or affirmation.... The conscience is the soul reflecting on itself; both the Greek word *suneidēsis* (*conscience*) and the English word ‘conscience’ have the idea of knowing oneself.

*McKnight:* Such a boldness, Peter warns, ought not to lead to a haughty, ugly defensiveness, but to *gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander*. Instead of brash defensiveness (which is frequently nothing more than an expression of insecurity), Christians ought to defend the Lord in a humble and respectful manner. Such a manner can lead both to conversions (3:1-2) and to leniency when persecution strikes (3:13). Moreover, if they live a good life before their opponents, they can have a *clear conscience* (Rom. 2:15; 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:12).

*Doriani:* Peter says that we should live so well that even if we suffer slander, those who malign us will know they are lying and be ashamed. Specifically, Peter tells us to be gentle and

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respectful. *Gentleness* (or *meekness*) is humility, a refusal to use force or demands rights. (The Greek is *prautēs*; the companion adjective *praus* appears in text such as Mt. 5:5—‘Blessed are the meek’—and 21:5.) *Respect* is literally *fear*. Curiously, a disciple can show the right sort of fear to humans because we have greater respect or fear for God (cp. 1:17). So, then, when we suffer slander or false accusations, we can reply gently and meekly because we know that God, the Sovereign, will justify us (2:23). Therefore, while a good reputation is valuable (Pr. 22:1), it is not imperative that we vindicate ourselves in the courts of men.... It is our task to keep *a clear conscience*, a confidence that our behavior has been good (Acts 23:1; Rom. 2:15; Heb. 13:18). Our good behavior, Peter reminds us, is *in Christ*. Jesus defines good conduct by His commands and His example (3:18), and He is the power and motivation for good conduct in even the most provoking situations.

### d) Application (3:16b)

*...so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.*

*Gardner:* This sort of humble and respectful behavior, that seeks only to imitate Christ and to be a trustworthy witness to the Savior, may lead to the accusers being *ashamed of their slander*.... Thus, as the prosecutors maliciously try to provoke Christians by their false accusations (*slander*), they hear of Christ’s gospel love and forgiveness and see this being lived out in humility and respect among His followers (see 2:12).

*MacArthur:* *Slandered* believers who maintain *good behavior in Christ* will have their consciences at rest, untroubled by guilt, and their godly lives will prove any criticisms from unbelievers to be false. *Slandered* (*katalaleisthe*) is an onomatopoeic word (one whose pronunciation suggests its meaning) that describes ‘evil speaking’ or ‘verbal abuse.’ *Revile* means ‘to threaten,’ ‘to insult,’ or ‘to mistreat.’ A pure conscience can withstand and deflect whatever abusive, insulting speech the world hurls at it (cp. 1 Cor. 4:12). Those who engage in such sinful mistreatment of obedient believers, with the aim of shaming and defeating them, will themselves *be put to shame* (cp. Gen. 42:8-21).

### 4. Restated Principle (3:17)

*<sup>17</sup>For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.*

*Gardner:* Peter and his Christian readers would understand immediately that *doing evil* will bring suffering through God’s judgment on them, and also perhaps a *just* punishment at the hands of the accusers. No Christian should find himself or herself in this situation. But at times, it may be that this is the Lord’s will, for He is utterly sovereign, to allow His people to suffer for *doing good*. Such suffering fades in its significance when contrasted with the suffering of God’s judgment. Even as the Christian may be called upon to suffer for the faith, he or she is reminded that one day God will vindicate His people and they will rejoice, whereas the persecutors will suffer at God’s hand for *doing evil*. Though this verse makes sense to Christians, it is surely a hard teaching to absorb.... We know that His suffering was willed by God and led to the most amazing manifestation of His grace and love to the world. Our suffering, *if it is God’s will*, will never be the same as Christ’s redemptive suffering, but it will always serve to remind us that we ‘participate in the sufferings of Christ’ (4:13) as we too are falsely accused and persecuted.

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*MacArthur:* Concerning suffering, there are two possibilities. First, believers may *suffer for doing what is right*, accepting that pain as part of God's wise and sovereign plan for blessing their lives. Second, they may suffer *for doing what is wrong*, receiving the expected discipline of the Lord for their disobeying His word (cp. 2:20; 4:15-19). God sometimes wills that believers suffer for righteousness so they might receive the blessings that come out of such suffering. It is also God's will that believers endure His beneficial chastisement when they sin (Heb. 12:5-11). Of the two possibilities that may come, Peter recognizes that the first is unique because it comes only *if God should will it so*. That is a comforting promise... Christians *suffer for the sake of righteousness* when God wants them to. He never wants us to sin, so that suffering, in one sense, is not what He wished for them though it has sometimes become His will for their righteousness (Heb. 12:11).

*McKnight:* *It is better* both before God and in the practical results for living if people live a godly life. If God wills that they are to suffer, it is better that such takes place when the Christians are doing good rather than evil.

*Dorani:* The disciple, wrongly accused, might suffer unjustly. Yet *it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil*. This restates, in broader terms, what Peter earlier told Christian slaves (2:19-20); he says it again in 4:13-15. If we suffer for doing evil, we merely endure just punishment. A believer cannot claim persecution when punished for wickedness or folly. But if we suffer for doing good, we demonstrate our union with Christ and can expect to join Him in glory (4:13-14). Until then, we strive to live well and endure suffering *if it is God's will*. (In the phrase 'if it is God's will,' the verb's mood is optative, suggesting that this suffering is possible, but not certain).

For next time: Read 1 Peter 3:18-22.

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### Lesson Summary

#### IX. For Good (1 Peter 3:8-17)

**Aim:** To live the ‘good life,’ that is, a life dedicated to Christian good works, and to be prepared to explain to outsiders about our Christian hope that makes us zealous for good.

#### A. Living for Good (3:8-12)

The passage starts in this paragraph as an exhortation on living the ‘good life,’ i.e., a life of good works characterized by love, blessing, and peace.

##### 1. Christian Love (3:8)

- Five brief exhortations describe the ‘good life’, which is characterized by love
- *Harmony* or unity of mind (*homophrones*): single-mindedness in our faith, not our opinions
- *Sympathy* or compassion (*sumpatheis*), ‘sharing the same feeling’ and acting on it
- *Brotherly love* (*philadelphos*): unselfish service
- *Tenderness* or kindness (*eusplagchnoi*); visceral, gut reaction of feeling, gentleness
- *Humility*, courtesy, or ‘humble-minded’ (*tapeinophrones*); putting others first

##### 2. Christian Blessing (3:9)

- *Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling*; we are not to seek vengeance, but wait for the Lord’s vindication
- Instead, we are to be a *blessing* to others; cp Mt. 5:44; it is our calling as Christians
- In response, God will *bless* us – motivation for living the ‘good life’ – doing well by doing good
- Our blessings from God may be in this life; the ultimately blessing is our inheritance

##### 3. Christian Peace (3:10-12)

- Peter quotes from Psalm 34:12-16
- Fourfold responsibility: 1) *love life* (*agapan zōēn*); 2) control our speech (avoid *evil* and *deceit*); 3) *do good* (and *turn from evil*); and 4) *seek peace and pursue it*
- For the righteous (those that follow the fourfold responsibility), God’s eyes are watching them (in protection) and His ears are attentive to their prayers
- The face of the Lord is set against those who are set on evil

#### B. Suffering for Good (3:13-17)

Peter transitions from the above description into a recognition that while the good life may protect us from many kinds of harm, it is still a possibility that Christians may suffer while doing good, but that is within the will of God.

##### 1. Rhetorical Question (3:13)

- *Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?* cp. Is. 50:9; Rom. 8:31
- *Zealous* (*zēlōtēs*), eager, avid, ardent, enthusiastic
- The question might seem naïve, but Peter is preparing us for this eventuality

##### 2. Righteous Suffering (3:14-15a)

- *Even if you should suffer*; Gk. verb in optative mood, indicating uncertainty; ‘perchance’
- Blessing is the result of suffering for righteousness sake (cp. Mt. 5:10)
- While you may not experience suffering, if it does come, count it a blessing of God

## 1 Peter – Lesson 9

- Do not be afraid of persecutors—allusion to Isaiah 8:12b-13 (cp. Mt. 10:26-33)
  - *But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy*; Is. 8:13; i.e., give the primary place of adoration, exaltation, and worship to Christ
3. Ready Defense (3:15b-16)
- *Being prepared to make a defense (apologia)*; could refer to a formal court setting
  - *For a reason for the hope that is in you*; i.e., we need to know the gospel (the ‘hope’), what it is, what it means to us, and be able and ready to communicate it at any time
  - *Do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience*; i.e., style points matter – don’t win the argument and lose the war
  - *so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame*; Peter continually emphasizes the impact our good behavior has on the sinful and watching world
4. Restated Principle (3:17)
- *For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil*
  - If you suffer for doing evil, you merely endure just punishment
  - If you suffer for doing good, that is the will of God and is commendable in His sight (cp. 2:20)

Building on his central motif begin in 2:11-12 of living a ‘beautiful life,’ 1 Peter 3:8-17 continues to describe, now in general terms (rather than in the midst of specific relationships), what that life looks like. It is also a ‘good life,’ in the sense that God’s commendation rests on those who ‘do good.’ Peter gives a description of Christian love, in verse 8, using five different terms to describe the ‘good life’: harmony, sympathy, brotherly love, tenderness in humility. In verse 9, he restates his exhortation in a negative sense, i.e., what we are not supposed to do. We are to eschew vengeance, rather seeking to be a blessing and being blessed in return. This is consistent with the exhortation in Psalm 34:12-16, where we are to seek peace and pursue it as part of loving life and doing good. In response, God will look favorably upon us and hear our prayers, but He turns His face against those who hate the ‘good life’ and do evil.

Verse 13-17 of 1 Peter 3 raise the specter of persecution and suffering against Christians who are zealous for the good life. Despite it being irrational why some people would take umbrage against those who seek to do good, it is clear that the wicked and evil people around us will find many opportunities to do so. If, perchance, you are called upon to suffer for righteousness’ sake, know that you are blessed by God (cp. Mt. 5:10). In those situations, do not afraid of your persecutors, but rather give honor and worship to our holy Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Further, always be ready to defend your Christian witness, having an *apology* (testimony) describing the gospel and its impact on sinners, including yourself. Do not be arrogant in this gospel defense, but rather be gentle and reverent, keeping your conscience clear of any wrongdoing. It may be that your defense may win converts to Christ, or at least shame those who slander you unjustly. In any event, know that suffering for doing good, should you experience it, is the will of God.