

“Defending Our Faith”

Lesson Text: 1 Peter 3:8–17 **Background Scripture:** 1 Peter 3:8–17

Devotional Reading: 2 Timothy 4:1–8

1 Peter 3:8–17 (NIV)

8 Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.

9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

10 For, “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech.

11 They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it.

12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

13 Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?

14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.”

15 But in your hearts revere 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 For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

TODAY’S LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Facts:** To identify the Old Testament text quoted.
- **Biblical Principle:** To compare and contrast the things he or she “must do” with what he or she “must not do.”
- **Daily Application:** To state one “must do” and one “must not do” for personal focus in the week ahead.

INTRODUCTION

Man’s Search for Meaning?

Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people? Shouldn’t we “get even” with those who do us wrong? Anyone with life experience will inevitably ask these questions. We want to make sense of our suffering and find a way to deal with the resulting despair, if not eliminate it entirely.

Viktor E. Frankl’s 1946 book *Man’s Search for Meaning* details his attempts to find meaning and purpose in his experiences as a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp. By the end of the book, Frankl acknowledges human evil and the capacity of suffering humans to find meaning in their experiences.

Many individuals described in Scripture suffered persecution. The various ways they reacted are timeless in their ability to instruct all future generations.

LESSON CONTEXT

Peter was one of Jesus’ original 12 disciples (also known as “apostles”; Luke 6:13). Peter (also called Simon or Cephas; John 1:42) was known for being impulsive (examples: Matthew 14:22–28; 16:22; 26:35; Mark 9:5–6; John 18:10). In spite of that fact—or perhaps because of it—he seems to have held a

special place among the Twelve. He is named first in all four listings of those Twelve (Matthew 10:2–4; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:14–16; Acts 1:13). Jesus conferred on him the “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19). After Jesus’ ascension, Peter was a leader of the first-century church (see Acts 1:15–17; 2:14–40; 15:6–29). The apostle was chosen to be the first to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10; 15:7), but his ministry was primarily to the Jews (Galatians 2:1–10). In that position, he experienced persecution (example: Acts 12:1–4), which informed his outlook regarding suffering and trials.

The letter of 1 Peter is one of two existing letters by that apostle (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1). The recipients of both letters were the various churches found in an area of northeastern Asia Minor, located in modern-day Turkey (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 3:1). The first letter was likely intended to be circulated among the regions, perhaps by way of Silas, an assistant to Peter (1 Peter 5:12).

The occasion for Peter’s letter was primarily a response to the suffering of believers, particularly since more was yet to come (see 1 Peter 1:6–7; etc.). Peter could address whatever suffering his audience had or would experience because he had been “a witness of Christ’s sufferings” (5:1); Peter himself had suffered for that name (Acts 12).

Right Behavior: 1 Peter 3:8–12

The word “finally” does not signal the end of the letter, but the end of the section (2:11–3:7); this is to introduce another summary or general statement like that at the beginning. Again, the central idea is humility, and the same main verb is implied, namely, “submit” to one another, each one humbly filling his or her place in the Christian community by being or doing the things listed here in verse eight of today’s lesson.

Love is a recurring theme in Peter’s letters, not only God’s love for us, but also our love for others. Peter had to learn this important lesson himself, and he had a hard time learning it! How patient Jesus had to be with him! We should begin with love for God’s people (1 Peter 3:8).

This love is evidenced by a *unity of mind* (see Phil. 2:1–11). Unity does not mean uniformity; it means cooperation in the midst of diversity. The members of the body work together in unity, even though they are all different. Christians may differ on *how* things are to be done, but they must agree on *what* is to be done and *why*. Unity is a gift from God (Romans 15:5–6). The frequency of New Testament references to unity speaks to its importance (John 10:16; 17:11, 21–22; 1 Corinthians 1:10–12; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Ephesians 4:3, 13; Philippians 2:1–4; 4:2).

1. What does it mean to be “like-minded”? (1 Peter 3:8)

What Do You Think?

Why might some Christians not experience God’s gift of unity?

Digging Deeper

What scriptural evidence above gives you confidence in unity as a gift, even if believers seem divided?

The command regarding not repaying evil with evil can be found in several other passages (examples: Proverbs 20:22; 24:29; Matthew 5:39, 44; Romans 12:17, 19; 1 Thessalonians 5:15). An aspect of evil treatment the original readers had suffered or were suffering was insults. The idea includes slander or reproach (rebuke or shame). Jesus himself had faced mocking and insults leading up to and during His crucifixion (Matthew 27:27–31; Mark 15:29–32; Luke 22:63–65). However, He did not respond to His abusers in the manner in which He was treated (see 1 Peter 2:23).

2. How do you interpret not paying back “evil with evil?” (1 Peter 3:9)

What Do You Think?

In which situations is it most difficult not to respond to verbal assaults?

Digging Deeper

In those situations, how can you lean on the Holy Spirit to guide your responses?

It's not sufficient merely to refrain from rendering evil for evil. Rather, potential evil reactions are to be replaced with actual holy reactions (Matthew 5:44). As Christians, we can live on one of three levels. We can return evil for good, which is the satanic level. We can return good for good and evil for evil, which is the human level. Or, we can return good for evil, which is the divine level. Jesus is the perfect example of this latter approach (1 Peter 2:21-23). As God's loving children, we must not give "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (Matt. 5:38-48), which is the basis for *justice*. We must operate on the basis of *mercy*, for that is the way God deals with us.

Although the arrangement of the text does not show it, verses 10-12 of today's lesson are a poem quoted from Psalm 34:12-16. The poem sums up the implications of humility for all aspects of life in general; it is the epitome of the Christian life. The person who wants a truly happy life, enjoying all God's blessings, must first turn away from evil in both word and deed. On the positive side, he must *pursue* or "run after" peace. This kind of person can be happy because God's eye is on him for protection, God's ear is open to his prayer.

3. How would you personally define loving life and seeing good days? (1 Peter 3:10-12)

Confident Believers: 1 Peter 3:13-17

These verses introduce the third main section of 1 Peter—God's grace in suffering. They introduce the important spiritual principle that the fear of the Lord conquers every other fear. Peter quoted Isaiah 8:13-14 to back up his admonition.

The setting of the Isaiah quotation is significant. Ahaz, King of Judah, faced a crisis because of an impending invasion by the Assyrian army. The kings of Israel and Syria wanted Ahaz to join them in an alliance, but Ahaz refused; so Israel and Syria threatened to invade Judah! Behind the scenes, Ahaz confederated himself with Assyria! The Prophet Isaiah warned him against ungodly alliances and urged him to trust God for deliverance. "The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread" (Isa. 8:13).

As Christians, we are faced with crises, and we are tempted to give in to our fears and make the wrong decisions. But if we "revere Christ as Lord" in our hearts, we need never fear men or circumstances. Our enemies might *hurt* us, but they cannot *harm* us. Only we can harm ourselves if we fail to trust God. Generally speaking, people do not oppose us if we do good; but even if they do, it is better to suffer for righteousness' sake than to compromise our testimony. Peter discussed this theme in detail in 1 Peter 4:12-19.

4. Why are we encouraged to have confidence in our relationship with God? (1 Peter 3:13-15a)

What Do You Think?

What blessing have you experienced during or following suffering for righteousness' sake?

Digging Deeper

How can you communicate the hope of blessing while not ignoring the pain another is currently experiencing?

When Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives, each crisis becomes an opportunity for witness. We are to “always be prepared to give an answer.” What does this mean?

Our English word *apology* comes from the Greek word translated “answer,” but it does not mean “to say I am sorry.” Rather, it means “a defense presented in court.” “Apologetics” is the branch of theology that deals with the defense of the faith. Every Christian should be able to give a reasoned defense of his or her hope in Christ, especially in hopeless situations. A crisis creates the opportunity for witness when a believer behaves with faith and hope, because the unbelievers will then sit up and take notice.

This witness must be given “with gentleness and respect” and not with arrogance and a know-it-all attitude. We are witnesses, not prosecuting attorneys! We must also be sure that our lives back up our defense.

Peter suggested that Christians present to the unsaved an account of what we believe and why we believe it, in a loving manner. The purpose is not to win an argument but to win lost souls to Christ!

5. How would or do you personally prepare to share your faith with others? (1 Peter 3:15b)

What Do You Think?

How do you remain ready to testify about the hope you have?

Digging Deeper

How would someone hearing you speak about your hope describe your attitude?

The New Testament has much to say about the importance of one’s conscience as it uses that word about 30 times. The conscience can be a marvelous guide to proper thought and behavior if it is properly informed in doing so (Acts 23:1; 24:16; Romans 9:1; etc.). When functioning as God intended, it is a moral alarm system (Romans 2:15). But one’s conscience can be overridden by evil desires (Ephesians 4:19; 1 Timothy 4:2).

Proper conduct (doing good) in all situations is an important theme in this letter (see 1 Peter 2:15, 20; 4:19). As noted, when believers suffer for such conduct, the result is a powerful witness for unbelievers. The ultimate example of suffering in this regard is Christ (see 3:18, not today’s lesson text).

This verse also reveals another aspect of believers’ suffering: God’s will (see verse 17 of today’s lesson text). We should approach this topic with much caution because the will of God in some contexts means that He causes something to happen, but in other contexts, it means that He permits it to happen. God exercises His sovereign control by permitting what He does not cause. Some relevant passages to help understand the difference are Job 1:12; 2:6; Lamentations 3:32–33; Acts 14:16; 16:7; 1 Corinthians 16:7; Hebrews 6:3; 12:4–11; James 1:13–15; 4:15. In any case, God is able to bring good out of suffering—indeed, that is His intent (Romans 8:28). God does not enjoy seeing people suffer, but He does allow it (example: Exodus 3:7–9) at times. A believer’s suffering leads to faithful endurance (Romans 5:3–4; James 1:3) and a deeper relationship with Christ (Philippians 3:8–10).

Again, in the final verse, 17b of today’s lesson, Peter emphasizes that it is better being in the will of God to suffer for *doing good* than for doing evil.

6. What are ways that you can keep “a clear conscience” (1 Peter 3:16-17)?

CONCLUSION

Finding Meaning

Few of us will experience the level of suffering endured by the martyrs of Christian history. However, that does not make Peter’s directives any less applicable—quite the opposite! When faced with suffering, we may search for meaning in that experience. The question asked relentlessly is, Why?

That question is natural and understandable. But it must also be temporary because ultimately the Why? needs to change to What's next? This is a way that our response to suffering can also serve as a way to point people to a life of faith in Jesus. God wants the best for people. When such suffering occurs, believers should remember to be unified in demonstrating trust in God.

What Do You Think?

What is your main takeaway from this lesson?

Digging Deeper

What will do you this week in response to that takeaway?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we thank You for being with us in all situations. Help us be unified with other believers. Show us how we can be attentive to the working of Your Spirit. Fill us with peace and humility in all the trials that we might face. We trust that You will work through us to complete Your will in the world. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Let suffering strengthen your faith.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson is called "[Stand Up for God](#)," where we analyze the "ends justify the means" tactic used by Stephen's opponents. Study Acts 6:7–15.