

March 17 Lesson 3 (NIV)

## Defending Our Faith

Devotional Reading: 2 Timothy 4:1–8

Background Scripture: 1 Peter 3:8–17

1 Peter 3:8–17

<sup>8</sup> Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> For,

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

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

<sup>12</sup> 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.”

<sup>13</sup> Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” <sup>15</sup> 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, <sup>16</sup> keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. <sup>17</sup> For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

### Key Text

*For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.—1 Peter 3:17*

Examining Our Faith

Unit I: Faithful vs. Faithless

## Lessons 1–5

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Man’s Search for Meaning?
- B. Lesson Context: Peter, the Apostle
- C. Lesson Context: Peter, the First Letter

#### I. Right Behavior (1 Peter 3:8–12)

- A. Be a Blessing (vv. 8–9)  
*Which Route?*
- B. Pursue Peace (vv. 10–12)

#### II. Confident Believers (1 Peter 3:13–17)

- A. Do Not Fear (vv. 13–14)
- B. Give an Answer (vv. 15–17)  
*Faith to the End*

#### Conclusion

- A. Finding Meaning
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

### How to Say It

anthropomorphisman-thruh-pu-more-fih-zm.

Polycarp **Paw**-lih-karp.

Silas *Sigh*-luss.

Smyrna *Smur*-nuh.

### Introduction

#### A. 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.

### **B. Lesson Context: Peter, the Apostle**

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). His ministry focused mainly on Jews (see Galatians 2:8). In that position, he experienced persecution (example: Acts 12:1–4), which informed his outlook regarding suffering and trials.

### **C. Lesson Context: Peter, the First Letter**

First Peter 5:13 reveals the likely location of where the letter was written: the city of Rome. That verse says "Babylon," not "Rome," but there is widespread agreement that *Babylon* is a code word for *Rome*. Historic, literal Babylon had been the great oppressor of the Jews in the sixth century BC (2 Kings 24–25). This served as Peter's analogy to Rome of the first century AD (compare Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; etc.), particularly under the evil Emperor Nero (reigned AD 4–68).

The letter's positive attitude toward government (1 Peter 2:13–17) may indicate that Nero's state-sponsored persecution had not yet reached full intensity (but see 4:12). In any case, Peter was not shy about confronting ruling authorities when necessary (Acts 4:19; 5:29). As one writer notes, 1 Peter is "one of the earliest Christian documents reflecting on the problem of the relation of the Christian to the state."

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). Were the intended recipients primarily of Jewish background, primarily of Gentile background, or a roughly even split? The letter's dozen or so quotations from the Old Testament could indicate that the intended audience was primarily of Jewish background. A stronger case can be made, however, for seeing the audience as primarily Gentile in background as Peter addressed their former lives of "ignorance" (1:14; compare Paul's use of this same word in Ephesians 4:17–19 to refer to Gentiles).

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).

## **I. Right Behavior**

## (1 Peter 3:8–12)

### A. Be a Blessing (vv. 8–9)

#### **8a. Finally, all of you, be like-minded,**

Verse 8 as a whole is only nine words in the original language. Five of those nine words are adjectives that describe behavior fitting for believers facing a hostile world.

The first adjective, translated as *like-minded*, describes the desired unity of believers. 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).

#### **8b. be sympathetic,**

This is the translation of the second of the five adjectives. Were we to take the individual letters of the underlying Greek word and flip them to their sound-alike letters in the English alphabet, we would hear the word *sympathy*. The word appears in its verb form in Hebrews 4:15; 10:34.

#### **8c. love one another,**

Repeating the procedure from verse 8b, converting the individual letters of the underlying Greek word to their sound-alike letters in English results in hearing the word *Philadelphia*—the city of brotherly *love*. Believers are described as part of God's household or family (Matthew 12:50; John 1:12; Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:19; 1 John 3:1–2). Therefore, the third adjective describes the love that family members are to have for one another.

#### **8d. be compassionate and humble.**

This verse's fourth and fifth adjectives elaborate on how believers can live with love and compassion. To have heartfelt concern toward others is a crucial part of the life of a believer (compare Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12). Its presence reflects a life transformed by God's love (see 1 John 3:17).

To be *humble* is probably an umbrella term that includes deference, kindness, and thinking of others more highly than oneself (compare Romans 12:16; Philippians 2; 1 Peter 5:5).

#### **9a. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult.**

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. 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).

#### **9b. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.**

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). This should not be confused with a

salvation based on works, for Peter has already established salvation as God's work (1 Peter 1:3, 23). As a result of our salvation, we are to be conduits for God's blessing in the world.

### **B. Pursue Peace (vv. 10–12)**

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

This verse begins with a quote from Psalm 34:12–16, supporting Peter's point regarding the right kind of behavior amid trials and difficulty. According to this psalm's superscription, David wrote this psalm during a time of personal suffering and trials, as recorded in 1 Samuel 21:10–15. Therefore, it was an appropriate psalm to cite to an audience of believers who themselves were undergoing trials (see Lesson Context: Peter, the First Letter). With this quote, Peter switches back to the negative, what-not-to-do imperatives but with greater specificity: *evil* as it comes from one's *tongue* (compare James 3:1–10).

A feature of Hebrew poetry known as *parallelism* is quite evident here. Note that the words *tongue* and *lips* are synonyms in the sense of being instruments of speech. The *evil* and *deceitful speech* they can produce are also parallel in meaning. The parallelism continues in the next verse.

**11a. “They must turn from evil and do good;**

Perhaps you recall from previous lessons that when parallelism is present, then only one idea is in view, not two. Thus to *turn from evil and do good* are to be seen as a single action. The way to avoid evil is to replace those impulses with doing good as one action. To avoid evil without replacing it with doing good introduces the danger noted in Luke 11:24–26.

**11b. “they must seek peace and pursue it.**

More Hebrew parallelism presents itself in this continuing quote from Psalm 34:14: to *seek peace* is the same thing as to *pursue it* (compare Matthew 5:9). God's people have peace with him (Romans 5:1), and we are expected to seek peace in relationships with others (14:19). This is not peace “at any cost,” but is peace “as far as it depends on you” (12:18). We don't yield or agree to unholy viewpoints merely to keep the peace (Matthew 10:34–36; Luke 12:51–53). God is indeed a “God of peace” (Romans 15:33; 16:20), but he also wages war (Revelation 2:16; 19:19; etc.).

**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.”**

This verse features a literary tool called *anthropomorphism*, which is seeing God in terms of human characteristics and behavior. “God is spirit” (John 4:24) and, therefore, does not have a physical body. However, Peter describes the Lord figuratively as having *eyes*, *ears*, and a *face*. Peter does this to help his audience better understand the Lord's character. This technique is nothing new, being used dozens of times in both Old and New Testaments (examples: Genesis 6:8; Exodus 33:10, 20, 23; Amos 9:8; James 5:4).

## **II. Confident Believers (1 Peter 3:13–17)**

### **A. Do Not Fear (vv. 13–14)**

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

Another literary tool presents itself: that of the rhetorical question. Such questions are not intended to elicit an answer because the answer is obvious. The rhetorical question here contrasts an ideal situation with what was likely already being experienced by Peter's audience, per the next verse, below.

#### **14a. But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.**

While Peter hoped to see good behavior receive proper recognition (see 1 Peter 2:13–14), this would not always be the case. Oppression is not inevitable for believers, but it is a possibility that all believers must prepare themselves to face—and not be surprised when it does (4:12; 1 John 3:13).

Peter was not suggesting those who suffer experience a masochistic enjoyment of their own pain. Blessing comes when people hear God's word and obey his commands (Luke 11:28). The ultimate blessing comes when a person receives forgiveness for sin through faith in Christ Jesus (see Romans 4:4–8).

#### **14b. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened."**

This half-verse alludes to Isaiah 8:12. That section of the book where it is located details a conflict between the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel. When Ahaz, king of Judah, was faced with the destruction of his kingdom, the Lord promised that Judah would be protected (Isaiah 7:3–9). Even though Ahaz and his people faced destruction, they were commanded not to be afraid. They were to fear the Lord rather than earthly opponents (8:12–15).

## **B. Give an Answer (vv. 15–17)**

#### **15a. But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.**

Again, the challenge was (and is) to replace what is not to be done with what should be done instead. To *revere*, or sanctify (as in John 17:17, 19, etc.), means to designate someone or something being set apart as holy (10:36). The underlying Greek word is also translated as "hallowed" in verses proclaiming the holiness of God's name (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2). Given the imperative tone of the verb *revere* as used here, we may wonder how we mere humans can possibly revere *Christ as Lord* more than he already is sanctified! Indeed, this verb is used in its imperative tone only five times in the New Testament: here and in Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:12; John 17:17; Revelation 22:11.

The key to understanding all this is context. Words take on definite meanings only within the contexts used. Take, for instance, the word *fine*. By itself, it has no fewer than seven potential meanings! Which of the seven is intended is discovered only in the context of that word's use in a sentence and paragraph. The context of the imperative in the verse before us is found in these three words: *in your hearts*. Humans certainly do not sanctify God by literally making him holier than he already is! What we are to change, rather, is how we view him.

**15b. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.**

Colossians 4:6 says much the same thing as this verse. “Readiness” in a general New Testament sense has two aspects: we are to be ready to do good (Titus 3:1) even as we remain ready for the Son’s return (Matthew 24:44; Luke 12:40). We err when we focus on either of those at the expense of the other. One error is reflected in the old description of someone who was “so heavenly minded that he was no earthly good.” The other error lets a Christian’s responsibility to be a change agent for social justice eclipse the need to evangelize for the life to come in eternity.

There are various areas in which Christians are to be ready. Peter specifies one of these: one’s readiness *to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have*. Notice that this isn’t addressing what preachers and Bible teachers are to do on Sunday morning to people who are already saved by the blood! Rather, it applies to all Christians as they (we) interact with unbelievers in everyday life.

Notice also that Peter’s imperative isn’t dealing with a Christian’s initiative in bringing up the subject of salvation in Jesus. Rather, the imperative here deals with how to react when an unbeliever asks about our hope. But before the unbeliever asks about our hope, he or she needs to see that hope reflected in how we talk and behave differently from the ways the world does (1 Peter 4:3–4).

**15c. But do this with gentleness and respect,**

Any response that believers provide will be as effective only as the attitude with which it is given. In that light, the phrase *with gentleness and respect* speaks to a low-key response. Such a demeanor is to characterize followers of Jesus (see Matthew 5:5; Galatians 5:22–23; Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:12).

**16. keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.**

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).

**17. For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.**

Proper conduct (*doing good*) in all situations is an important theme in this letter (see 1 Peter 2:15, 20; 4:19). 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*. 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).

## **Conclusion**

### **A. 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.

### **B. 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. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

Let suffering strengthen your faith.<sup>1</sup>

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