

PREPARING FOR THE BEST

1 Peter 3:8-17 *⁸ Now to sum up, all of you be like-minded, sympathetic, brotherly, tender-hearted, and humble in spirit; ⁹ not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but giving a blessing instead, for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For, 'THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS, MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT. ¹¹ HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD; HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT. ¹² FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL.'¹ ¹³ And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their fear, and do not be troubled, ¹⁵ but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and fear, ¹⁶ having a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing good rather than for doing wrong."*

It's obvious that Peter wrote this letter to prepare his readers for a "fiery trial" of persecution (cf. 1 Peter 4:12). However, instead of "doom and gloom," Peter was optimistic and hopeful! During the worst, "prepare for the best" was the essence of his letter.

In this pericope, Peter gave three instructions in order the experience blessings in bad times:

1. **Cultivate Christian Love!**

The underlying theme in Peter's letters is *love*—God's love for us and our love for others. Of course, this was a lesson with which Peter himself struggled.

In summing up his instruction, Peter indicates that we must begin with love for God people (v. 8). Just as the whole law is summed up in love (Romans 13:8-10), so human relationships are fulfilled in love. It's important to remember that **love must be based upon a decision—not emotion!**

¹ Psalm 34:12-16

This love is evidenced by being “like-minded” (cf. Philippians 2:1-11). Of course, *unity* does not equate to *uniformity*, it actually means cooperation amid diversity. The body members work together in unity even though they are all different.

Christians may legitimately differ on HOW things are to be done, but they must agree on WHAT needs to be done and WHY they need to be done! Whatever methods we might use, we must be intentional about honoring Jesus, sharing the gospel, and building the church. Of course, if the methods are contrary to legitimate biblical principles, they should be abandoned!

Another evidence of love is **compassion**—a sensitivity to the legitimate needs of others. We must not become hard-hearted toward one another. Paul indicates that we must share both joys and sorrows (cf. Romans 12:15). The reason should be obvious—we are **brothers and sisters in the same family** (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:9)!

Love reveals itself in **tender-heartedness**. Because most of our *news* is “bad”—*if it bleeds, it leads*—it is not unusual to become insulated and cynical. Therefore, we must intentionally cultivate compassion by actively demonstrating our concern for the wellbeing of others! Unfortunately, this means that people can take advantage of your empathy—so, we must be “*wise as serpents and harmless as doves*” (Matthew 10:16). It’s important that we serve to *help* one another and not “enable” irresponsibility!

Humility in spirit is required for the typical person to place the needs of others before his own. This is probably the most difficult evidence of love for believers to consistently demonstrate!

Finally, not only are we to love God’s people, but we are to **love our enemies**. Since the recipients of this letter were doing the will of God, they were already receiving some persecution. Peter warned them that harsher persecution was in their near future—so PREPARE!

As disciples of Jesus, we can live in one of **three attitudes**:

- We can return evil for good—**the satanic level**.
- We can return good for good and evil for evil—**the human level**.
- We can return good for evil—**the divine level!**

This final level is where the Incarnate Jesus, who serves as our perfect example, chose to live! Usually, we seek justice—“*an eye for an eye*”—but God calls us to strive for *mercy*, which is the way God treats us (cf. Lamentations 3:22-23).

Obviously, we have real enemies! So, how do we fight God’s battles? Remember, when Peter was confronted by real enemies, his initial reaction was to swing a sword (cf. Luke 22:47-53). Before Paul (then Saul) was saved, he used every means possible

to oppose the church (The “Way”). After his interaction with the risen Jesus, Paul never again used human weapons to fight God’s battles (cf. Romans 12:17-21; 2 Corinthians 10:1-6). During times of persecution, Peter and the Apostles depended on prayer and God’s power, NOT on their own wisdom and strength.

We also must be reminded of our “**calling**” as disciples of Jesus because this will help us to love our enemies and to do good to them when they treat us badly. We are called to “*inherit a blessing*.” In that regard, the persecutions that we experience on earth add to our blessed inheritance of glory kept in heaven for us (cf. Matthew 5:10-12).

On the other hand, our inheritance is not altogether heavenly—we receive a present blessing ourselves when we treat our enemies with love and mercy. The saints and martyrs throughout church history bear witness to the blessings received when suffering persecution for their faith. In that regard, not only should we love one another and our enemies, we should *love life*². Persecution should never cause believers to give up! What may appear to be “bad days” from the carnal perspective, can be “great days” from a disciple’s perspective.

Beginning here, Peter quotes from Psalm 34:12-16 to demonstrate what we should *do to inherit the blessing*:

- 1) **We must deliberately decide to love life.** This decision is deliberate and is based on an attitude of faith that sees the best in every situation. We can decide to *endure* life—a *burden*; we can decide to *escape* life—*run away*; or we can choose to *enjoy* life—*trust God* who is in control.
- 2) **We must control our tongues.** Wrong words in the wrong spirit cause many of our problems in life—“*...the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison*” (James 3:8).
- 3) **We must do good and hate evil.** We need to emphasize both the positive and the negative. We must decide to hate sin and shun sin because it brings death!
- 4) **We must pursue peace.** “*Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God*” (Matthew 5:9). This does not mean “*peace at any price*” because true peace is always be based upon just and righteous relationships (James 3:13-18). Paul wrote, “*if possible, so far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone*” (Romans 12:18). Sometimes it may not be possible, but we are admonished to work diligently to achieve peace (cf. Romans 14:19).

² 1 Peter 3:10-12 is a translation of Psalm 34:12-16

“But what if our enemies take advantage of us? When we seek peace, they seek war!” Peter assured his readers that God’s eyes are on His people, and His ears are open to their prayers. In such cases, we must not take matters into our own hands. We must trust God to protect and provide, for He alone can defeat our enemies (cf. Romans 12:17-21).

What is a “good day” for a believer? A good day for believers who loves life is not one in which we are pampered and sheltered, but it is when we experience God’s presence, power, and blessing amid life’s problems and trials. It is a day when despite circumstances, we taste the goodness of God and experience His ever-present nearness (cf. Psalm 34:1-3, 4-8, 18).

2. **Practice the Lordship of Jesus** (1 Peter 3:13-15).

In these verses , Peter introduced another emphasis for believers who are suffering—God’s amazing grace! In addressing their fear, Peter quotes from Isaiah 8:12, ***“do not fear what they fear.”*** Instead of fear, decide *in your hearts to set apart Christ as Lord!* He is the antidote to fear because He is still the sovereign God who protects and keeps His own!

This reference to Isaiah is significant because of its context: Ahaz, King of Judah, faced a crisis—the Assyrian army’s impending invasion. The kings of Israel and Syria wanted Ahaz to join them in an alliance, but when Ahaz refused, both Israel and Syria threatened to invade Judah! Behind the scenes, Ahaz then aligned himself with Assyria! For which, the prophet Isaiah warned Ahaz against ungodly alliances and urged him to trust God for deliverance. ***“Sanctify the Lord of hosts [armies] himself; and let him be your fear and let him be your dread”*** (Isaiah 8:13).

As Christians, we are continuously facing perceived crises that tend to cause us fear, which in turn tempts us to make the wrong decisions. However, if we ***“sanctify Christ as Lord”*** in our hearts, we place our trust, confidence, and hope in the Lord, which removes any reason to fear men or circumstances.

Of course, our enemies may *hurt* us, but they cannot *harm* us. The only way we can be harmed is if we fail to trust God. Though we face opposition because we obey God, it is better to suffer for righteousness’ sake than to compromise our faith and our testimony (see 1 Peter 4:12-19).

If Jesus is Lord in our hearts, we can expect to experience blessing even when we face the enemy. The word translated ***“blessing”*** in verse 14 is the same word that is

found in Matthew 5:10ff—this is part of the “*joy unspeakable and full of glory*” (1 Peter 1:8).

When Jesus is Lord in our lives, crises become opportunities for victories, blessings, and a powerful witness to His presence. As a result, we can always be ready to give an answer—a defense for our faith (“apologetic”). In other words, crises create opportunities for the believer’s effective witness when we behave with faith and hope. In such times, unbelievers take notice. Our witness in such times is not presented with braggadocious arrogance but with meekness, wonder, and respect.

What does it mean to “*sanctify Christ as Lord*” in our hearts? It means to submit, to turn everything over to Jesus, and to intentionally live to please and glorify Him. It means to more greatly fear displeasing the Lord than fearing what men might think, say, or do to us. Such a commitment actually simplifies our lives!

3. **Maintain a Good Conscience** (1 Peter 3:16-17).

Our *conscience* is the internal judge that witnesses to us and that either approves or accuses our motives and our actions (cf. Romans 2:14-15).

Our conscience may be compared to a window in our souls that lets in the light of God’s truth. If we persist in ungodly attitudes and actions, our “window” gets dirtier and dirtier until the light can no longer penetrate our *being* (“window”). This leads to a “*defiled or corrupted conscience*” (Titus 1:15).

A “seared conscience” is one that has been so marred with sin that it is no longer sensitive to right and wrong (1 Timothy 4:2). It is possible for one’s conscience to be so poisoned that it approves the bad and condemns the good. The Bible calls this an “*evil* (ponēros, πονηρός) *conscience*” (Hebrews 10:22). For example, a criminal can feel guilty if he “squeals” on friends, but happy if he succeeds in the crime.

Of course, the reliability of one’s conscience depends upon received knowledge, the “light” that penetrates the “window.” The more believers study the word to better understand God’s will, the more sensitive our consciences become to truth—to right and wrong. It takes intentional exercise to keep one’s conscience *clear* (Acts 24:16). If we are not growing in our knowledge and faith, we are relying upon a “*weak conscience*” to be our internal judge—such weak consciences are upset very easily (1 Corinthians 8:7).

A good, strong conscience fortifies our courage to be right with both God and men. A good conscience gives us inner peace while an uneasy conscience divides the heart, drains our strength, and disables our ability to function wholeheartedly. A good

conscience bolsters our confidence and removes the concern about what other people might think or say about us. When Christ is Lord, we fear only God and can disregard threats, opinions, or actions of any who might oppose us.

Of course, our conscience alone can never be the test of what is right or wrong. If we disobey God's Word and base our actions upon the approval of our conscience, there is something radically wrong with our conscience. In other words, our conscience is only our internal safeguard when it aligns with the Word of God.

If we are to gain and maintain a good conscience, we must quickly deal with sin in our lives by confessing it and thoroughly repenting—this is the only way to keep the *“window to our soul”* clean!

Since Christians are committed to the lordship of Jesus, we should never suffer because of evildoing. On the other hand, Christians should never be surprised if we suffer for well-doing! Because we live in the sinful world which tends to call evil good and good evil, it is no surprise that the religious leaders called Jesus a *“malefactor”*—a person who does evil things (John 18:19-30). We can expect the same kind of accusations! However, we should not fear this world! If we practice the lordship of Jesus, we will be able to fear God and never fear this world nor the godliness of this world!

Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Hopeful (1 Peter): How to Make the Best of Times Out of Your Worst of Times (The BE Series Commentary) David C Cook. Kindle Edition.