

Well Done

1 Peter 3:13-17

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Introduction:

Attention:

Subject: Nothing can bring lasting harm to the person who does what God wants. An apparent exception to the premise is then presented, namely, unjust suffering (v. 14a), which in its turn leads to advice on how to react to such suffering (vv. 14b–16) since it may correspond to God's will (v. 17). The conclusion that such suffering cannot ultimately harm one is then given, demonstrated by the fact that although unjust suffering.

The question suggests an answer something like this, "Under normal circumstances when you do what is right and good, you should not expect pain or harm to be directed your way."

Scripture: 1 Peter 3:13-17

In light of verse 12 ...

Body:

- I. Suffer for Right 13-14
 - a. Who Can Harm? *Matthew 10:28*
 - i. *Cause Harm to mistreat*
 - ii. The question is representing the future glory
 - 1. Believers may be distressed by persecution now, but in actuality they are blessed by God himself and will enjoy the eschatological reward.
 - a. no one will harm believers ultimately on the day of judgment, for God (as 3:10–12 teaches) will reward them for their faithfulness
 - 2. Pain is short lived
 - 3. Therefore...
 - iii. Prove Zealous- **one who is earnestly committed to a side or cause, enthusiast, adherent, loyalist**, but translates in a good sense as 'earnestly desire
 - iv. Good- **to meeting a high standard of worth and merit, good in turns of social significance and worth**
 - 1. but to be devoted to the good (e.g., v. 11 which keeps one under the benevolent gaze of God (v. 12a).
 - b. Suffer
 - i. For the Sake of Righteousness

1. Suffer- experience something in an unfavorable and undeserved sense, ***endure pain***
 - a. **Romans 8:18** *Suffering for the present time*
 2. Righteousness - **the quality or characteristic of upright behavior,**
 3. You are blessed - **is that all secular goods and values are now completely subsidiary to the one supreme good, the kingdom of God. The predominating estimation of the kingdom of God carries with it a reversal of all customary evaluations.**
 - a. The Beatitudes **Matthew 5:3-11**
- c. Do not fear **Isaiah 8:12-13**
- i. Their Intimidation
 - ii. Do not be Troubled

Transition:

II. Suffer for Good 15-16

- a. But Sanctify
 - i. Sanctify- **to treat as holy, reverence**
 1. In your Hearts- is the innermost center of the human being (3:4) and hence the source of Christian love
 2. We should not understand the heart as our inner and private lives, which are inaccessible to others. The heart is the origin of human behavior (cf. 1:22; 3:4), and from it flows everything people do. Hence, setting apart Christ as Lord in the heart is not merely a private reality but will be evident to all when believers suffer for their faith. The inner and outer life are inseparable, for what happens within will inevitably be displayed to all, especially when one suffers.
 3. Thus the ensuing open statement of one's hope is to be an expression of one's deepest convictions
 - ii. Always Ready to make a defense
 1. Defense - speech in defence. **2** a reasoned statement or argument. speak on behalf of oneself or of others against accusations presumed to be false
 2. The exhortation here is instructive, for Peter assumed that believers have solid intellectual grounds for believing the gospel. The truth of the gospel is a public truth that can be defended in the public arena. This does not mean, of course, that every Christian is to be a highly skilled apologist for the faith. It does mean that every believer should grasp the essentials of the faith and should have the ability to explain to others why they think the Christian faith is true. Achtemeier remarks that in this respect we have an interesting difference between the Christian faith and mystery religions, for the latter required secrecy of their adherents
 - iii. Who ask for Account

1. Account- **computation, reckoning** a formal accounting, esp of one's actions
 - a. For the Hope
 - b. Interestingly enough Peter used the word "hope" (*elpis*) rather than "faith" here. We have already seen in 1:22 (see commentary) that the two words are closely linked. "Hope" was a central word for Peter, focusing on the eschatological inheritance that awaits believers (1:3; cf. 1:13). The implication is that unbelievers will recognize by the way believers respond to difficulties that their hope is in God rather than in pleasant earthly circumstances
- iv. With Gentleness and Reverence
 1. Gentleness- **gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness, meekness**
 2. Reverence – lack of fear and unintimidating but respect
 - a. When believers encounter a hostile world and are challenged concerning their faith, the temptation to respond harshly increases. Defending a position could easily be transmuted into attacking one's opponents. Hence, Peter added that the defense must be made "with gentleness and reverence"
- b. Keep
 - i. Good conscious- **the inward faculty of distinguishing right and wrong, moral consciousness, conscience- New man New Creation**
 1. Verse 15 blends right into v. 16, being joined by a participle. We also have another piece of evidence that suggests that "gentleness and reverence" in v. 15 focus on the relationship of believers to God. The phrase "keeping a clear conscience" functions as an imperatival participle, even if it is technically instrumental. Again, Peter specified what is involved when believers defend their faith. When Peter spoke of a "clear conscience" (*suneidēsin agathēn*, lit., "a good conscience"), he referred to the relationship of believers to God
 - ii. Shame for the thing that is slandered in reviled
 1. Slandered- **speak ill of, speak degradingly of, speak evil of, defame, slander**
 2. **Reville - to treat someone in a despicable manner, threaten, mistreat, abuse**
 - iii. Will be put to Shame
 1. Three pieces of evidence support this interpretation. First, the verb "put to shame" in 1 Pet 2:6 refers to the last day, and though the term does not always refer to the future, it often bears this meaning (Rom 5:5; 9:33; 10:11; 1 Cor 1:27). Second, and most important, believers are already abused and criticized for their good behavior in Christ. Hence, he exhorted his readers to continue to please God and live in a godly fashion, so that on the day of judgment

unbelievers will recognize that they were mistaken all along.

Third, the language of 1 Pet 2:12 is parallel to 3:16 in a number of respects: the call to good conduct, the maligning by unbelievers, and the need to continue to live righteously when oppressed.

iv. Good Behavior

1. What unbelievers criticize, shockingly, is the “good behavior” of believers. The word for “behavior” (*anastrophēn*) was a favorite of Peter’s, often designating the kind of conduct that is pleasing to God (1:15; 3:1–2; by way of contrast 1:18, and see the verbal form in 1:17). That the behavior in view is distinctively Christian is clear by the prepositional phrase “in Christ” (*en Christō*).

III. Suffer Well v.17

a. Better

b. God’s Will

- i. The suffering of believers is attributed to the will of God (cf. 1:6). The optative of the verb “suffer” (*paschoi*) is used because Peter did not know the extent to which God wills the suffering of each believer. He realized that some will experience more vilification and even bodily harm than others. Such opposition, however, is not outside God’s control. The suffering each believer endures represents God’s will for them. Peter did not deny the reality of Satan and his evil ragings in the persecution of the church (5:8), nor did he exempt from responsibility human beings who persecute the church (2:12; 3:16).
- ii. Nevertheless, ultimately no one can touch God’s children apart from his permission. This is also the message of the Book of Job. Satan could only inflict damage on Job with God’s acquiescence. Naturally God’s intentions and motives in allowing suffering are remarkably different from Satan’s, and hence God remains unalterably good in the process, while Satan is irremediably evil.

c. Rather Right than Wrong

- i. When Christians persist in doing good and refrain from revenge even when censured, unbelievers cannot help but notice the goodness of those who claim to be Christ’s

Conclusion:

Background:

Verses 13-17 are preceded by the Peters' description of husbands and wives relationships.
Verses 8-9 talks about not returning evil for evil etc

Word Studies

1. Zealous- **one who is earnestly committed to a side or cause, *enthusiast, adherent, loyalist***, but translates in a good sense as ‘earnestly desire’¹²
2. Good - **to meeting a high standard of worth and merit, *good in turns of social significance and worth***³
3. ***Suffer*** - in an unfavorable sense ***suffer, endure***.⁴ c.

1 Pt. If in Paul the question of the relation between the sufferings of Christians and the death of Jesus is very secondary, a first glance at 1 Pt. might give the impression that the author heavily stresses this relation when in 2:19f.; 3:14, 17; 4:1, 15, 19; 5:10 he takes the word πάσχω, which he uses for the death of Jesus (→ 918, 19 ff.; he never has ἀποθανεῖν, θάνατος or σταυρωθῆναι, σταυρός) and applies it to Christians (cf. also his use of πάθημα → 934, 23 ff.). Yet πάσχω never means “to die” in this use, except fig. at 4:1. πάσχω occurs first in 2:19f. The connection with v. 18 shows that πάσχω refers to the treatment of a Christian slave by a master who is σκολιός. This is brought out even more plainly in v. 20. 2:20a shows that the maltreatment is in punishment for faults, → III, 819, 6 ff. Hence ἀγαθοποιοῦντες καὶ πάσχοντες in 2:20b (par. 2:19) refers to the opposite situation, i.e., that slaves who have faithfully done their duty are undeservedly, ἀδίκως (→ I, 152, 37 f.) punished. It is true that πάσχω could have the more general sense “to be treated badly” (with ref. to scolding, blows, poor food etc.). The relation to κολαφίζεσθαι, however, supports the sense “to suffer punishment,” → 905, 20 ff.; 912, 17 f., 23 f., esp. as we find in 4:15 too the saying: μὴ γάρ τις ὑμῶν πασχέτω ὡς (→ 905, 25) φονεὺς ἢ κλέπτης (→ III, 755, 22 ff.) ἢ κακοποιὸς (*ibid.*, 485, 33, 38 ff.) ἢ ὡς ἀλλοτρίεπισκοπος (→ II, 620, 42 ff.). 4:15 refers to the possibility of Christians being punished by the public courts as thieves, murderers etc. In 4:16, esp. as πάσχω has to be supplied from v. 15, the εἰ δὲ ὡς Χριστιανός also suggests public condemnation and punishment, though, as in 4:19,¹²⁷ it might refer to all the sufferings to which

¹ N. Hillyer, [*“Zeal,”*](#) ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1262.

² William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 427.

³ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 3.

⁴ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 785.

v. verse.

v. verse.

par. parallel.

esp. especially.

esp. especially.

v. verse.

¹²⁷ On the relation of 4:15 and 4:19 to 4:16f. cf. Wbgr. Pt., 142, *ad loc.*; → III, 59, 16 ff.; 461, 9 ff.; 939, 15 f.

Christians were probably exposed in the days of 1 Pt., i.e., abuse (cf. 4:14, → 240, 14 ff.), threats, assaults, disadvantages at work, persecutions etc.⁵

4. Righteousness - **the quality or characteristic of upright behavior, *uprightness*, *righteousne***⁶
5. Blessed- **favoured, *blessed*, *fortunate*, *happy*, *privileged***⁷ In keeping with the tension into which the dawn of the age of salvation sets the soul, the NT beatitudes have great emotional force (Mt. 13:16; Rev. 19:9). As in Gk. macarisms, there is often contrast with a false estimation as to who is truly blessed (Mt. 5:3–6, 10 f.; Lk. 11:28; Jn. 20:29; 1 Pt. 3:14; 4:14). A clear difference from the Gk. beatitudes is that all secular goods and values are now completely subsidiary to the one supreme good, the kingdom of God, whether it be that the righteous man may hope for this, is certain of it, has a title to it, or already has a part in it. The predominating estimation of the kingdom of God carries with it a reversal of all customary evaluations.

Thus the NT beatitudes often contain sacred paradoxes (Mt. 5:3 ff.; Lk. 6:20–22; 1 Pt. 3:14; 4:14; Rev. 14:13). This is particularly true of the striking beatitudes which obviously formed the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount in the very earliest tradition.⁴⁵ In the impressive form of beatitudes basic statements are here made about those who may regard themselves as citizens of the kingdom of God. The power of the statements lies in their reversal of all human values. In Lk. the beatitudes consist more of eschatological consolation. Men in certain circumstances, the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the hated, are promised the blessings of the kingdom of God. In Mt. the factor of their own moral and religious conduct is more prominent, and the connection between right conduct and heavenly recompense is emphasised.⁴⁶ There is in fact no material distinction between the two forms, for even the partially earlier form in Lk. includes righteousness on the part of those who are called blessed. The blessing of Jesus is for pious *aniyim*,⁴⁷ who are depicted partly as humble and oppressed (→ *πτωχοί*, Lk. 6:20; Mt. 5:3 + *τῶ*

⁵ Wilhelm Michaelis, [“Πάσχω, Παθητός, Προπάσχω, Συμπάσχω, Πάθος, Πάθημα, Συμπαθής, Συμπαθέω, Κακοπαθέω, Συγκακοπαθέω, Κακοπάθεια, Μετριοπαθέω, Όμοιοπαθής,”](#) ed.

Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 921.

⁶ William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 248.

⁷ William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 611.

NT New Testament.

Gk. Greek.

Gk. Greek.

NT New Testament.

⁴⁵ The simpler Lucan tradition (3 short beatitudes with one longer one in the 2nd person) has become 7 plus 1 in Mt. Mt. 5:5 is open to textual objection.

⁴⁶ H. Windisch, *Der Sinn d. Bergpredigt* (1929), 61; Hck. Lk., 83.

⁴⁷ Cf. Kittel Probleme, 53 f.; Kl. Mt., 34; W. Sattler. *Die Anawim im Zeitalter Jesu* (1927).

πνεύματι; cf. Lk. 1:52f.; Ps. 10:2; 14:6; 18:27), partly as those who are filled with longing (πεινῶντες, Lk. 6:21; Mt. 5:6 + καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην, cf. Is. 55:1), partly as those who are much disturbed, whether at the poor state of the world or at their own imperfection (Lk. 6:21 κλαίοντες, Mt. 5:4 πενθοῦντες, cf. Is. 61:2 f.). The self-conscious and impenitent rich, and the proud and self-righteous models of piety, are their antithesis, Lk. 18:9. The beatitudes in Mt. which are additional to those of Lk. mention also men whose mind corresponds in content to the higher law of the kingdom of God: ἐλεήμονες, v. 7; καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ, v. 8; εἰρηνοποιοί, v. 9. Here, too, there is to some degree a contrast with the attitude of the righteous among the Jews. What counts before God is simple pity (Mt. 25:31 ff.) rather than cold knowledge of the Law, purity of heart (Ps. 24:4) rather than self-righteous external purity (Mt. 23:26), unselfish readiness to assist the cause of peace (→ II, 419). The final beatitude in the 2nd person⁴⁸ refers the disciples paradoxically to the blessing of being listed among the most honoured of the prophets as a result of persecution. As they remain steadfast in martyrdom they can be sure of the divine reward. The blessing extends also to those who, in distinction from the unsatisfied longing of the upright in days past, may now experience the coming of the kingdom of God (Mt. 13:16 f. and par.).⁴⁹ It applies also to those who meet the decisive revelation of God with genuine faith (Lk. 1:45; Mt. 16:17); hence also to those who accept the revelation of God without cavil (Mt. 11:6 and par.) and make no false demands upon it (Jn. 20:29); and to those, too, who bring the true presupposition of faith in readiness to hear the Word of God (Lk. 11:28). As Jesus sets before men the terrible twofold destiny of judgment or salvation, He blesses those who will find a divine reward by steadfast watchfulness (Lk. 12:37 f.; Rev. 16:15), fidelity (Mt. 24:46; Lk. 12:43), or the general fulfilling of Christian requirements (Lk. 14:14; Jn. 13:17). Similarly, those who stand fast are called blessed in Jm. 1:12, for their earthly endurance brings them eternal salvation. The thought of a sure reward is also present when the righteous doer is called blessed in Jm. 1:25. In all these verses the light of future glory shines over the sorry present position of the righteous. Thus the NT beatitudes are not just intimations of the future or consolations in relation to it. They see the present in the light of the future. As the Gk. world often blesses the one who escapes serious misfortune, so women who are unfortunate enough to be childless are called blessed under the threat of impending judgment on Jerusalem (Lk. 23:29). The honour of a woman is most enhanced by great sons, and for this reason the mother of the Messiah' is called blessed (Lk. 11:27). In a non-personal use in Ac. 20:35 Christian giving is blessed as compared with selfish receiving.⁸

v. verse.

v. verse.

v. verse.

⁴⁸ In Mt. the (secondary) penultimate and ultimate, Bultmann Trad., 115.

par. parallel.

⁴⁹ Cf. Ps. Sol. 17:44.

par. parallel.

NT New Testament.

Gk. Greek.

⁸ Friedrich Hauck and Georg Bertram, "[Μακάριος, Μακαρίζω, Μακαρισμός](#)," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 368–369.

6. Sanctify - **to treat as holy, reverence**⁹
7. Account -**computation, reckoning** a formal accounting, esp. of one's actions, and freq. with fig. ¹⁰reason, with the implication of some verbal formulation—'reason'¹¹
8. Gentleness - **gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness, meekness** ¹²
9. Reverence - **intimidating entity, do not be intimidated by their intimidation**¹³For believers who know the presence of Christ in the Spirit, fear has lost the element of anxiety, for anxious fear of suffering (cf. Rev. 2:10: μὴ φοβοῦ, ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν, Cf. 1 Pt. 3:14) or of death (Hb. 2:15: φόβος θανάτου) can have no importance for those who are freed from the bondage of death by Christ (Hb. 2:15), who fearlessly proclaim the Gospel (Phil. 1:14) and who know that God is their Helper in all things (Hb. 13:6 quoting Ps. 118:6, cf¹⁴
10. Conscious- **the inward faculty of distinguishing right and wrong, moral consciousness, conscience**¹⁵The good conscience is more than an empty and blameless conscience. It is also more than the pure and simple heart of the OT righteous. In all probability the author has in view the renewal of man by the new creation in faith, which embraces the whole life of the Christian. At this point, then, the Pastorals are not the product of Christian respectability;⁷⁹ they are a deliberate echo of the Pauline message of justification out of which they grew.⁸⁰¹⁶

⁹ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 10.

esp. **esp.** = especially
freq. **freq.** = frequent(ly)

¹⁰ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 600.

¹¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, [*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*](#) (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 778.

¹² William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 861.

¹³ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1062.

¹⁴ Horst Balz and Günther Wanke, "[Φοβέω, Φοβέομαι Φόβος, Δέος,](#)" ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 214.

¹⁵ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 967.

OT Old Testament.

⁷⁹ Dib. Past. Exc. on 1 Tm. 1:5.

⁸⁰ Spicq *Epîtres Past.*, 37: "Avoir une ἀγαθή συνείδησις est le propre de l'homme rené dans le Christ."

¹⁶ Christian Maurer, "[Σύννοια, Συνείδησις,](#)" ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 918.

11. Slander - speak ill of, *speak degradingly of, speak evil of, defame, slander*¹⁷
12. Revile - to treat someone in a despicable manner, *threaten, mistreat, abuse*¹⁸

Commentary Studies

The logic of the two passages comprising 3:13–22*⁷ flows from the statement of the basic premise (v. 13*) that nothing can bring lasting harm to the person who does what God wants.⁸ An apparent exception to the premise is then presented, namely, unjust suffering

¹⁷ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 519.

¹⁸ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 362.

* ¹³ Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?

¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,

¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

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

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit,

¹⁹ in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison,

²⁰ who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.

²¹ And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

1 Peter 3:13–22 (NRSV)

⁷ For the sake of convenience I divide consideration of this passage into two parts, vv. 13–17* and 18–22*; the discussion of these latter verses is so voluminous that it requires consideration as a separate unit, even though it belongs integrally with vv. 13–17*. For the force of the introductory καί of v. 13*, see the comment below.

* ¹³ Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?

1 Peter 3:13 (NRSV)

⁸ The divine will was outlined in the preceding sections, encapsulated in the psalm quotation contained in vv. 10–12*.

(v. 14a*), which in its turn leads to advice on how to react to such suffering (vv. 14b–16*) since it may correspond to God's will (v. 17*). The conclusion that such suffering cannot ultimately harm one is then given, demonstrated by the fact that although unjust suffering was also visited upon Christ (v. 18*), it was a suffering for the benefit of those who follow him (vv. 19–21*), and he emerged victorious from it (v. 22*).⁹ That such an understanding of the logic of this passage is on target is shown by the general similarity of this thought

* ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,

1 Peter 3:14 (NRSV)

* ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,

¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

1 Peter 3:14–16 (NRSV)

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

1 Peter 3:17 (NRSV)

* ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit,

1 Peter 3:18 (NRSV)

* ¹⁹ in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison,

²⁰ who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.

²¹ And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

1 Peter 3:19–21 (NRSV)

* ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

1 Peter 3:22 (NRSV)

⁹ For similar discussions of the flow of thought in these verses, see, e.g., Goppelt, 232; Michaels, 184. I do not agree with Schelkle (129) that the section of which these verses are a part is dense and poorly organized, however.

pattern to the thought pattern found in 2:18–25*: after a statement of the premise (2:18*; 3:13*) there is advice on how to behave as Christians in the midst of hostility (2:19*; 3:14–16*), an ensuing assertion of the superiority of just (for doing good) over unjust (for doing evil) suffering (2:20*; 3:17*), an assertion then justified (ὅτι, 2:21*; 3:18*) by a discussion

* ¹⁸ Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh.

¹⁹ For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly.

²⁰ If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval.

²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

²² "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."

²³ When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.

²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

²⁵ For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

1 Peter 2:18–25 (NRSV)

* ¹⁸ Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh.

1 Peter 2:18 (NRSV)

* ¹³ Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?

1 Peter 3:13 (NRSV)

* ¹⁹ For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly.

1 Peter 2:19 (NRSV)

* ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,

¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

1 Peter 3:14–16 (NRSV)

* ²⁰ If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval.

1 Peter 2:20 (NRSV)

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

1 Peter 3:17 (NRSV)

* ²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

1 Peter 2:21 (NRSV)

* ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit,

1 Peter 3:18 (NRSV)

centering on the suffering Christ (2:21–25*; 3:17–22*).¹⁰ The thought pattern is thus a familiar and important one for our author.

Because the theme of this passage—Christian life in the midst of hostility—is familiar throughout the letter, one is dealing here with the core of the author’s message to his readers who are facing social oppression and persecution.¹¹ Points touched on elsewhere are here made thematic: Christians are not to give offense (v. 13*; cf. 3:9*), they are to hold Christ as Lord (vv.

* ²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

²² “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

²³ When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.

²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

²⁵ For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

1 Peter 2:21–25 (NRSV)

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

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit,

¹⁹ in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison,

²⁰ who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.

²¹ And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

1 Peter 3:17–22 (NRSV)

¹⁰ On this point, see also Boismard, “Liturgie” [2], 183.

¹¹ With, e.g., Kelly (139) and Lohse (“Parenesis,” 50), both of whom see this theme continuing to the concluding paragraph; cf. also Millauer, *Leiden*, 48. I disagree on this point with Goppelt (231), who argues against 3:13–4:11* being the central portion of the letter.

* ¹³ Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?

1 Peter 3:13 (NRSV)

* ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing.

1 Peter 3:9 (NRSV)

14–15a*; cf. 1:3*), they are to give the lie to accusations of evil by living a good life (v. 16*; cf. 2:12*, 15*) because it is better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil (v. 17*; cf. 1:6*; 2:19–20*). Indeed, ideas expressed repeatedly in this letter are concentrated in these verses: (1) Christians regularly suffer rejection and disgrace; (2) they must do what is good even if their goodness is the occasion for suffering; (3) suffering is to be due only to their doing good, not to any evil they do; (4) because they suffer for doing good they are blessed; (5) Christian lives must witness to their hope, because Christ’s triumphant resurrection carries with it the promise for the Christians’ future.

What is new in this section is the need for Christians to be ready to give a public defense of their faith, here, typically for our author, identified as their “hope,” a defense to be given with due deference and backed by living out what they confess. One gathers the impression that our author felt it important that those who persecuted Christians should do so not in ignorance but in awareness of what it was Christians believed, perhaps in the hope that such knowledge would ameliorate those persecutions by showing not only the harmlessness to decent society of what Christians believed and did, but also the positive force for social good that the Christians represented.¹² Such readiness on the part of Christians to bear witness to their beliefs is probably to be understood as informing the remainder of the letter’s discussion of the fate of Christians in their society.

Comment

* ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,

¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

1 Peter 3:14–15 (NRSV)

* ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1 Peter 1:3 (NRSV)

* ¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

1 Peter 3:16 (NRSV)

* ¹² Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

1 Peter 2:12 (NRSV)

* ¹⁵ For it is God’s will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish.

1 Peter 2:15 (NRSV)

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

1 Peter 3:17 (NRSV)

* ⁶ In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials,

1 Peter 1:6 (NRSV)

* ¹⁹ For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly.

²⁰ If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval.

1 Peter 2:19–20 (NRSV)

¹² So also, e.g., Schwank, “L’Épître (1 P 3, 8–15),” 23.

■ **13*** The *καί* with which this verse opens functions not so much as a copulative link with the preceding sentence (“and”) as it does to introduce an inference from the preceding verse,¹³ and hence has the meaning “then.”¹⁴ Since the verse is therefore to be seen in light of 3:12¹⁵—to be zealous for the good means to walk under the benevolent gaze of God—the intention of the verse is not to make a statement about absence of social rejection or even persecution,¹⁶ but about a far more grievous harm, one that can separate them from that God.¹⁷ The participial phrase *ὁ κακώσων* (“the one who harms”) derives from a verb (*κακώω*) that is relatively rare in the NT, occurring most often in Acts, where it states or implies persecution of Christians;¹⁸ but the context in which it is used here indicates that more than mere social persecution is meant. The phrase “zealots for the good” (*τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ζηλωταί*) employs a word (*ζηλωτής*) that is used in the LXX principally to describe God as “jealous,”¹⁹ but that is fairly common in Hellenistic Greek in connection with the pursuit of various moral ideals.²⁰ It is in the latter sense that it is used here,²¹ though the primary meaning is not to be devoted to good behavior that is correct in the eyes of civil

* ¹³ Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?

1 Peter 3:13 (NRSV)

¹³ With, e.g., Kelly, 139.

¹⁴ So BDF § 442 (7), who see its use in introducing an apodosis, with or without a protasis, as a Hebraism (as does Kelly, 140), although they acknowledge an inferential use of *καί* as early as Homer *Iliad* 1.478. For this use of *καί* in the NT, see Mark 10:26*; Luke 10:29*; 2 Cor 2:2*; cf. John 9:36*; 14:22*; Rev 6:17*.

¹⁵ With, e.g., Margot, 57.

¹⁶ The author assumes its existence in the immediately following verse, as well as in 1:6*; 2:19–20*; 4:12–19*; cf. Best, 131; Senior, 63; Schiwy, 52.

¹⁷ On this point see also, e.g., Spicq, 130; Kelly, 140; Schelkle, 11. De Villiers (“Joy,” 77) further points out that enemies of Christians cannot deprive them of their final inheritance, since it is guarded by God himself (1 Pet 1:4–5*). For a similar sentiment, see Pss 56:4*; 118:6*; Isa 50:9*; Rom 8:31*; cf. Luke 12:32*. The universality such a notion is indicated by its reflection in Plato *Apologia* 41D; on this point see also Elliott, *Elect*, 182.

¹⁸ E.g., Acts 7:6*, 19*; 34*; 12:1*; 14:2*; 18:10*; cf. 9:13*.

LXX Septuagint

¹⁹ E.g., Exod 20:5*; 34:14*; Deut 4:24*; 6:15*; Nah 1:2*.

²⁰ Used in a general positive sense: Philo *Som.* 1.124.8; 2.39.2; *Vit. Mos.* 1.153.3; in relation to specific virtues: Philo *Abr.* 33.1, righteousness; 60.4, piety; *Spec. leg.* 1.30, piety; *Virt.* 175.3, piety, righteousness; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 38.6, God; Epictetus *Diss.* 2.14.13, God; 3.24.40, truth; Plutarch *Vit., Lucull.* 38.3, honor; *Mor., Lat. viv.* 1129B, virtue; Isocrates *Ad Demonium* 11.6, virtue. Philo also uses it in a general negative sense: *Spec. leg.* 1.333; 2.170; 4.91, 199; *Mut. nom.* 95.5; *Som.* 2.274; *Vit. Mos.* 2.55.

²¹ For similar use in the NT, see 1 Cor 14:12* (zealous for spiritual things); Titus 2:14* (zealous for good works). It can also be used in the sense of Jews zealous for the law (Acts 21:20*); Paul zealous for God (Acts 22:3*), and for the traditions of the fathers (Gal 1:14*). Van Unnik (“Redemption,” 65) therefore overstated the case when he observed that in the NT the word means a zealot for the law of God.

authorities,²² though that of course is not ruled out, but to be devoted to the good (e.g., v. 11*) which keeps one under the benevolent gaze of God (v. 12a*).

The thrust of the verse is therefore not to deny the presence of social persecution in the lives of Christians, something the author knows as both possibility (e.g., 1:6*; 3:14*) and reality (4:12–19*), but rather to point out that such persecution is not capable of removing them from the divine favor shown them in Jesus Christ. Such awareness will give them courage to remain steadfast in their faith despite suffering at the hands of those who reject the gospel.²³

■ **14a***²⁴ The use of the optative²⁵ *πάσχοιτε*, introduced with the phrase *εἰ καί*, raises the question of the reality of the suffering the author here envisions. On the one hand, if the latter

²² Contra, e.g., Goppelt, 233.

* ¹¹ let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it.

1 Peter 3:11 (NRSV)

* ¹² 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.”

1 Peter 3:12 (NRSV)

* ⁶ In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials,

1 Peter 1:6 (NRSV)

* ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,

1 Peter 3:14 (NRSV)

* ¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

¹³ But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.

¹⁴ If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker.

¹⁶ Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name.

¹⁷ For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

¹⁸ And “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinners?”

¹⁹ Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God’s will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.

1 Peter 4:12–19 (NRSV)

²³ So also, e.g., Bovon, “Foi chrétienne,” 156; Goppelt, 234.

* ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,

1 Peter 3:14 (NRSV)

²⁴ Because v. 14a* is a complete sentence and qualifies v. 13*, while v. 14b* is the beginning of a sentence completed in v. 15*, they will be treated as v. 14a* and vv. 14b–15*.

²⁵ The optative mood, its rarity in the NT reflecting its increasing disuse in Koine (it appears mostly in formulaic phrases, e.g., *μὴ γένοιτο*, *εἰ τύχοι*), expresses a fulfillable wish (e.g., *πληθυνθείην*, 1:2*) or (in the NT with or without *ἄν*) a potential reality, often with *εἰ* (e.g., *εἰ θέλοι*, 3:17*); its use in indirect discourse in the NT is limited to the Lukan literature. See

phrase indicates a supposition that is more or less improbable (“even if”),²⁶ it would suggest a rather remote possibility of suffering, a meaning quite consonant with the optative mood.²⁷ In that case the verb would represent a possible qualification of the apparent statement in the preceding v. 13* that those who do God’s will need fear no harm. On the other hand, a statement about the remote possibility of suffering in a letter that in other places assumes its reality²⁸ would seem anomalous at best. That observation, coupled with fact that the phrase εἰ καί (“even if”) can describe a condition either already fulfilled or most likely to be,²⁹ indicates that the optative πάσχετε (“you suffer”) has an implication here other than remote potentiality.³⁰ While it may reflect the author’s indirect approach to the topic of suffering,³¹ it seems more likely to intend to express the fact that while Christians are not undergoing continuous suffering, **they do live in an environment charged with suspicion and hostility, which has erupted and can erupt into violence and persecution at any time.**³² Thus, while the author knows suffering is always a threat, he does **not know whether the communities addressed in the letter will be undergoing persecution at the**

Ludwig Radermacher, *Neutestamentliche Grammatik* (HNT 1; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 2d ed. 1925) 164–65; BDF §§ 384–86.

²⁶ So, e.g., Bigg, 157. Its use in the LXX confirms such an observation: of the eight appearances, only two seem to point to a reality (Ezek 7:1*; 1 Kgdms 19:24*, the latter a proverb); the remainder (Num 16:14*, 29*; 2 Macc 4:47*; 4 Macc 5:13*; Job 31:9*; Ezek 21:18*) designate potentiality.

²⁷ So, e.g., Cranfield (98): suffering is somewhat remote; Michaels (“Eschatology,” 396): a hypothetical discussion. Beare (163) thinks that the words on suffering may have been introduced because they belonged to Christian tradition, rather than to the reality envisioned by the author. The suggestion of F. W. Danker (“1 Peter 1:23–2:17,” 100 n. 38) that it describes “what is desirable,” i.e., suffering for righteousness’ sake, though a possible meaning of the optative, seems wide of the mark in this context.

* ¹³ Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?

1 Peter 3:13 (NRSV)

²⁸ See 1:6*; 2:12*, 19–21*; 4:13–19*; 5:9–10*; so also Michaels, 186. On the unlikely possibility that there is a break in the historical situation between 4:11* and 4:12*, thus accounting for a shift from potential to actual suffering, see the Introduction § IV.A, “Literary Unity of 1 Peter.”

²⁹ So, e.g., Hart (66): “the contingency is likely to occur.” In the NT, εἰ καί only rarely indicates potentiality (1 Cor 7:21*; Phil 2:17*); it usually assumes the reality of what it introduces (Mark 14:29*; Luke 11:8*; 18:4*; 2 Cor 4:16*; 5:16*; 7:8*, 12*; 11:15*; 12:11*; Phil 3:12*; Heb 6:9*).

³⁰ That is confirmed when the author uses almost identical language in 4:19* (οἱ πάσχοντες κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ) to state that Christians do in fact suffer. Brox (33) finds an exact parallel to this usage in Ignatius *Rom.* 3.3, where a verb in the subjunctive (*sic*) expresses the fact that Christians are hated by the world, a statement surely not meant to be anything other than a declaration of reality.

³¹ So, e.g., Richard (“Christology,” 125): it may convey the writer’s “delicate, indirect approach to the reality of suffering.” Similarly, Dalton (*Christ’s Proclamation* [2d ed.], 73) argues that the optative conveys the author’s desire to spare the feeling of the readers rather than give too blunt a reference to the painful topic of persecution.

³² So also, e.g., Kelly, 141; Selwyn 191; Holmer and de Boor, 122; Roger Omanson, “Suffering for Righteousness’ Sake (1 Pet 3:13*–4:11),” *RevExp* 79 (1982) 439.

time he is writing, or the time they will read, the letter.³³ To express such a sporadic reality, the author has employed the optative.

The phrase διὰ δικαιοσύνην (“because of righteousness”) introduces the usual qualification³⁴ that the suffering of which he speaks is inflicted on Christians because they do what as Christians they must, not because they do evil.³⁵ Those who undergo such suffering are blessed (μακάριοι), a beatitude the author repeats in slightly different form at 4:14*, where the phrase ἐν ὀνόματι Χριστοῦ (“because of the name of Christ”), used in place of διὰ δικαιοσύνην (“on account of righteousness”), helps define the meaning of this latter phrase. The idea that those who suffer because of their devotion to God, already known in the OT,³⁶ is more likely here to reflect Matt 5:10*,³⁷ which seems at this point to have passed into the broader tradition.³⁸

Far from contradicting v. 13*, therefore,³⁹ v. 14* clarifies it,⁴⁰ pointing out that far from calling into question the claim of v. 13* that nothing can harm the person zealous for God’s

³³ With Brox, 158.

³⁴ E.g., 2:20*; 3:9*, 10–11*; 4:15–16*.

³⁵ See also van Unnik (“Teaching,” 94), who notes that in 2:24*, δικαιοσύνη describes the status of Christians who have broken with evil. The parallelism between the position of this phrase in this sentence and the position of τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ in v. 13* further helps define it.

* ¹⁴ If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

1 Peter 4:14 (NRSV)

³⁶ E.g., Ps 94:12*; Job 5:17*. Carmignac (“La théologie,” 381) also cites Lev 26:41–45*; Deut 30; Jer 30; Ezek 33–37, but they are of doubtful significance in this instance.

* ¹⁰ “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:10 (NRSV)

³⁷ So also, e.g., Lecomte, “Aimer la vie,” 292; van Unnik, “Teaching,” 94; Kirk, “Endurance in Suffering,” 49, quoting Cranfield.

³⁸ There is no need to postulate that the author must have heard the words from Jesus himself, as Best (133) correctly observes. Nor is it necessary to question whether the author used an oral tradition of a word of Jesus, as Schelkle (100) does. If, as seems likely, Matt 5:11–12* are a later addition to the earlier beatitudes, they must have been prompted by a situation much like the one presumed in 1 Peter, and they show the currency of the eighth beatitude. Dio Chrysostom’s remark (*Or.* 47.25) that being roundly abused though doing good deeds is a mark of royalty is of doubtful significance here.

* ¹³ Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?

1 Peter 3:13 (NRSV)

³⁹ Contra Windisch (69), who sees here a contradiction between vv. 13* and 14*, which he thinks is made endurable by the traditional nature of vv. 14–16*.

* ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,

1 Peter 3:14 (NRSV)

⁴⁰ With, e.g., Margot, 58; Schweizer, 75; Kelly, 141.

* ¹³ Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?

1 Peter 3:13 (NRSV)

will,⁴¹ the suffering of Christians actually confirms that claim, since those who suffer in accord with the divine will are in fact blessed rather than harmed.⁴²

■ **14b–15*** These verses, along with v. 16*, explain how the Christians are to react to suffering imposed on them because of their faith (διὰ δικαιοσύνην [“on account of righteousness”], v. 14a*). The first element in that reaction (v. 14b*) is to be lack of fear, expressed here in the form of a double prohibition (μη φοβηθῆτε μηδὲ ταραχθῆτε [“do not fear nor be distressed”]).⁴³ The second element (v. 15a*) is to be faithfulness to Christ as Lord, again expressed in the form of a command (ἀγιάσατε [“sanctify”]), followed by an explanation (v. 15b*) of how that faithfulness is to be carried out, namely, by a readiness to explain what it is that causes them to act as they do. How they are to carry out that explanation, and its intended result, is then given in v. 16*.

⁴¹ That God’s will is for Christians to do good, see 2:15.

⁴² Beare (163) rightly points to the difference in meaning in these two verses between κακῶ, used in an ultimate negative sense, and πάσχω. One may further note that because of the suffering of Christ, πάσχω in this letter is used without exception to refer to something positive rather than negative for the Christian.

* ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,

¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

1 Peter 3:14–15 (NRSV)

* ¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

1 Peter 3:16 (NRSV)

* ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,

1 Peter 3:14 (NRSV)

* ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,

1 Peter 3:14 (NRSV)

⁴³ Because Hellenistic Greek does not tolerate a negatived command in the aorist, the verbs are in the subjunctive mode.

* ¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

1 Peter 3:15 (NRSV)

* ¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

1 Peter 3:15 (NRSV)

* ¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

1 Peter 3:16 (NRSV)

Although the Christian traditions that one should fear none but God, and be willing openly to express one's beliefs, are anchored in words of Jesus,⁴⁴ Peter here employs Isa 8:12–13* to make his points. The relationship between LXX Isa 8:12b–13* and 1 Pet 3:14b–15a* can be seen in the following comparison:

Isa 8:12b*	τὸν δὲ φόβον ⁴⁵ αὐτοῦ οὐ μὴ φοβηθῆτε οὐδὲ μὴ ταραχθῆτε
1 Pet 3:14a*	τὸν δὲ φόβον αὐτῶν ⁴⁶ μὴ φοβηθῆτε μηδὲ ταραχθῆτε
Isa 8:13*	κύριον αὐτὸν ἀγιάσατε καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται σου φόβος.

⁴⁴ E.g., Matt 10:26–33*, esp. v. 28; Luke 12:23–32*; 21:14–15*; cf. Michaels, 184; Hart, 167; Goppelt, 236. Brox (159) notes that these words of 1 Peter stand at the beginning of the tradition, evident in the martyrological literature of the early church, which praises fearlessness and calm in the face of persecution.

* ¹² Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what it fears, or be in dread.

¹³ But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

Isaiah 8:12–13 (NRSV)

LXX Septuagint

* ¹² Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what it fears, or be in dread.

¹³ But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

Isaiah 8:12–13 (NRSV)

* ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,

¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

1 Peter 3:14–15 (NRSV)

* ¹² Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what it fears, or be in dread.

Isaiah 8:12 (NRSV)

⁴⁵ Φόβον is a cognate accusative followed by a genitive of origin or source: “the fear emanating from them.” While the context of the passage in Isaiah is the threatened Assyrian invasion, in our letter it is those who inflict punishment on Christians for what they do and say as Christians.

* ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,

1 Peter 3:14 (NRSV)

⁴⁶ While this change from LXX αὐτοῦ to the plural αὐτῶν could represent a deliberate attempt to universalize the threat (Schwank, “L’Épître [1 P 3, 8–15],” 26) or to make it refer to the enemies to be mentioned in 1 Pet 3:16* (Michaels, 186), the Hebrew text of Isa 8:12* can be construed to have the antecedent of the I of אֶת־מֹרְאוֹ (“their fear”) in Isa 8:12b* be הָעַם הַזֶּה (“this people”) of v. 12a*, in which case the plural αὐτῶν of 1 Peter may render “people” as plural in concept, and thus represent a translation (whether by our author or another is immaterial) independent of our LXX text. Any inferred reasons for the change are thus rendered questionable.

* ¹³ But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

Isaiah 8:13 (NRSV)

1 Pet 3:15a* κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν.

While the word φόβος (“fear”) in this context evidently means not being terrorized by those who inflict suffering on Christians, it is in line with the normal use of this concept in this letter, namely, that the only one whom the Christian is to “fear” (i.e., revere) is God.⁴⁷ If the Christian reveres God alone, there is no need for terror in the face of any kind of danger.

Verse 15a* represents the positive pole of the contrast embodied in vv. 14b–15a*: do not fear them, but sanctify Christ as Lord. The substitution of τὸν Χριστὸν (“Christ”) for αὐτόν (“him”) in v. 15a*, necessary for this contrast, raises the question of how it is to be construed, whether as predicative (“sanctify Christ as Lord”)⁴⁸ or appositional (“sanctify the Lord, namely, Christ”).⁴⁹ Important in this case is the presence of the article with “Christ,” natural if it is predicative, but awkward if it is appositional, which would more normally have both words (“Lord” and “Christ”) either with or without the article. The meaning in either case, however, is virtually the same: the one whom Christians must regard as holy⁵⁰ is Christ. Thus any reverence for (since Christ alone is holy), or fear of any other (since Christ is the one who determines the Christian’s final fate),⁵¹ is forbidden. The substitution of the phrase “within your hearts” (ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν) for the further reference to fear in Isa 8:13b* adds depth to the command, since for Peter

* ¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

1 Peter 3:15 (NRSV)

⁴⁷ As in 1:17*; 2:17*; 3:6*; so also, e.g., Cothenet, “Le réalisme,” 568; Wand, 99; Goppelt, 235; Calvin, 107. For the same double use of the concept, see *1 Enoch* 96.3.

* ¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

1 Peter 3:15 (NRSV)

* ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,

¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

1 Peter 3:14–15 (NRSV)

* ¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

1 Peter 3:15 (NRSV)

⁴⁸ So, e.g., Bovon, “Foi chrétienne,” 37; Selwyn, 192. Best (133) prefers predicative but concedes that it might also be taken as appositional to κύριον.

⁴⁹ So, e.g., Kelly, 142; Michaels, 187 (“probably”); Schutter, *Hermeneutic*, 149 (“favor slightly ... apposition”). Bigg (158) argues that the context in Isaiah 8 from which the quotation was taken demands that it be construed as appositional, but that is to put too much weight on the source.

⁵⁰ The meaning of “sanctify” (ἀγιάσατε), since, as Schelkle (100) points out, Christ is already holy in his very being. The point is not to make him holy, but to acknowledge that fact, as, e.g., Beare (164) also argues, comparing it to the first petition of the Lord’s Prayer.

⁵¹ A point made by Goppelt, 236.

* ¹³ But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

Isaiah 8:13 (NRSV)

the “heart” (καρδία) is the innermost center of the human being (3:4*) and hence the source of Christian love (1:22*).⁵² Thus the ensuing open statement of one’s hope is to be an expression of one’s deepest convictions.⁵³

Verse 15b* is probably best understood as further definition of how such acknowledgment of Christ is to occur, namely, through being prepared⁵⁴ at all times to account for their beliefs and actions as Christians.⁵⁵ On the one hand, the forensic connotations of the word ἀπολογία (“defense”)⁵⁶ coupled with the legal implications of αἰτεῖν λόγον (“to require an account”) render it possible that what is described here is the Christians’ legal response when hailed into court:⁵⁷ they are to undertake a defense of belief and actions rather than remain silent. On the other hand, this language can also be used to describe more private disputes.⁵⁸ While those terms could therefore describe either formal legal proceedings or informal accusations,⁵⁹ the presence of

* 4 rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God’s sight.

1 Peter 3:4 (NRSV)

* 22 Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart.

1 Peter 1:22 (NRSV)

⁵² On this point cf. de Villiers, “Joy,” 77. Osborne (“L’utilisation,” 720) inexplicably accounts for the substitution by saying it is in line with the author’s practice of avoiding the verb φοβέομαι with God or Christ as the object.

⁵³ Lecomte (“Aimer la vie,” 292) correctly finds here the same relationship between heart and mouth as that expressed by Paul in Rom 10:9–10*.

* 15 but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

1 Peter 3:15 (NRSV)

⁵⁴ While, e.g., Beare (164) argues that the adjective ἔτοιμοι has imperatival force (as in his view the participles do), it is more likely that the participle ὄντες is presumed and that, as in the case of the earlier participles in 2:18–3:7*, it is to be construed as an adverbial participle of means, i.e., “by being ready.”

⁵⁵ There is an echo here of Col 4:6*, as well as an echo in the larger context of Luke 12:1–12* (do not fear, be ready to give an account), as Selwyn (193) notes. Leaney (47) finds in this advice a contradiction to Mark 13:11*, where Jesus counseled his followers not to prepare a defense beforehand, but the point here is simply that one is always to be ready to do it, not that one must have prepared beforehand in detail what its content is to be.

⁵⁶ It is the technical term for the defendant’s rebuttal of charges in court, as, e.g., Best (134) notes, and is used in a forensic sense in Acts 25:16*; Phil 1:7*, 16*; 2 Tim 4:16*, as is the verb ἀπολογέομαι in Luke 12:11*; 21:14*; Acts 24:10*; 25:8*; 26:1*, 2*, 24*.

⁵⁷ So, e.g., Beare, 164; Margot, 10; Lampe and Luz, “Nachpaulinisches Christentum,” 198.

⁵⁸ Goppelt (236) notes that it is language normally used of private disputes, and cites Plato *Politicus* 285E as an example (although ἀπολογία does not appear there); it is also the case with ἀπολογία in 1 Cor 9:3*; 2 Cor 7:11*, and with ἀπολογέομαι in 2 Cor 12:19*. That this is the meaning of the language here, see, e.g., Michaels, 188; Selwyn, 193. Kelly (67) argues that “no reference is intended to formal proceedings in a court of law.”

⁵⁹ So, e.g., Goppelt, 236 n. 26; Best, 134; de Villiers, “Joy,” 77–78.

παντί (“to any one [who asks]”) seems to point rather in the direction of informal demands that Christians account for why they do what they do,⁶⁰ that is, fail to conform to accepted cultural practices. While one cannot rule out all reference to judicial proceedings,⁶¹ the likelihood is therefore that the author has more informal social intercourse in mind as the context here. The implication would then be that Christians must take any such request as seriously as they would the requirement in a court of law to answer to formal charges.⁶²

The account Christians are to give is to concern their “hope” (ἐλπίς). While one would expect here rather the word “faith” (πίστις),⁶³ it is also clear that the word “hope” describes for our author the characteristic element of Christian life,⁶⁴ and is therefore the inclusive term our author uses to describe it.⁶⁵ The phrase ἐν ὑμῖν, often translated “within you,” the hope each Christian holds in his or her heart, has as its more likely meaning “among you,” referring to the hope common to the Christian community that binds together and upholds its members.⁶⁶

This command to be ready with an account of one’s Christian life for anyone who might ask at any time is counter to the kind of attitude held by many esoteric groups in the Greco-Roman world at that time, for whom such divulgence would have been tantamount to betrayal of the community and their god(s).⁶⁷ Such open explanation of the Christian “hope,” far from something to avoid, is here added to the requirements expressed by our author such as to do good, not to recompense evil or defamation in kind, and to suffer if necessary for one’s faith. In this context, not even fear of further persecution is to deter the Christians from giving a full account of their “hope.”⁶⁸ Cultural isolation is not to be the route taken by the Christian

⁶⁰ So also, e.g., Omanson, “Suffering,” 439; Cothenet, “Le réalisme,” 567; Brox, 159; Bigg, 158.

⁶¹ So also, e.g., Kelly, 143; Tarrech, “Le milieu,” 389.

⁶² Michaels (188) suggests that Peter sees Christians as being “on trial” every day with respect to what they do and think.

⁶³ So, e.g., Wand, 98.

⁶⁴ Wand (98) argues that it was “the special gift of the gospel to the Gentile world.” While Plutarch (*Mor., Quaest. conv.* 668E) mentions a philosophical school (the ἐλπίστικοί) who held hope to be the strongest bond of life, without which life is unendurable, lack of other references in Greek literature to a school of that name indicates its relative unimportance.

⁶⁵ So also, e.g., Calvin, 109; Wolff, “Christ und Welt,” 335; Omanson, “Suffering,” 439. It is used by Peter in the same way Paul uses the word “faith,” e.g., 1 Pet 1:3*, 13*; 3:5*, as Goppelt (237), Schelkle (101), and Schweizer (64) also observe. In fact the phrase τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν καὶ ἐλπίδα (“your faith and hope”) in 1 Pet 1:21* is probably to be understood as a hendiadys, both words describing the same reality.

⁶⁶ So also, e.g., Michaels, 189; Selwyn, 194. Kelly (143) acknowledges both possibilities, but thinks the individualist interpretation is to be preferred here. Such individualism is probably anachronistic within the thought-world of our author, however.

⁶⁷ E.g., the “mystery” religions, whose very name (μυστήριον), and that of the devotees (μύστης), derived from the verb “to initiate” (μύω), means only those initiated could share its rites and (to use modern parlance) knowledge of its belief systems. The same held true for Qumran, where secrecy was imposed from the beginning upon novices, e.g., 1QS 8.12; Josephus *Bell.* 2.141 (I owe these references to Cothenet [“Le réalisme,” 570], who, however, wrongly refers to Josephus *Bell.* 2.142).

⁶⁸ So also, e.g., Schwank et al., 72.

community. It is to live its life openly in the midst of the unbelieving world, and just as openly to be prepared to explain the reasons for it.⁶⁹

■ **16*** The ἀλλά with which this verse begins⁷⁰ has little of its adversative sense here; it serves to caution the readers not to give an account of their hope in an aggressive or arrogant manner.⁷¹ Rather, they must meet such demands as a Christian is to meet all demands, even insults and abuse: by not retaliating in kind.⁷² Such conduct must have two characteristics, πραύτης (“meekness”) and φόβος (“fear,” here “reverence”). That Christian conduct is not to be abusively aggressive (“meek”) formed a firm part of Christian tradition, rooted in the traditions of a saying by Jesus (Matt 11:29*), and a description of him (Matt 21:5*).⁷³ The fear is not terror of the accuser but reverence for God,⁷⁴ here understood in the sense that nothing in the defense may be contrary to, or detract from, such reverence. v. 16a thus qualifies the way the Christian’s defense is to be conducted.⁷⁵

Further qualification is provided by the participial phrase “maintaining a good conscience” (συνείδησιν ἔχοντες ἀγαθήν). The participle (ἔχοντες), rather than carrying imperative force,⁸⁹ is probably here to be understood as an adverbial participle of attendant circumstance, describing something that must also characterize those who give an account of their beliefs with appropriate

⁶⁹ Whether the notion of a kind of universal missionary apologetic, as Goppelt (237) avers, is here intended is not clear, but the emphasis on open witness to the Christian faith is unavoidable; cf. also Schweizer, 74.

* ¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

1 Peter 3:16 (NRSV)

⁷⁰ English translations attach the first phrase of v. 16* to v. 15*, so that the adversative does not begin the verse. In the Greek text, however, this phrase belongs at the beginning of v. 16*.

⁷¹ So also, e.g., Michaels, 189; for that reason many English translations render it “yet.”

⁷² Our author bases that injunction on both the OT (3:10–11*, citing Psalm 34) and Jesus’ own actions (2:23*). It is attributed in Christian tradition to the words of Jesus himself, where the reaction of the Christian to a malevolent neighbor is nonretaliation in kind (Matt 5:39–42*) based on love (Matt 5:44*).

* ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Matthew 11:29 (NRSV)

* ⁵ “Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

Matthew 21:5 (NRSV)

⁷³ In those sayings, the adjectival form πραύς appears. In the Pauline tradition, this virtue was also based on Jesus (2 Cor 10:1*), and so was incumbent on all Christians (Gal 5:23*; Eph 4:2*; Col 3:12*; 2 Tim 2:24b–25*; Titus 3:2*; see also Jas 1:21*). On this point see also Spicq, 132.

⁷⁴ So also, e.g., Lippert, “Leben,” 254; Beare, 165; Senior, 65; Schelkle, 101; Michaels, 189.

⁷⁵ That defenses were not always conducted in this way is indicated, for example, by 4 Maccabees (e.g., 9:1–9*; 11:2–6*), a book that also intends to defend a system of beliefs. On this point see also Reicke, 107–8.

⁸⁹ As, e.g., Beare (165) argues.

meekness and reverence. The phrase “good conscience”⁹⁰ is used here in its normal Christian meaning,⁹¹ and refers to the attitude toward God⁹² that determines all other attitudes.⁹³ The phrase would thus give further substance to the word “reverence” (φόβου), and its intent would be that nothing in their defense should be of such nature as to compromise their Christian conscience, that is, lies or a vituperative tone. Even defense before unsympathetic inquirers must not lead one to words unworthy of one’s relationship with God.

The purpose for a ready defense carried out in an appropriate way is given in the ἵνα clause that constitutes v. 16b*. The prepositional phrase ἐν ᾧ has the force of a temporal conjunction, and means “when” or “whenever.”⁹⁴ The passive καταλαλεῖσθε, a form of the verb καταλαλέω otherwise unknown in the NT or LXX, assumes that those who do the evil speaking are those who despise (οἱ ἐπηρεάζοντες) the Christian conduct of the readers.⁹⁵ The participial form of the verb ἐπηρεάζω, used in conjunction with καταλαλέω, indicates that Christians suffer vituperation and vilification rather than more life-threatening expressions of hostility.⁹⁶

What incites the derision of those outside the Christian community is behavior described as “good” (ἀγαθή) and “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ). While much of the behavior exhibited by Christians would also be recognized as good in the general culture,⁹⁷ the addition of the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ makes clear that “good” is here defined not by cultural norms but by the Christian faith.⁹⁸ The

⁹⁰ The phrase συνείδησις ἀγαθή, absent from the genuine Pauline letters but found in later NT literature (Acts 23:1*; 1 Tim 1:5*, 19*; 1 Pet 3:16*, 21*), was highly prized, e.g., by Seneca (= *bona conscientia*: *Benef.* 4.12.4; *Vit. beat.* 20.5).

⁹¹ So also, e.g., Kelly (144), who notes its different meaning in 1 Pet 2:19*.

⁹² The point is not so much an interior psychological state, an idea far too modern to be present in this epistle, but rather how one understands one’s life in relation to God; cf. also Kelly, 144.

⁹³ So also, e.g., Best, 134.

* ¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

1 Peter 3:16 (NRSV)

⁹⁴ So also, e.g., Fink, “Use and Significance,” 34. The circumlocution “in the matter in respect of which,” proposed by Hart (67), is thus unnecessary. Bigg’s (159) suggestion that it be translated “the very thing where ye are spoken against,” taken to refer to ἀναστροφή, is rendered unlikely by the fact that while ἀναστροφή is feminine, ᾧ cannot be.

LXX Septuagint

⁹⁵ Best’s (134) suggestion that in this context it is preferable to render the phrase “those who revile you may be put to shame by your good behavior in Christ” departs from the grammar of the sentence: it is the good behavior that is reviled; the good behavior does not put the revilers to shame.

⁹⁶ So, e.g., Beare, 166. Michaels (190) also calls attention to Luke 6:28*. Such reproach by outsiders was also known to the covenanters at Qumran, e.g., 1QH 2.9b–10, 11b, 12, 16.

⁹⁷ E.g., avoiding the vices listed in 4:15*. See Pliny *Ep.* 10.96.7 for the content of his determination of Christian practice, all of which would normally be recognized as virtues.

⁹⁸ So also, e.g., Lippert, “Leben,” 255; Beare, 166. The double use of “good” in this verse in specifically Christian contexts (good conscience in connection with reverence for God, good conduct in reference to Christ) shows that the author is defining that word in Christian, not cultural, terms.

phrase ἐν Χριστῷ, used only in 1 Peter (3:16*; 5:10, 14*) outside the Pauline corpus,⁹⁹ means to conform to Christ's teaching (e.g., 1 Cor 4:17*), to possess his spirit (e.g., Rom 8:1–2*, 9–10*; 1 Cor 6:11*; 2 Cor 3:17*), and to think (e.g., Phil 2:5*) and act (e.g., Eph 2:10*) under his influence.¹⁰⁰ For that reason, the phrase is probably best understood as signifying what the adjective “Christian” does in English: to think and act within the sphere of the influence of Christ.¹⁰¹

* ¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

1 Peter 3:16 (NRSV)

* ¹⁴ Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

1 Peter 5:14 (NRSV)

⁹⁹ So also, e.g., Goppelt, 238. It was probably coined by Paul, as Lippert (“Leben,” 255) affirms, but is sufficiently in accord with the theological intent of this letter that its presence does not justify classifying the letter as “Pauline” on this basis, as Furnish (“Elect Sojourners,” 11) argues (but see Schelkle, 101). That it is nowhere defined, as Brox (161) observes, indicates that the author assumed the readers would also be familiar with its intent, and that it was commonplace within the tradition represented by 1 Peter.

* ¹⁷ For this reason I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

1 Corinthians 4:17 (NRSV)

* ¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

Romans 8:1–2 (NRSV)

* ⁹ But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

Romans 8:9–10 (NRSV)

* ¹¹ And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

1 Corinthians 6:11 (NRSV)

* ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

2 Corinthians 3:17 (NRSV)

* ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

Philippians 2:5 (NRSV)

* ¹⁰ For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Ephesians 2:10 (NRSV)

¹⁰⁰ On this point, see Spicq, 132–33.

¹⁰¹ The dative case here is probably the dative of sphere, designating the context within which something occurs.

When those who vilify such action will be put to shame is difficult to determine. Its use in 1 Pet 2:12* would imply that shame in the eschatological judgment,¹⁰² while the context here would imply shame is an immediate matter, once the truth of Christian behavior is known through the account of their action given by Christians (3:15b*¹⁰³).

The verse as a whole gives the impression not so much of formal judicial proceedings¹⁰⁴ as of informal vilification, or of trumped-up charges brought to the attention of a local magistrate¹⁰⁵ that can be dispelled once the true content of the Christian beliefs is known. The situation presumed is such that active but appropriately modest defense will result in lessening such vituperation, quite different from the case later in Asia Minor under Pliny and Trajan.¹⁰⁶ The mention of verbal defense in v. 15*b and Christian activity in v. 16b* shows that the words and acts of Christians are to be of a piece, emphasized by the phrase “maintaining a good conscience” (συνείδησιν ἔχοντες ἀγνηθῆν) in conjunction with the defense, and the description of good behavior “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ): there must be no contradiction between what Christians say and what they do.

* 12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

1 Peter 2:12 (NRSV)

¹⁰² So, e.g., Michaels (“Eschatology,” 398), who notes nevertheless the absence here of reference to the “day of visitation” (ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐπισκοπῆς); cf. also Best, 134. For more on that phrase, see the comments on 2:12* above.

* 15 but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

1 Peter 3:15 (NRSV)

¹⁰³ That the point is the conversion of the those who see the good works of the Christians is argued strongly by Heinz-Jürgen Vogels, *Christi Abstieg ins Totenreich und das Läuterungsgericht an den Toten* (Freiburger Theologische Studien 102 [Freiburg: Herder, 1976], e.g., 35–36; see also 42 n. 131), who then finds in it the key to the meaning of 3:19*. The point here, however, seems more to concern a lessening of persecution of Christians when the true nature of their actions is known, the point of the readiness for such an explanation in v. 15*, than that such good works have as their intention the conversion of their persecutors.

¹⁰⁴ As Pliny (*Ep.* 10.96, 97) shows, at a somewhat later time refusal to recant, regardless of whether Christian activity was accurately known, would result in death.

¹⁰⁵ So also, e.g., Kelly, 144. While no specific accusations are mentioned here, as Brox (161) notes, an indication of such false charges can perhaps be found reflected in 4:14*.

¹⁰⁶ On this point, see “Excursus: 1 Peter 3:16a and the Pliny-Trajan Correspondence.”

* 15 but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

1 Peter 3:15 (NRSV)

* 16 yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

1 Peter 3:16 (NRSV)

■ **17*** The conjunction γάρ which introduces this verse indicates that what follows is related to the preceding argument as substantiation,¹⁰⁷ in this instance surely the “good Christian behavior.” The point is to urge Christians to be sure that the behavior that is despised by non-Christians is good rather than evil, that is, that the vilification they receive is due to behavior in accord with the Christian faith, not behavior that even by then-current cultural standards would be deemed evil.¹⁰⁸

The idea that it is better to suffer evil or injustice rather than to inflict it was widely accepted in the Greco-Roman world,¹⁰⁹ and raises the question whether this verse is to be understood (1) as a kind of reflection of that common wisdom,¹¹⁰ or (2) as having eschatological implications: that it is better to suffer now as a Christian at the hands of human beings than, denying that faith, to suffer at God’s hands in the final judgment.¹¹¹ The validity of (1) can be argued on the basis that (a) such an idea is familiar to our author, appearing at both 2:20*¹¹² and 4:15–16*; that (b) there is no hint of a bifurcated meaning to this verse, with the first half referring to suffering now at the hands of human beings, the second half to punishment at the eschaton at the hands of God;¹¹³ and that (c) the conjunction γάρ links it to the idea of the good behavior of the preceding

* ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God’s will, than to suffer for doing evil.
1 Peter 3:17 (NRSV)

¹⁰⁷ See also, e.g., Goppelt, 238.

¹⁰⁸ For a similar point, see 4:15–16*. That it also reflects 2:20, see Omanson, “Suffering,” 440; Beare, 166.

¹⁰⁹ E.g., Plato *Gorgias* 474B: οἶμαι καὶ ἐμὲ καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους τὸ ἀδικεῖν τοῦ ἀδικεῖσθαι κάκιον ἢ γεῖσθαι (“I assume that I together with other people regard it a worse thing to inflict evil than to endure it”); 474C: ἄσχιον πότερον τὸ ἀδικεῖν ἢ ἀδικεῖσθαι; ἀποκρίνου. τὸ ἀδικεῖν (“Which is the worse, to inflict evil or to endure it; answer me. To inflict it”). See also *Cicero Tusc. disp.* 5.56: “accipere quam facere praestat iniuriam” (“It is preferable to accept rather than inflict injustice”). I owe this last reference to Brox, 162 n. 514.

¹¹⁰ So, e.g., Brox (163), who argues that the point here is not eschatological, but thinks that it represents a relatively inappropriate formulation, since it is hardly “better” for the Christian to suffer for doing good, since the Christian is as a matter of course always to do the good and will inevitably suffer for it. For more on the meaning of this verse, see the discussion below.

¹¹¹ So, e.g., Michaels (“Eschatology,” passim), who makes use of, and modifies, some arguments of Karl Gschwind, *Die Niederfahrt Christi in die Unterwelt* (NTAbh 2.3–5, Münster: Aschendorff, 1911).

* ²⁰ If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval.

1 Peter 2:20 (NRSV)

¹¹² So also, e.g., Omanson, “Suffering,” 440. Beare (166) points out that it is here broadened from reference to slaves to reference to all Christians.

* ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker.

¹⁶ Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name.

1 Peter 4:15–16 (NRSV)

¹¹³ That is to overlook the fact that the suffering due to God in this verse is the suffering not of those who do evil but of those who do good, and that it occurs now, not at the eschaton.

verse that is clearly activity in the present time.¹¹⁴ The validity of (2) can be argued on the basis that (a) the verse lacks the reference to endurance found in 2:20* and hence is virtually a truism;¹¹⁵ that (b) formally the saying is a *Tobspruch*, a form that, when used in the Gospels (e.g. Mark 9:43*, 45*, 47*), clearly has an eschatological significance;¹¹⁶ and that (c) the context also supports an eschatological meaning, as shown, for example, in 3:10–12*, where the quotation from Psalm 34 divides human beings into doers of good and doers of evil and indicates God's reaction to them.¹¹⁷ While one cannot deny an eschatological undertone running through this passage, as it does through the whole of the letter, it is probably preferable not to assume it as directly present here.

¹¹⁴ This argument is strengthened if in fact the κατασχυνθῶσιν of v. 16* is noneschatological in tone. See the discussion there.

* ²⁰ If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval.

1 Peter 2:20 (NRSV)

¹¹⁵ This and the following two arguments are presented by Michaels (191), who argues as persuasively as any for this view; see also his arguments in "Eschatology," esp. 398.

* ⁴³ If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.

Mark 9:43 (NRSV)

* ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell.

Mark 9:45 (NRSV)

* ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell,

Mark 9:47 (NRSV)

¹¹⁶ Yet as Michaels (191) himself admits, the καλός, the mark of the eschatological *Tobspruch* in the Synoptics, is absent from this verse; in its place one finds κρεῖτον, which in turn reflects more closely the form found in 1 Cor 7:9b*, where there is no eschatological implication. The form thus argues against, rather than for, an eschatological background.

* ¹⁰ For "Those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit;

¹¹ let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it.

¹² 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."

1 Peter 3:10–12 (NRSV)

¹¹⁷ Yet again, contrary to Michaels's argument (191; see also Michaels, "Eschatology," 395), one need not find an eschatological tone to 3:10–12*; surely God does not wait until the eschaton to turn his face away from the evil (i.e., condemn it). The divine judgment may only then be publicly revealed, but God's condemnation of evil is not limited to the end time.

The verse appears to function as a kind of *inclusio* with 3:14a*, where the suffering of those zealous for the good (τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ζηλωταί, 3:13*) makes them blessed, while in v. 17*, those suffering for doing good (ἀγαθοποιοῦντες) do what is better. In both cases, “blessed” and “better,” divine rather than human values are assumed.

What lifts the verse above the level of a Greco-Roman truism is the fact that the suffering of those who do what is good (as the connection with v. 16* makes clear, good in Christian, not cultural, terms)¹¹⁸ is due not to the haphazard workings of human justice but rather to God’s own plan (his “will”).¹¹⁹ The force of the optative θέλοι in this instance is not so much to assign such suffering to some hypothetical level as it is to indicate that such suffering, while not always and everywhere present, is nevertheless always possible.¹²⁰ Congruent with what our author argues in 4:15–16*, he here affirms that Christians are not to provide their opponents justification for the vilification they receive. That does their cause no good at all. Their witness to the hope that animates them is helpful only when it is supported by actions consonant with that hope, actions that may bring about further suffering but that alone have the chance of causing shame to those who ignorantly revile them.

Yet more is implied here, as the ensuing verses show. Enduring God-willed unjust suffering is not simply to imitate Christ, who also suffered unjustly; to make that point v. 18* says much more than would otherwise be necessary. Rather, Christians can endure such suffering because they can look beyond it to their sure redemption achieved by Christ’s self-sacrifice. Yet that sacrifice had wider implications than simply the Christians’ redemption; it contained within itself

* ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,

1 Peter 3:14 (NRSV)

* ¹³ Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?

1 Peter 3:13 (NRSV)

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

1 Peter 3:17 (NRSV)

* ¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

1 Peter 3:16 (NRSV)

¹¹⁸ That point is demonstrated by such words and phrases as “reverence” (φόβος), “good conscience” (συνείδησις ἀγαθή), and “Christian” (ἐν Χριστῷ).

¹¹⁹ As Vanhoye (“1 Pierre,” 123) notes correctly, Peter invokes God’s will only in those places that refer to situations of opposition to Christians: unjust criticism, insults: 2:15*; 3:16–17*; cf. 4:14*; violent persecution: 4:12–19*; ill treatment, cf. 2:19–20*.

¹²⁰ So also, e.g., Goppelt, 239; de Villiers, “Joy,” 78; see also the comments on πάσχετε in v. 14*, above.

* ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker.

¹⁶ Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name.

1 Peter 4:15–16 (NRSV)

* ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit,

1 Peter 3:18 (NRSV)

implications affecting the fate of the entire cosmos. It is to that discussion that the author turns in the verses that follow.¹⁹

¹⁹ Paul J. Achtemeier, [*1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*](#), ed. Eldon Jay Epp, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 228–238.

a. Know that you are blessed (3:13–14a)

13. Here Peter begins a new section dealing specifically with the problem of persecution by unbelievers. Although this theme has been hinted at in 1:6; 2:12, 15, 19; 3:1 and 9, this is the first time Peter confronts persecution as his primary subject and deals with it at length.

In the first sentence, the phrase *to harm you* may also be translated ‘who will harm you’ or ‘who is going to harm you’ (NIV). The sentence is a rhetorical question with the force, ‘Is there really anyone who will harm those who are eager to do good?’ It implies that harm is not the normal expectation, for usually those who do what is right are rewarded, not punished. (This is a witness to the restraining influence of God’s ‘common grace’ given to all people, as it finds expression in conscience and human government.)

14a. None the less, this is not always so. Though persecution of the righteous is abnormal, it does happen, so Peter recognizes the possibility that Christians may *suffer for righteousness’ sake*. The verb form (optative) is the one a writer would use to speak of an event he considered unlikely, and the phrase *even if* contributes further to the sense of unlikelihood implied. (Though suffering of all kinds may be widespread, suffering *for righteousness’ sake* may still be unlikely.) Yet Peter must realize that this ‘unlikely’ possibility is happening to some of his readers, and he must tell them how to respond.

You will be blessed (or, ‘you are blessed’; the Gk. text does not contain a verb but a plural adjective which applies to the readers, ‘if you suffer ... (you) blessed ones’, and it most naturally indicates blessing which comes at the same time as the suffering, not after it). This blessing includes the favour of God in general, but more specifically the readers would think of the blessing promised to the ‘righteous’ in verse 12. The word *makarios* (‘blessed’) has the sense ‘blessed, happy’, with emphasis on blessing which comes from God (cf. Matt. 5:11–12).

b. Trust Christ (3:14b–15a)

14b. Peter makes specific reference to the persecutors when he says, *Have no fear of them*. The passage is an inexact but fairly close quotation from Isaiah 8:12–13 (LXX), which (at least in the Heb. text) is a warning not to fear what the faithless people fear (see NIV). But this context does not concern avoiding the groundless fears which unbelievers experience: it rather counsels Christians not to be afraid when facing hostile opposition. So the sense, ‘Do not fear a fear of them’ or ‘Do not fear them’ is preferable, and it is certainly an acceptable way of translating Peter’s words.²³

NIV The Holy Bible, New International Version: New Testament, ²1978; Old Testament, 1978.

LXX The Septuagint (pre-Christian Greek version of the Old Testament).

NIV The Holy Bible, New International Version: New Testament, ²1978; Old Testament, 1978.

²³ Note a very similar construction in 3:6, ‘not fearing any fear’; cf. also Mark 4:41, ‘they feared a great fear’ (i.e. ‘they were greatly afraid’); Matt. 2:10. This is a common Heb. idiom (‘cognate accusative’) found frequently also in the LXX; cf. BDF, sec. 153 and Robertson, *Grammar*, pp. 477–479.

Though it is generally better to understand New Testament citations of the Old Testament as carrying the same sense in both places, where the New Testament context strongly favours a slight change of sense or referent we must adopt an interpretation which is faithful to its new context (especially when, as in this case, there is no formal citation but simply a duplication of several expressions). Peter is apparently borrowing a familiar phrase from the Old Testament but using it in a different context and with different application.

Nor be troubled uses a term (*tarassō*) which means ‘be shaken up, disturbed, frightened’, and often implies emotional turmoil (note its use in Matt. 2:3; 14:26; John 13:21; 14:1; etc.).

15a. The alternative to fear is to focus attention on someone else: *But in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord*. *Reverence* translates *hagiazō*, which normally means ‘sanctify, make holy’, but here seems to have the sense, ‘treat as holy, regard reverently’ (it has a similar sense in Matt. 6:9, ‘hallowed be thy name’, or ‘may your name be revered’). The phrase is also an adaptation of part of Isaiah 8:13, ‘But the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.’ Thus the sense of fear or reverence for the Lord rather than fear of men is reinforced—yet Peter stops short of applying to Christ the admonitions to ‘fear’ the Lord in Isaiah 8:13. To *reverence Christ as Lord* means really to believe that Christ, not one’s human opponents, is truly in control of events. To have such reverence *in your hearts* is to maintain continually a deep-seated inward confidence in Christ as reigning Lord and King, who even now has ‘angels, authorities, and powers subject to him’ (3:22).

c. Use this opportunity to witness while doing right (3:15b–22)

15b. Yet the stance of Christians toward unbelievers must never be merely passive or neutral, and Peter does not stop with an admonition not to fear. He goes on to encourage preparation for active witness which will win the unbeliever to Christ. Peter envisages the need to respond to allegations of wrongdoing which Christians face from their opponents, so he says: *Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you*. The word *defence* (*apologia*) almost always has a sense of ‘reply to an accusation’ (cf. Acts 22:1; 25:16; 1 Cor. 9:3; Phil. 1:7, 16). Although some maintain that formal legal charges are in view here (so Beare, p. 164), Kelly’s point that *always* and *any one* are extremely general (p. 143) is well taken: whether to formal charges or informal accusations, Christians should be prepared to give an answer (Kelly notes the non-technical uses of *apologia* in 1 Cor. 9:3; 2 Cor. 7:11; Plato, *Politicus* 285e).

However, since the questioning is concerning *the hope that is in you*, Peter must be assuming that the inward hope of Christians results in lives so noticeably different that unbelievers are prompted to ask why they are so distinctive (cf. 4:4). Christians therefore should always be ready (prepared) to give an answer. Paul provides a good example of seizing the offensive and bearing testimony to Christ even when on trial himself (Acts 22:1–21; 24:10–24; 26:1–23, 25b–29). In hostile situations the opportunity for witness to Christ often comes unexpectedly; the Christian who is not always ready to answer will miss it.

Beare F. W. Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Oxford: Blackwell, ³1970).

Kelly J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (London: Black, 1969).

Kelly J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (London: Black, 1969).

Yet such witness must be given *with gentleness and reverence*, not attempting to overpower the unbeliever with the force of human personality or aggressiveness, but trusting the Holy Spirit himself quietly to persuade the listener. (The word *gentleness* and its related adjective ‘gentle’ are discussed in the note at 3:4.)

16. *Keep your conscience clear* (or ‘good, morally right’: *agathos*) demands far more than mere outward morality. This does not imply that sinless perfection is possible, but it does imply that a Christian should aim to have a ‘good conscience’ before God. This can be maintained by (1) avoiding conscious or wilful disobedience to God throughout each day; and (2) continuing to practise immediate repentance and prayer for forgiveness (and therefore for a cleansing of the conscience) whenever one becomes aware of any sin in one’s life.

While other parts of the New Testament mention effectiveness in prayer (1 John 3:21–22) and confidence of access to God in worship (Heb. 10:22) as benefits of a clear conscience, here witness to others is the motive: Christians should keep their consciences clear *so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame*. (A similar motive for righteous conduct is given in 2:12, 15; cf. 3:1–2.) *Abused* refers to verbal, not physical abuse, since it translates *katalaleō*, ‘speak evil of’ (the same term is used in 2:12, and three times in Jas 4:11). *Revile* implies insulting or threatening speech, while *behaviour* represents *anastrophē*, the word Peter frequently uses to speak of conduct or pattern of life (see note at 1:15). The hope that opponents will *be put to shame* does not suggest that their shame is something good in itself, but that it will issue in the silencing of their slander and subsequently in their considering and believing the gospel (cf. 2:12, 15; Matt. 5:16; Rom. 12:20–21).

17. Developing a theme he had touched on earlier when addressing servants (2:19–20), Peter again emphasizes the value of suffering unjustly. Although the RSV translates *it is better to suffer for doing right ... than for doing wrong*, the Greek text does not make it explicit that the suffering is specifically *for* the right that one does; this sense has to be derived from the larger context (see v. 14, where Peter speaks of suffering ‘for righteousness’ sake). The phrase *if that should be God’s will* again (as in v. 14) uses the unusual optative mood, indicating something which Peter thought possible but unusual, not ordinarily to be expected.

But why is it *better* to suffer for doing right than for doing wrong? In this context, it is because such wrongful suffering patiently endured is so remarkable that it becomes a powerful form of witness, leading unbelievers to salvation (cf. 2:12; 3:1–2). This understanding is confirmed by the following verse, which shows that Christ himself also suffered unjustly ‘that he might bring us to God’. (Verse 18 begins with a *hoti*, ‘for, because’, indicating that the verse gives a reason to support v. 17.) Just as Christ endured unjust suffering for our salvation, Peter reasons, so we are blessed by God if we endure unjust suffering for the salvation of others.

Of course, the parallel is not complete at every point, for Jesus’ suffering not only bore witness, but also actually earned our salvation because he died as our substitute (see notes at 1:19; 2:24). By contrast we can in no sense bear the wrath of God against the sins of others. None the less the example of Christ’s willingness to suffer for our sake provides a powerful encouragement for us to be willing even to suffer while witnessing, in order that others might be saved (cf. Col. 1:24).

This kind of suffering is much ‘better’, for deserved suffering because of wrong one has done is hardly a witness²⁰

²⁰ Wayne A. Grudem, [*1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 17, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 158–163.

3:13–14. **Who is going to harm you ...?** The context of Peter’s question makes it almost rhetorical. Though the adversary, through physical suffering or material hardship, would distress those who were **eager** (*zēlōtai*, lit., “zealots”) **to do good**, no real harm can come to those who belong to Christ. For even if suffering should occur, Christians **are blessed** and thus should **not be frightened**. The word here translated “blessed” (*makarioi*; cf. 4:14) was used by Jesus (Matt. 5:3–11). **To be “blessed” in this context does not mean to “feel delighted” but to be “highly privileged.” Christians are not to be afraid of what men can do to them (cf. Matt. 10:28). Consequently 1 Peter 3:14 concludes with a quotation from Isaiah 8:12 which, in context, is part of an exhortation to fear God rather than men.**

3:15. In their **hearts** Christians are to **set apart Christ as Lord**. Alexander Maclaren wrote, “Only he who can say, ‘The Lord is the strength of my life’ can go on to say, ‘Of whom shall I be afraid?’ ” (*Expositions of Holy Scriptures*, 16:42) Christians should overcome fear by sanctifying (*hagiasate*, “make separate from others”) Christ as their Lord (*kyrion*). As a result Christians should **always be prepared** (*hetoimoi*, “ready”; cf. 1:5) **to give ... the reason** (*apologian*, the “defense” which a defendant makes before a judge; cf. Acts 22:1; 25:16) **for their hope** in Christ. Such an oral defense should be consistent with one’s “set-apart” conduct.

3:16. A believer’s testimony should not be given in an arrogant manner but **with gentleness and respect**. (“Respect” here is from *phobos*, “fear,” whereas “respect” for one’s wife [v. 7] is *timē*, “honor.”) Christians who are not afraid in the face of persecution are able to witness respectfully to their faith in Christ. They then keep **a clear** (*agathēn*, “good”) **conscience** (*syneidēsin*; cf. 2:19; 3:21). Peter may have been alluding to the occasion when he denied Christ out of fear, in words that were neither gentle nor respectful.

Christians who suffer unjustly and keep a clear conscience put to shame those who **slander their good behavior in Christ**. Once again Peter encouraged his readers with the fact that good behavior is their best defense against unjust punishment and persecution.

3:17. However, Peter pointed out that it may be **God’s will** (*thelēma*; cf. 2:15; 4:2, 19) for them **to suffer for doing good** (cf. 1:6; 2:15; 4:16, 19). This, as he told them earlier, “is commendable before God” (2:20) and so is **better** than deserved suffering **for doing evil** (cf. 2:14). First Peter 3:17 is an effective summary of the content of 2:15, 19–20.²¹

²¹ Roger M. Raymer, [“1 Peter,”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 850.

3:13. The last major section of 1 Peter begins with this verse. From here on Peter is primarily concerned with the believer's response to actual persecution and intimidation. His focus is the believer's response to specific attacks. He begins to zero in on this response by asking a question in verse 13: "Since we are doing good in our lives, will people harm us?" Peter has exhorted his readers previously to be good to others as a witness and defense against nonbelievers (see 2:12), so this question would naturally flow from such an exhortation. The question suggests an answer something like this, "Under normal circumstances when you do what is right and good, you should not expect pain or harm to be directed your way."

3:14. Circumstances are not always normal, however. Slaves face the prospect of suffering for doing what is good (see 2:20). All Christians need to hear about suffering and trials in general (see 1:6–7). Peter himself suffered under circumstances that were not "normal." Suffering in the believer's life requires discussion.

Right (*dikaiosunen*) is often translated as "righteousness." In this context, the emphasis is on right living, or living that parallels the standards of the Word of God. This kind of behavior sometimes produces a negative reaction from others. The believer is **blessed** in the sense of being a recipient of God's favor and grace and living out another dimension of his calling (see 2:21). Still, we have normal human responses to the harm directed toward us as believers. Peter hinted at one of the main responses: **Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.** A better translation of the first part of this sentence would be, "Do not fear their threats or intimidations."

Opponents often attempt to intimidate believers to change their "right" behavior or to deny their "right" beliefs. Inherent in "fear" is the suggestion of being put to flight, or running away. The word describes "terror that causes you to flee." In the midst of suffering for doing what is right, believers are sometimes intimidated into running from their belief system or running from their circumstances. Peter's counsel was that they should not allow this to happen.

3:15. Instead of running away, Christians need a renewed allegiance. **Set apart Christ as Lord** means "to treat as holy or to regard with reverence." Christians are to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Holy One and also as Lord. "Lord" is the New Testament term for the Old Testament personal name for God (see Exod. 3:14–15; 6:2–3), often transcribed as "Jehovah" but more properly as "Yahweh." The New Testament applies the Old Testament title for God the Father to Jesus Christ, thus celebrating the deity of Christ.

The believer is to view Christ as holy, as worthy of reverence because of who he is. To reverence Christ as Lord means to believe that Jesus Christ is in control and that those who come against the believer are not. To have such reverence is to maintain a deep-seated confidence in Jesus Christ as the reigning Lord of the universe (see 3:22). When our lives are centered on Christ, who is in control of the universe, then we are able to respond properly to the uncertainties and inconsistencies of life.

When we have made this commitment, we can respond to harm by communicating a positive word regarding our hope in Christ rather than running away. Even while suffering unjustly, Christians are able to go on because of their hope in the future. Yancey observes, "When we awake

in the new heaven and new earth, we will possess at last whatever we longed for. Somehow, from all the bad news, incredible good news emerges—a good without a catch in it somewhere. Heaven and earth will again work the way God intended. There is a happy ending after all” (Philip Yancy, *Disappointment with God* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988], p. 245.)

From the opening words of chapter 1, Peter has emphasized the **living hope** of the believer (see 1:3). The unbeliever does not enjoy this hope but is connected only to an **empty way of life**, and a life of spiritual darkness (see 1:18; 2:9). One of the distinguishing marks of believers in Christ is their possession of hope. Christian hope is to be so real and distinctive that non-Christians will be puzzled by it and ask for an explanation. We should seize the opportunities of witness presented in these kinds of situations. Our response should be characterized not by smugness or vindictiveness but by **gentleness and respect**.

These words suggest that the believer should approach others carefully and kindly. A Christian should not attempt to ram the truth down someone’s throat or to speak patronizingly or critically to them. According to Grudem, “Such witness must be given with gentleness and (respect), not attempting to overpower the person with the force of human personality or aggressiveness, but trusting the Holy Spirit himself to quietly persuade the listener” (Grudem, 153).

3:16. If we maintain our testimony with gentleness and respect, we can be confident of operating with a **clear conscience**. This means that we should live in such a way that we won’t have to keep looking over our shoulder, hoping that the wrong we have done isn’t about to catch up to us.

By operating this way, our behavior and words will speak volumes to those who come against us. Peter promised that truth will prevail. What is not clear is whether the reference to the slanderers being ashamed refers to their present life or to the future day of God’s judgment. Most likely the text looks to a change of heart by the persecutors in this life as they are confronted by the gracious responses of the people they are persecuting.

3:17. This verse is an effective summary of what Peter has already stated in 2:15, 19–20: Suffering for doing good may be God’s will for believers²²

²² David Walls and Max Anders, [*I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*](#), vol. 11, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 53–55.

Peter concluded v. 12 by promising that the Lord's favor is on the righteous, but he will punish evildoers. He drew an inference from v. 12 in v. 13. It follows, therefore, that no one can ultimately harm those who are zealous in doing good. The promise of the heavenly inheritance guarantees that the distresses of this life do not constitute the last word. Verse 14 restates the thesis of v. 13. Believers may be distressed by persecution now, but in actuality they are blessed by God himself and will enjoy the eschatological reward. Since no one can ultimately harm believers and since they live under God's blessing, they are exhorted in v. 15 not to fear. Those who have God's promise of blessing realize that any pain in this life is short-lived. Instead of fearing what unbelievers might do, believers are to set apart Christ as Lord in their hearts and to respond to those who ask them about their endtime hope with humility and the fear of the Lord. Their good conduct will be the basis for the eschatological shame of their opponents since the latter did not respond to goodness when observing it. Peter only wanted to be sure (v. 17) that believers suffer for doing what is good instead of deserving censure because of evil behavior.

3:13 Even though I begin a new section here, this verse is closely linked to the preceding verses. The word *kai*, which is left untranslated by the NIV, is usually translated “and” or “but.” In this instance, however, it is almost equivalent to “therefore.”²¹⁶ Peter had just affirmed in v. 12 that the Lord will look with favor on the righteous, but he sets his face against those who practice evil. He speaks here of the final judgment, where those who live righteously will be rewarded and the wicked will be judged.²¹⁷ A rhetorical question is employed to stimulate the thinking of Peter's readers. Who will inflict harm upon believers if they pursue what is good? The NRSV is a bit more helpful than the NIV in that it clarifies even more explicitly that the future is in view, “Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?” Some commentators understand Peter to speak of this life, so the meaning is that people will ordinarily treat believers well if they practice righteousness.²¹⁸ The logical connection between vv. 12 and 13 suggests that this interpretation is incorrect. Furthermore, the future tense of the participle (*ho kakōsōn*) probably refers to judgment day. The point of the rhetorical question, then, is that no one will harm believers ultimately on the

NIV New International Version

²¹⁶ Kelly, *Peter and Jude*, 139–40; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 229; van Rensburg, “Intersentence Relational Particles and Asyndeton in 1 Peter,” 289. Michaels translates it “then” or “and so” (*1 Peter*, 185; cf. also Tite, *Compositional Transitions in 1 Peter*, 95–97).

²¹⁷ The link between the two verses is even clearer in Greek. Note the close proximity of the words *κακά* and *κακώσω*.

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

NIV New International Version

²¹⁸ E.g., Davids, *First Peter*, 129–30; McKnight, *1 Peter*, 212–13; Marshall, *1 Peter*, 114.

day of judgment, for God (as 3:10–12 teaches) will reward them for their faithfulness.²¹⁹ The link with the previous verses is also indicated in the last clause of the verse, “if you are eager to do good.” Godly behavior is also described as doing “good” in 3:11, which summarizes all that is required in 3:8–12. The word translated “eager” literally means “zealous” (*zēlōtai*), demonstrating an ardent pursuit of virtue, even in the face of persecution.²²⁰ Peter was not promising, then, that believers would escape rejection and harm in this world. Some understand Peter to say that usually the righteous will escape harm but occasionally they will encounter suffering.²²¹ This view should be rejected, for Peter did not suggest that sufferings are rare. Suffering stalks the believer until this present evil age comes to an end. Instead, Peter assured believers that nothing can ultimately harm them if they continue to walk in God’s paths, that the pain inflicted on them now is only temporary, and that they will be vindicated by God on the last day.²²² The thought is quite similar to Rom 8:31:²²³ “What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?” Paul was scarcely saying that believers face no opposition. His point was that no one can ultimately and finally triumph over believers since God will vindicate them on the last day.

3:14 The conjunction “but” (*alla*) introducing v. 14 does not provide a contrast but a clarification of v. 13. Hence, it could be translated as “indeed.”²²⁴ The suffering of Christians might suggest that the assertion in v. 13 is false. Believers can be harmed, even killed, by opponents. Peter, however, did not conceive of the suffering of believers as contradicting the claim of v. 13. Those who suffer for the sake of righteousness, those who endure opposition because of their zeal for what is good, are “blessed” (*makarioi*; see also 4:14).²²⁵ The blessing comes from God himself, showing that believers are beneficiaries when they are afflicted. In what sense are they blessed? Peter hardly could have meant that sufferings are themselves pleasant, for then, obviously, they would not be sufferings. He was almost certainly drawing on the Jesus tradition here, for Jesus himself taught in Matt 5:10–12 (cf. Luke 6:22–23) that those who suffer are blessed because of the eschatological reward they will receive.²²⁶ We can see now why the word “but” should be translated “indeed.” The train of thought is as follows: “No one will be able to harm believers on the future day if they are zealous for good” (v. 13). Indeed, even present suffering is not a sign of punishment but of God’s blessing both now and especially in the future, in the day when he rewards his people with eternal life.

²¹⁹ Rightly Cranfield, *I & II Peter and Jude*, 97–98; Kelly, *Peter and Jude*, 139–40; Michaels, *1 Peter*, 183–84; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 229; Martin, *Metaphor and Composition in 1 Peter*, 214; Bechtler, *Following in His Steps*, 164; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 620; Schelke, *Der Petrusbrief—Der Judasbrief*, 100.

²²⁰ The word ἀγαθοῦ here is an objective genitive.

²²¹ E.g., Lea, “1 Peter—Outline and Exposition,” 35.

²²² F. Neugebauer remarks that there is also an emphasis on present reward here (“Zur Deutung und Bedeutung des 1. Petrusbriefes,” *NTS* 26 [1980]: 78–79).

²²³ Augustine says, “If you love the good, you will suffer no loss, because whatever you may be deprived of in this world, you will never lose God, who is the true Good” (in *James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude*, ACCS [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000], 103).

²²⁴ Michaels paraphrases the beginning of v. 14 as follows, “What is more (even if you should suffer ...) you are blessed” (*1 Peter*, 185).

²²⁵ See also Kelly, *Peter and Jude*, 140; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 231.

²²⁶ So Goppelt, *1 Peter*, 241.

Peter used the optative form of the verb “suffer” (*paschoite*), which leads some scholars to the conclusion that suffering is unusual and a remote possibility for Christians.²²⁷ Such an understanding of the verbal form flies in the face of the context of the rest of 1 Peter, where it is quite evident that Christians in Asia Minor were facing suffering (cf. 1:6–7; 2:12, 19–21; 4:12–19; 5:9–10). Furthermore, such a view is difficult to square with the rest of Christian tradition, where suffering is part and parcel of the believer’s life.²²⁸ The purpose of the optative, then, is not to suggest that suffering is unlikely. Rather, the optative is used because suffering, though not a constant experience in the Christian life, is always a threat and could erupt at any time.²²⁹ Peter was not teaching that suffering is rare, only that it is not perpetual. The suffering envisioned is “for what is right” (*dia dikaïosynēn*) and hence excludes trouble that comes because of ignorance or sin (cf. 2:20; 4:15). Righteousness is another way of describing “the good” for which believers are zealous in 3:13.

Peter now draws two implications (in this verse and the next) from the fact that suffering is an indication of God’s blessing.²³⁰ These two implications are the main point of the text and are expressed as imperatives. Since believers are blessed by God when they suffer, they should not fear what unbelievers can do to them. The NIV understands the first phrase differently, translating it, “Do not fear what they fear.”²³¹ The NIV rendering fits with the allusion to Isaiah, which will receive attention below. In the Petrine context, however, we probably have a reference to the fear that unbelievers could strike into the hearts of Christians.²³² This interpretation is reflected in the NASB, “Do not fear their intimidation.” The second imperative, “do not be frightened,” bears the same idea and simply restates the first imperative.²³³ The admonition fits with Peter’s emphasis on only fearing God. Fear of human beings, even of those who persecute, is forbidden. The reason

²²⁷ Cf. Cranfield, *I & II Peter and Jude*, 98; Beare, *First Peter*, 137; Richard, *Reading 1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter*, 147.

²²⁸ Cf. Acts 4:1–22; 5:17–42; 7:54–8:3; 9:29–30; 12:1–24; 13:45; 14:1–6, 19, 22; 16:19–40; 17:5–9, 13–15; 18:12–17; 19:23–41; 1 Thess 3:1–5; 2 Thess 1:4; 2 Tim 3:11–12).

²²⁹ So Kelly, *Peter and Jude*, 141; Selwyn, *First Peter*, 191; R. Omanson, “Suffering for Righteousness’ Sake (1 Pet 3:13–4:11),” *RevExp* (1982): 439; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 231; F. W. Danker, “1 Peter 1:24–2:17—A Consolatory Pericope,” *ZNW* 68 (1967): 100, n. 38. Michaels suggests that the optative provides emphasis, so that the point is that even when believers suffer their future is better than unbelievers (*1 Peter*, 186).

²³⁰ The connecting word is δὲ, but contextually we should discern an inference here.

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²³¹ For this interpretation see Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, 110.

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²³² The pronoun αὐτῶν would then be a genitive of source (so also Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 232, n. 45). Or similarly it could be an objective genitive (Kelly, *Peter and Jude*, 142; Michaels, *1 Peter*, 186–87). Calvin maintains that Peter shifted the meaning slightly from the original intention in Isaiah, but he argues that the difference in meaning is not significant in any case (*Catholic Epistles*, 106–7).

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²³³ The words μηδὲ ταραχθῆτε are omitted in a few manuscripts (ℱ⁷², B, L) but are surely original. Perhaps Michaels is correct that they were omitted because of the similar ending on φοβηθῆτε (*1 Peter*, 183).

fear is prohibited relates back to vv. 13–14a. Since no one can ultimately harm believers and since even their suffering is a sign of God’s blessing, then it follows that they should not fear what others can do to them.

Peter alluded in this verse and the next to Isa 8:12–13. The text is reshaped slightly to fit Petrine themes, though we again do not know if the text was carefully altered or if it is cited from memory. Apparently the Isaiah text was important for Peter, for we saw in 1 Pet 2:8 that he appealed to Isa 8:14, in the texts collected on the stone. The context of Isaiah 7–8 is important. The Southern Kingdom of Judah was threatened by the Northern Kingdoms of Israel and Aram (approximately modern day Syria). These two countries were threatening to remove Ahaz as king of Judah and to install a certain Tabeel as king in his stead. The threat filled Ahaz and Judah with terror (Isa 7:2), but Isaiah promised that the Lord would preserve Judah, that Israel and Aram would be vanquished by Syria, and that the Lord would provide a sign to demonstrate the faithfulness of his word. Judah and Ahaz were to respond by trusting in the Lord’s promise. In Isa 8:11–15 the Lord commands his people not to fear the plot hatched by Israel and Aram. They should only fear Yahweh, the God of Israel, and put their trust in him alone. Those who trust in him will find him to be a sanctuary, but those who fail to trust will stumble, fall, and be broken. We can see from this short synopsis of Isaiah that Peter appropriately applied the prophecy to his situation. Just as Judah had enemies in the days of Ahaz, so the Petrine readers faced opponents in their day. Just as Judah was tempted to fear their foes, so the Petrine readers were liable to fear what their persecutors might do to them. Hence, the words of Isaiah still spoke to Peter’s day. Believers are not to fear the suffering unbelievers might administer to them. They are to trust in the Lord, believing that he will vindicate his own.²³⁴

3:15 Peter here stated the second implication from vv. 13–14a, continuing to allude to Isaiah 8. Negatively, believers are to refrain from fear. Positively, they are “to set apart Christ as Lord” in their “hearts.” The differences from the Septuagint are more substantial than in v. 14. In Isa 8:13 the “LORD” (*kyrios*) is clearly Yahweh, but here Peter added the word “Christ” (*Christon*).²³⁵ The words “in your hearts” are also lacking in Isaiah. The move from Yahweh to Christ is common in the New Testament, reflecting the conviction that Jesus the Messiah deserves the same honor as Yahweh. In addition, Peter’s change reflects the situation his readers faced, for they were persecuted because of their allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord. Peter exhorted his readers to continue to treat Christ as the holy one, fearing him instead of those who are harming them. Christ is already Lord in any case, but believers demonstrate and acknowledge his lordship in their lives by honoring his name (cf. Matt 6:9).

Some scholars argue that the construction should be translated as “set apart the Lord, namely, Christ.”²³⁶ The meaning does not change dramatically if this interpretation is correct, though more emphasis is placed on Christ’s identification as Lord, so that Peter would have been stressing that what was said about Yahweh in the Old Testament was now true of Jesus Christ. But two

²³⁴ McCartney observes that despite the minor differences between the OT and Peter, “the resultant force is actually quite similar. In both contexts the exhortation is on being afraid not of other people, but only of the Lord” (“The Use of the Old Testament in the First Epistle of Peter,” 95–96).

²³⁵ The MT inserts θεόν instead of Χριστόν. The external evidence supports the latter (P⁷², A, B, C, Ψ, 33, 614, 1739), and perhaps scribes inserted θεόν because Christ was not in the LXX of Isa 8:13. See also *TCGNT* 622–23.

²³⁶ Kelly, *Peter and Jude*, 142; Michaels, *1 Peter*, 187.

arguments suggest that we should interpret the construction as it is interpreted in the NIV, “set apart Christ as Lord.” First, “Lord” lacks the article, but “Christ” has one, and it would be more natural in an appositional relationship if both nouns lacked or retained the article.²³⁷ Second, it seems more likely in context that Peter did not want to stress that Christ is Lord but that believers should set him apart and treat him *as Lord*. The place where Christ is to be set apart as Lord is “in your hearts.” We should not understand the heart as our inner and private lives, which are inaccessible to others. The heart is the origin of human behavior (cf. 1:22; 3:4), and from it flows everything people do. Hence, setting apart Christ as Lord in the heart is not merely a private reality but will be evident to all when believers suffer for their faith. The inner and outer life are inseparable, for what happens within will inevitably be displayed to all, especially when one suffers.

How the next sentence relates to the previous one is difficult to discern. The NIV understandably turns the adjective “prepared” (*hetoimoi*) into an imperative, “be prepared,” for something needs to be supplied to make the construction sensible. Technically speaking, perhaps, a participle (*ontes*) links this phrase to the main verb above (“set apart,” *hagiasate*).²³⁸ In any case, the adjective ends up *functioning* like an imperative, and so the NIV is not far off. Believers are to be ready constantly to respond to those who ask about their faith. What Peter emphasized is that they were to be prepared to provide a “defense” (NRSV, *apologia*—rendered “answer” by NIV) to those who ask about the Christian faith. The word “defense” suggests to some scholars a reference to formal court cases in which believers responded to legal accusations (cf. Luke 12:11; 21:14; Acts 19:33; 22:1; 24:10; 25:8, 16; 26:1–2, 24; Phil 1:7, 16; 2 Tim 4:16).²³⁹ We have already seen in the introduction that the persecution in 1 Peter was sporadic and informal and does not represent the kind of state-sponsored persecution under Pliny and Trajan (see introduction). Hence, the text does not address primarily formal legal situations.²⁴⁰ It envisions instead informal circumstances when believers are asked spontaneously about their faith.²⁴¹ This interpretation is supported by the words “everyone who asks you” (*panti tō aitounti hymas*), suggesting that believers respond to a wide variety of people, not exclusively in court situations.²⁴² The admonition here, of course, also applies to legal settings, nor does it preclude the possibility that believers

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²³⁷ So Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 232.

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²³⁸ So Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 233, n. 54. Beare describes the adjective as imperatival (*First Peter*, 138).

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²³⁹ E.g., Beare, *First Peter*, 138–39.

²⁴⁰ So most scholars. E.g., Omanson, “Suffering,” 439; Selwyn, *First Peter*, 193; Kelly, *Peter and Jude*, 142–43; Michaels, *1 Peter*, 188; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 233; Goppelt, *1 Peter*, 244.

²⁴¹ The words *απολογία* and *ἀπολογέομαι* are also used of private controversies (cf. 1 Cor 9:3; 2 Cor 7:11; 12:19).

²⁴² Some manuscripts (X², A, Ψ) insert *ἀπαιτοῦντι* instead of *αἰτοῦντι*. The latter is original, and it is just possible that the former emphasizes the forcefulness with which believers are challenged (cf. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 228).

occasionally faced legal charges.²⁴³ What I am saying is that the admonition cannot be restricted to courtroom appearances.

The exhortation here is instructive, for Peter assumed that believers have solid intellectual grounds for believing the gospel. The truth of the gospel is a public truth that can be defended in the public arena. This does not mean, of course, that every Christian is to be a highly skilled apologist for the faith.²⁴⁴ It does mean that every believer should grasp the essentials of the faith and should have the ability to explain to others why they think the Christian faith is true. Achtemeier remarks that in this respect we have an interesting difference between the Christian faith and mystery religions, for the latter required secrecy of their adherents.²⁴⁵

Interestingly enough Peter used the word “hope” (*elpis*) rather than “faith” here. We have already seen in 1:22 (see commentary) that the two words are closely linked. “Hope” was a central word for Peter, focusing on the eschatological inheritance that awaits believers (1:3; cf. 1:13).²⁴⁶ The implication is that unbelievers will recognize by the way believers respond to difficulties that their hope is in God rather than in pleasant earthly circumstances. The “hope that you have” is literally “the hope that is in you” (NRSV) or “the hope among you” (*tēs en hymin elpidos*). Some scholars favor the latter, arguing that the focus is not on the individual but the hope that is shared by the whole community.²⁴⁷ Social scientific studies of the New Testament era have rightly emphasized the community in the ancient world. Modern Western culture is highly individualistic, and the emphasis on personal freedom sets us apart from our ancestors. Nevertheless, we must beware of an overreaction, for early Christians did teach that individuals needed to repent and believe and were responsible for their decisions (cf. Acts 2:37–38; 3:19; Rom 10:9, etc.). In this case the translation of the NRSV, “the hope that is in you,” is to be preferred.²⁴⁸ The phrase is parallel to “in your hearts,” focusing attention on the inner life from which outward actions flow. The New Testament does not separate the inner from the outer, the private from the public, for whatever is on the inside is manifested on the outside. Here the hope that animates believers will become so evident that unbelievers will ask for an explanation.

When believers encounter a hostile world and are challenged concerning their faith, the temptation to respond harshly increases. Defending a position could easily be transmuted into attacking one’s opponents. Hence, Peter added that the defense must be made “with gentleness and reverence” (NRSV, *meta prautētos kai phobou*).²⁴⁹

²⁴³ So Kelly, *Peter and Jude*, 143; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 233; Bechtler, *Following in His Steps*, 90–91.

²⁴⁴ Luther argues from this text that every believer needs to know God’s word individually (*Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 158–59).

²⁴⁵ Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 234.

²⁴⁶ So Brox, *Der erste Petrusbrief*, 17.

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²⁴⁷ Selwyn, *First Peter*, 194; Michaels, *1 Peter*, 189; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 233–34.

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²⁴⁸ Rightly Goppelt, *1 Peter*, 244; Kelly, *Peter and Jude*, 143.

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²⁴⁹ In the Greek text this phrase is part of v. 16.

The NRSV translation is to be preferred over the NIV's "with gentleness and respect." The latter's use of the word "respect" suggests that Christians should treat unbelievers in a fitting way when questioned, and obviously Peter would not disagree. We have seen throughout the commentary, however, that "fear" in 1 Peter is always directed toward God (see the commentary on 2:18). Furthermore, "gentleness" or "humility" also becomes a reality when creatures consider themselves in relation to God.²⁵⁰ Still, Peter probably had in view gentleness toward other people and reverence before God.²⁵¹ Such fear and humility are required for wives as well (3:2, 4), suggesting again that the instruction for the wives functions as a pattern for all oppressed believers. Those who fear God and live in humility will treat their opponents with dignity and refrain from lashing out against them. What Peter emphasized, however, is the relation with God that enables believers to respond appropriately to unbelievers.

3:16 Verse 15 blends right into v. 16, being joined by a participle. We also have another piece of evidence that suggests that "gentleness and reverence" in v. 15 focus on the relationship of believers to God. The phrase "keeping a clear conscience" functions as an imperatival participle, even if it is technically instrumental. Again, Peter specified what is involved when believers defend their faith. When Peter spoke of a "clear conscience" (*suneidēsin agathēn*, lit., "a good conscience"), he referred to the relationship of believers to God. As Goppelt says, "They have the certainty of living by faith, without being perfect therein."²⁵² They live in God's presence in all they do, and hence they must not resort to revenge, anger, or sin when they are called upon to defend their hope.

Why should believers live in fear and humility before God and maintain a good conscience? In a purpose clause ("so that," *hina*) the intention is explicated, "so that" those who abuse the good conduct of believers will be humiliated on the last day. We receive further evidence that the primary form of persecution in 1 Peter was not physical but social. The situation addressed is "when you are maligned" (NRSV, *en hō katalaleisthe*).²⁵³ Unbelievers are "those who speak maliciously" (*ho epēreazontes*) about Christians. Formal court cases are not envisioned here but negative verbal attacks in the public square. The latter, of course, can lead to the former, and when verbal opposition ratchets up, physical violence may not be far behind. What unbelievers criticize, shockingly, is the "good behavior" of believers. The word for "behavior" (*anastrophēn*) was a favorite of Peter's, often designating the kind of conduct that is pleasing to God (1:15; 3:1–2; by way of contrast 1:18, and see the verbal form in 1:17). That the behavior in view is distinctively Christian is clear by the prepositional phrase "in Christ" (*en Christō*). The "in Christ" language pervades the Pauline letters, with the phrase appearing seventy-three times, and it is used outside

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²⁵⁰ Rightly Michaels, *1 Peter*, 189.

²⁵¹ Elliott, *1 Peter*, 627. Cf. also Bechtler, *Following in His Steps*, 164.

²⁵² Goppelt, *1 Peter*, 245.

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²⁵³ The RSV and others rightly translate this clause as temporal (so Reicke, *The Disobedient Spirits and Christian Baptism*, 110–11; Fink, "Use of *en hō* in 1 Peter," 34; Brox, *Der erste Petrusbrief*, 161). A number of witnesses substitute καταλαλοῦσιν ὑμῶν ὡς κακοποιῶν for καταλαλεῖσθε, but the former is almost certainly due to assimilation to 1 Pet 2:12.

Paul only in 1 Peter (cf. also 5:10, 14); but Peter did not develop the phrase in the same way as Paul, and here it is virtually equivalent to “Christian.”²⁵⁴

Peter continued to emphasize that the conduct of believers is related to the Lord, where all conduct is in the sphere of Christ. Further, Christians should only be abused for their “good” conduct. Believers are to live righteously so that those who abuse their good conduct will “be ashamed” (*kataischynthōsin*). Commentators are divided about whether unbelievers will feel ashamed during this life by recognizing the conduct of unbelievers or whether the shame is eschatological, referring to the humiliation experienced on the day of judgment.²⁵⁵ In support of the former it seems that Peter expected unbelievers to recognize the good conduct of believers now.²⁵⁶ When Christians persist in doing good and refrain from revenge even when censured, unbelievers cannot help but notice the goodness of those who claim to be Christ’s. The first option is certainly a possibility; neither was Peter denying that some will take notice of the good conduct of believers. Still, his focus here was on the end time, the day of judgment.²⁵⁷ Three pieces of evidence support this interpretation. First, the verb “put to shame” in 1 Pet 2:6 refers to the last day, and though the term does not always refer to the future, it often bears this meaning (Rom 5:5; 9:33; 10:11; 1 Cor 1:27). Second, and most important, believers are already abused and criticized for their good behavior in Christ. It is difficult to see how “more good behavior” would suddenly lead unbelievers to feel ashamed. Some non-Christians are persuaded, despite the godly conduct of Christians, that they are troublemakers. Peter called on believers to continue to live righteously when threatened. Peter probably had in view unbelievers who are hardened toward believers, who have made up their minds (come what may) that Christians are socially dangerous. Hence, he exhorted his readers to continue to please God and live in a godly fashion, so that on the day of judgment unbelievers will recognize that they were mistaken all along. Third, the language of 1 Pet 2:12 is parallel to 3:16 in a number of respects: the call to good conduct, the maligning by unbelievers, and the need to continue to live righteously when oppressed.

We have seen that there are good reasons to think in 1 Pet 2:12 that the righteous conduct of believers will lead some unbelievers to salvation to the glory of God, and that some would respond with repentance is not denied here. But Peter emphasized another truth in this verse. Some unbelievers refuse to acknowledge the goodness of the lives of believers. On the last day, however, they will be put to shame by God himself and will be compelled to acknowledge that believers lived righteously. First Peter 2:12 and 3:16 do not contradict each other. They contemplate different responses to the godly lives of believers: some unbelievers will see their good conduct and glorify God by believing the gospel (1 Pet 2:12), but others refuse to believe and will only admit the goodness of believers on the day that God judges them.

3:17 The word “for” (NRSV, *gar*) links v. 17 to the preceding, though the connecting word is unfortunately omitted by the NIV. Scholars debate the meaning of the verse, and so we must pursue this issue before explaining how it relates to the preceding. Is the verse saying that it is better for

²⁵⁴ So Michaels, *1 Peter*, 190.

²⁵⁵ Bechtler says that the shame of unbelievers is now recognized by the believing community (*Following in His Steps*, 195), but this would afford little encouragement to a beleaguered church.

²⁵⁶ Cf. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 236; Richard, *Reading 1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter*, 151–52.

²⁵⁷ So Michaels, *1 Peter*, 190–91; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 623–33.

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Christians to suffer when they do good than it is for them to suffer for doing evil? Such a view is supported by many commentators.²⁵⁸ Others object that such an interpretation is prosaic and so obvious that it hardly needs to be said. Therefore they understand the verse eschatologically. It is better to suffer now for doing good than it is to suffer on the day of judgment for practicing evil.²⁵⁹

Supporting this latter view is the eschatological focus of the argument in 3:10–12 and in 3:16. Further, the wording is parallel in some respects to Mark 9:43, 45, 47. Despite some provocative arguments favoring the latter view, I think Peter was not referring to the final judgment in this verse, even though I agree that eschatology informs 3:10–12 and 3:16.²⁶⁰ Such an eschatological focus is not evident here. The parallels in Mark are hardly decisive since those verses explicitly refer to end-time judgment and salvation. The Petrine formulation lacks such eschatological language. Further, the idea expressed in this verse is also communicated in 4:15–16 (cf. 2:20). Such a sentiment may seem prosaic, but it may be said in response that Peter knew human nature, realizing that even Christians may be apt to explain all suffering as an indication of their righteousness, when some of it may be deserved and come to them because of their sins. Neither is the verse merely a secular sentiment since the suffering Peter envisioned was for the good done because of one's relationship with God. Further, nowhere else did Peter use the word "suffer" (*paschō*) to refer to eschatological judgment, but only to the difficulties faced during the present evil age. We have noted in the above verses that the good conduct of believers is rooted in their relationship with God. Verse 17, then, explains that the opposition Christians receive must be for good behavior, not their shortcomings.

Another feature of v. 17 must be noted. The suffering of believers is attributed to the will of God (cf. 1:6).²⁶¹ The optative of the verb "suffer" (*paschoi*) is used because Peter did not know the extent to which God wills the suffering of each believer. He realized that some will experience more vilification and even bodily harm than others. Such opposition, however, is not outside God's control.²⁶² The suffering each believer endures represents God's will for them. Peter did not deny the reality of Satan and his evil ragings in the persecution of the church (5:8), nor did he exempt from responsibility human beings who persecute the church (2:12; 3:16). Nevertheless, ultimately no one can touch God's children apart from his permission. This is also the message of the Book of Job. Satan could only inflict damage on Job with God's acquiescence. Naturally God's intentions and motives in allowing suffering are remarkably different from Satan's, and hence God remains unalterably good in the process, while Satan is irremediably evil.²³

²⁵⁸ E.g., Brox, *Der erste Petrusbrief*, 163; Omanson, "Suffering," 440; Beare, *First Peter*, 140; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 237–38.

²⁵⁹ So Michaels, *1 Peter*, 191; cf. id., "Eschatology in I Peter iii.17," 394–401; Martin, *Metaphor and Composition in 1 Peter*, 223.

²⁶⁰ Rightly Brox, *Der erste Petrusbrief*, 162–63; Horrell, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, 68–69. Horrell notes that the author would not speak of judgment as the cause of suffering.

²⁶¹ Cf. Goppelt, *1 Peter*, 246.

²⁶² Calvin rightly says our suffering is not due to chance but God's will (*Catholic Epistles*, 111).

²³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 169–179.