



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 Peter 3: 8-17

Summer 2024

"No Pound Of Flesh"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. We are continuing our studies in 1 Peter. We're in chapter 3 this morning; and we'll look at verses 8 through 17. Peter has been encouraging, exhorting, directing those to whom he's written to, to be submissive in all areas of life—from the government to household relationships, family relationships; and now he's going to sum all of this up. That's how he begins in verse 8,

⁸To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; *(If you have a different translation from the New American Standard Bible, some of these words are translated differently. I'll maybe comment on that in the message.)* ⁹not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. ¹⁰For, *(now he quotes Psalm 34)*

“The one who desires life,
To love and see good days,
Must keep his tongue from evil
And his lips from speaking deceit.

¹¹“He must turn away from evil and do good;
He must seek peace and pursue it.

¹²“For the eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous,

And His ears attend to their prayer,
But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil."

¹³ Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, ¹⁵ but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; ¹⁶ and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

1 Peter 3: 8-17

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we do look to You to bless us as we continue this service, and as we sing the hymns we'll sing, and consider the text that we've just read; we pray that You would guide us in our thinking, and help us to apply our minds to the things that Peter has written. They're straightforward—and yet they're difficult.

I think as we ponder the instruction that he's given, just as was the case in the previous verses, with submission and obedience in various areas of life, and to various individuals; it's difficult as we consider what we're called to do. And yet this is the instruction You've given Your people. Peter had experienced it; he spoke as one who knew what it was to be persecuted and respond in a proper way—and we're to do that as well.

And it undergirds the principle that we find all through Scripture: 'We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.' (Phl 4:13). We need that strengthening, we need that grace, we need Your power, Your mercy to do whatever we do.—And with that we can do the things that are naturally challenging, difficult, even seemingly impossible.

And so LORD, we pray that You would help us to understand our responsibilities from this text, but also to remember that You're in it and You're sufficient for all of our needs. And help us as we study these things, to be encouraged to continue our studies of Your Word and learn of Your greatness and Your grace and Your faithfulness—and know that we can do the things that You require of us, not in our own strength, but in Yours; and You are faithful. So LORD, be glorified in the things we study this morning and encourage us.

And we have other needs, LORD, that are spiritual, but we need material help, as well. And we pray that You would bless us in whatever the circumstances we're in, for You know. We may not know what everyone is going through, but You do, and I pray that You'd supply and encourage in the meantime, and bring those in need through the difficulties, through the dark valley. You can do anything; 'All things are possible with You', (Mat 19: 26); and what a great thing that is to know. —Our prayers are not in vain.

So, we pray that You'd bless us now, as we continue this service, and prepare our hearts to study, think, and worship together. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) One of man's natural instincts is revenge. People must have their “pound of flesh”, a phrase that originated in Shakespeare's play, *The Merchant of Venice*. In it, the money lender, Shylock, who had a grudge, required a pound of a merchant's flesh if he failed to repay a large loan. It's an expression that has come to refer to vengeful behavior.

Nothing is more common to the natural man, the man outside of Christ, than vengeance—the desire, that need, to trade punches and get even. But Peter said, 'Do not return evil for evil, but give a blessing instead.' (vs9). That's the Christian life. It is a demanding life with a high standard; and very different from the life that we see around us. It's about doing good. —Simple, but difficult in a bad world.

Still, this is Peter's instruction in our text, in chapter 3, verses 8 through 17. He begins with positive instruction in verse 8. If I had one word to describe this verse, and really the entire passage, it would be '*graciousness*'. That should characterize us.

He begins, "To sum up..." (as I reviewed a little bit during the reading of the Scripture, he has just given instruction on submission in all areas of life; from our relationship to the state, to our relationships within the family, and now he sums up his instruction), "...all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit;" (vs8). And if we do that, we will do good in a bad world.

The first of these five virtues, *harmony*, is very significant to the rest of the virtues that he mentions. Harmony means, 'to have the same thoughts'. And it's significant that Peter puts it first because it indicates that 'unity of mind leads to unity in concern and conduct'. As Christians we must know what we believe, and why we believe it. If we're not united in our understanding of Christian doctrines—the Trinity and the doctrines of salvation, we will not be unified in our mission.

A division occurred early in the church, in the 'Galatian heresy', when Judaizers, (men who professed faith but compromised grace by mixing the Law with the Gospel), were teaching that salvation is by 'faith plus works', and not faith alone. It surfaced again in the debate between Augustin, (who taught the sovereignty of God), and Pelagius, who was the champion of *free will* and man's ability to perfect himself.

It's the same division that occurred later in the 16th century between the Calvinists and the Arminians. (The Arminians are also known as 'the Remonstrants' who were students and followers of Jacob Arminius.) One of their leaders, Simon Episcopius, was like Pelagius. He had a very high view of human nature and ability—and that affected his entire theology, for a 'high view of man' will lead to a low view of God. He denied predestination and election; and interpreted the Trinity symbolically, (but didn't believe in the Trinity); and Christ as our 'ethical model'; and Christianity as some 'moral religion'. Now if you have the ability to do these things you really don't need a savior—and that idea even effects your view of God.

Well today, it's the division between orthodoxy, (or evangelicalism), and liberalism. Now all of this is to say, 'What we believe matters!' If we're not united in the Gospel, if we're not united in grace, we are not united. And so Peter emphasizes being *harmonious*, (vs8), 'having the same thoughts'. There's no real unity in error or ignorance; a church must be of the same mind about the Trinity, about the doctrine of salvation, (and we could go on and list other things); and the more Christians are of one mind and one purpose, the more they will be mutually sympathetic and "*brotherly*" toward one another.

That's next on Peter's list: The word "*brotherly*" is 'brotherly love'. It's translated that way in some of the other versions. The New International Version translates this, 'love one another'—and that's the idea. We should have sympathy and love for all people—but first of all we should have love for fellow believers. The Lord Jesus, the night He was betrayed in John 13, said, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another." (Jn 13:35).

Now that's not simply affection. I think affection's part of it; we certainly should have a feeling of affection for one another, but it's also action—maybe primarily action. It's being, 'glad to help one another'. I think that would have been particularly true in their circumstances because that 'circumstance' they were in was one of persecution. — So they were to, 'bear up' one another's burdens.

But to do that, and act in that way, we need *humility*. That's the last of these qualities, being "*humble in spirit*"—which involves ideas, and attitudes, and outlook. It's the opposite of pride, which leads to selfishness. Pride is easy; it's natural. Humility is the product of grace. We pray for it; but it's also the result of knowing grace, understanding grace, understanding what God has done for us. —Which goes back to being *harmonious*, 'being of the same mind'. All of that, all of verse 8, is how we are to relate to one another in the church, the Christian community.

Next, Peter gives instruction on how we are to relate to the world; and in his day it was instruction for believers, as I just mentioned, who were living in a hostile, pagan world. His message: 'Don't take revenge!'

There were, no doubt, many reasons for them to do that, (to take revenge), and no doubt, many of them had that in their mind; it would have been 'the natural thing to do'; to get their "pound of flesh". When offended or hurt, that's what we want to do. We naturally want to retaliate—get even.

Charles Spencer, the brother of the late Princess Diana, wrote a book some years ago titled, *Killers of the King*, about the men who executed Charles I—and what Charles II did when the monarchy was restored after Oliver Cromwell.

Well, he could have shown clemency when he came to the throne to heal the nation after a civil war and division. Instead, he used all of his power and his wealth as king to get those involved with his father's killing. He searched relentlessly, throughout England, across the continent of Europe, and even in the American colonies until he hunted them all down and gave them all a brutal death: 'Drawn and quartered'.

Well that's an extreme example, of course. What we do is much less lethal, at least to one another, for we have other ways of responding. Most naturally is to respond to a personal offense by holding a grudge, (and that can fester within us, leading to doing something).

Wrong doings happen and they happen to everyone. And terrible things can occur which can produce terrible results to the victim, as it were. But Peter's message to the persecuted church of history in the most difficult of circumstances is, "...not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead;" (vs9). Now we are not in severe situations but that message is true for us as well.

And that kind of response is imitating Christ. Peter wrote of that earlier in chapter 2, verses 21 through 23, where he told his readers, (and told us as well), "...to follow in His steps..." (vs21), who, "...while being reviled did not revile in return." (vs23). What Christ did is trust His Father; trust in the LORD. That's what the Lord taught us to do in Matthew chapter 5, verse 44; "...love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..."

Peter got all of this from the Master Himself, so it is the right way—and therefore it is the best way. It may be the hardest way, but it's the best way. Revenge will destroy the avenger; it will eat up a man's soul.

That's the lesson of *Moby-Dick*. If you've ever powered through all 600 pages you know that. If not, well, it's about Captain Ahab who chased a great white whale across the globe, because it ate his leg. Now that would make anyone mad. *[Laughter]* He was seeking his 'ton of flesh'. His soul was consumed with revenge. —And in the end, it destroyed him. The whale carried him and his ship down to a watery grave.

Well, that's a story, but it illustrates a truth; the Lord's instruction to, "love your enemies", and Peter's counsel to, 'give a blessing instead of an insult' is good medicine; it is 'medicine for the soul'. That's a healthy response: Grace instead of aggression.

A caveat to this is: 'This is not a prohibition against seeking lawful restitution or a remedy to an injury in a law court.' That is one of the purposes of government that Peter set forth in this book—in chapter 2, verse 14, "...for the punishment of evildoers..."

What Peter is referring to here is a prohibition against personal revenge/retaliating. We are to pray for the enemy, not kill it. Pray for the hostile; pray that God would grant repentance and faith to the unbeliever and turn the enemy into a friend.

Now again, you're probably sensing what I sensed as I prepared all of this and thought about this...'That is hard to do!' These are difficult requirements of us—a high and difficult standard. It's just a fact of life: This is not an easy life that we are to live! It's hard not to brood over wounds suffered, especially when great harm has been done. We need *grace* to do that; and so I say, '*Grace* is assumed to be in effect through all of this.' These are things we cannot do in our own strength—but we are to do them.

Now the encouragement Peter gives is the promise of a blessing for such gracious conduct. That, I think, is clearer perhaps, in the New International Version, or maybe the English Standard Version, which both give good translations of the original text.

The New International Version: "On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing." (vs9b). It is our *calling* from God to live this way in a hostile world. Some saints have been *called* to debate and expose the error of skeptics. God has given them a mind like a steel trap, and quick in understanding. They're apologists; they're defenders of the faith.

Not all of us have that kind of mind, but all of us know the truth, (we should), and all of us can articulate it, speak it clearly, (at least we should be able to do that). And the Holy Spirit uses that effectively in the unbeliever's heart.

And all of us can, by the Spirit, behave graciously. It's a witness of divine life. It's a witness to the reality that you are a changed person, that there's something different about you. And such behavior, "...doing right...", as Peter put it back in chapter 2, verse 15, "...may silence the ignorance of foolish men." They cannot argue with a gracious life and a gracious response—and the Spirit uses that to win the lost. But regardless of how hostile people may respond, (and we can't control that), God has called us to live graciously, to be a witness to the world in that way.—And He will bless us for it with eternal, glorious blessing and reward.

So, much of life for us is a test, and regardless of the results of that, it's a test—and God blesses those who are faithful, regardless of the results around us. And the promise is that He'll bless us with reward. That's a great encouragement and incentive. Whatever we might suffer or lose in this, 'Oh, so brief life', is more than regained in eternity. God blesses us beyond anything that we might think we deserve.

It's the life He has called us to because, 'It is the life of Christ in whose steps we are to follow.' And if He has called us to that life, that difficult life, then He will supply the grace to do it. We live by faith.

One example that I've often cited, but it comes to mind in light of this difficult standard that He's set before us, is Joshua chapter 3, verse 15: It's when Israel is about to cross over the Jordan River into the promised land and they are about to receive their

inheritance. It's the priests that lead the way while carrying the Ark; but the problem is they've come to the Jordan River and it's overflowing its banks. It's a raging flood.

What do they do? They've been told to cross—but they don't stop and say, 'Well, we have to wait a while on this.' It says, 'The priests stepped into the river. And as the sole of their foot touched the river, the water it suddenly backed up.'

Now they didn't know that, they didn't experience that until they stepped out, until they stepped forward in obedience to the Lord God—and I think that's the life of faith. That's at least one example of the various ways we live by faith. They stepped forward and the blessing occurred. And that's how we're to live. We live by faith; and as we do, we will see God's blessing.

All of that is the basis for living this life of grace and non-retaliation. But Peter also had Scripture to support what he has taught here in verses 8 and 9. It's Psalm 34, verses 12 through 16, (which he quotes next in verses 10 and 12 of our text). In this Psalm, God promises a blessing for right behavior in times of opposition.

There is an answer in Scripture for every issue that we face in life. It may not be clear at first blush; it may not be clear in our first reading, but as we read through Scripture, as we study the Scripture, we gain God's wisdom and we learn chapters, and verses, and texts that apply to various circumstances in life. We just need to study the Scriptures to know that and have the wisdom of God.

Peter had done that. Peter was a man of the Word of God; he knew the Old Testament. And that was the Scripture, the Bible, of the early church as the canon was being completed. And so he finds justification for what he's saying here for these difficult decisions that we must make, these difficult requirements. He finds justification for that in Psalm 34; and that's what he quotes. I think it's a way of saying, 'This isn't coming just from me, this is God's will. You see it throughout the Word of God.'

So, he writes in verse 10, "For," (or, 'Here's my basis for what I'm saying to you, Psalm 34'),

"The one who desires life, to love and see good days,
Must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit." (vs10).

(That's the way the world lives; that's the way it does things. We're not to do things that way. Don't try to deceive, don't dissimulate, don't try to fool people. Just be straightforward.)

"He must turn away from evil and do good;
He must seek peace and pursue it,
For the eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous,
And His ears attend to their prayer,
But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil." (vs 11&12).

The emphasis in verse 10 and the first part of verse 11 is on *avoiding evil*—and the stress in the second part of verse 11 and verse 12 is on *doing good*. So, 'Avoid evil, do good!' That's the gist of the Psalm.

Life and good days end the Psalm, and refer mainly to the earthly life and happiness and how to have a proper life—though I don't think it's limited to that. Peter's meaning, (I take at least), is going beyond that, beyond this temporal life to heaven and to the world to come. But it is still true that in this life, being good to others leads to seeing good days and having a longer life. Generally, when we avoid sin we avoid harm.

Now that's not guaranteed; this doesn't guarantee a trouble free life. Toward the end of the Psalm, in verse 19, David wrote, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." The "righteous" can often suffer for doing good. And that's the issue here in 1 Peter—suffering unjustly, suffering for the faith. But in affliction for doing good there is peace and that's the kind of life the Christian is to desire and seek—and it's a better life than one that attains great prosperity, but comes with it a heavy heart of guilt and regret.

So, as the Psalm says, the Christian must,
"...turn away from evil and do good;
He must seek peace and pursue it." (vs11).

That's really the good life. It may not be the materially prosperous life, but it's the good life, a life of peace.

But it's more than that; it's most importantly a witness, a good witness to the world around us. And we have the encouragement to do that from the fact that,

“The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous,
And His ears attend to their prayer. (vs12a).

That means more than God sees what we're doing; He sees what everyone is doing, believer and non-believer. Peter means God is looking after us; He is attending to all of our needs. And by contrast, He is against those who do evil. He will deal with them; He will deal with them in His time.

In the meantime, we are to trust Him and do good. And that's part of the test of faith: Are we going to live an honest life before the LORD, even though it's difficult to do that, and challenging?

The emphasis here on, ‘doing good and pursuing peace’, does not suggest that salvation is by works. Peter was writing to people who were already saved. And that's also clear from the Psalm itself. Earlier, in verse 8, David wrote the familiar statement, "O taste and see that the LORD is good." That means, ‘Trust in Him, believe in Him—begin with faith in Him and His promises, and you will experience His goodness, and His faithfulness.’

He is, ‘the great Deliverer’, according to verse 19 in the Psalm. Everything that Peter says in quoting the Psalm presumes faith in grace; it assumes salvation. This is the life of the saved; this is the life of the child of God, the people of God—seeking peace and doing good, being gracious to others.

And generally, those who do good and obey the Law will not be persecuted. Verse 13, "Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?" This begins a new section of the book on suffering innocently, suffering for the sake of the Gospel.

Normally, people who do good, who live peacefully, live lawful, orderly lives don't suffer hostility. That's the Christian life. Paul told the Thessalonians, "...make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands." (1Thess 4:11). That's a peaceful life, and a life that promotes peace with others.

But, there are exceptions. Christians do, "...suffer for the sake of righteousness..." (vs14). And if that happens to you, Peter said, "...you are blessed." (ibid.). That seems odd: 'Blessed if I'm persecuted'. But the Lord said the same thing in Matthew chapter 5, verses 11 and 12; "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you...because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great;"

We are blessed when we 'suffer for righteousness sake', (vs14), because we are children of God; and that is the evidence of it. We're suffering for Christ; and that is evidence that we are born again, children of God. We are blessed because of God's present favor for us in such a circumstance. He hears us; He attends to us—and we are blessed because there is great reward for such suffering.

Then, referring to the persecutors, Peter wrote, "And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled." (vs14b). This is another of those seemingly impossible expectations of the Christian life. But then Peter gave the alternative to fear in verse 15: Focusing on Him; fixing our minds on Him—that is the alternative to fear. That is the way to power in the midst of difficulties: Being devoted to Him. As he puts it, "...sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts."

But that involves knowing Him. That involves knowing who He is; what He's done; that He is the God-man, very God of very God, the eternal Son of God, second Person of the Trinity. We worship the One God in three Persons. God who exists in three Persons; that's the mystery and reality of God. But knowing it is true, we regard Christ, God's Son, as holy and to be worshiped, and to be obeyed—and with the knowledge that He is all powerful and reliable and the knowledge that 'He will never forsake us'. He, (*God*), says that in various ways, but we find that very clearly in Hebrews chapter 13, verse 5. As fearful as man can be, (and man can be a monster, doing monstrous evil),

still, Christ is God; not God the Father, but God the Son. And we are always safe in His constant care: 'All will be well', that's the promise. That truth calms fear, and it gives stability in unstable times.

But it does more: It girds, it prepares the mind for action to be a witness for Him to unbelievers. So we're to sanctify our minds with Christ, focus upon Him. Peter continues, "...always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you..." (vs15b).

Now this is a question that the interrogator asks because he has seen something in the Christian life that's different, an inward hope that sets him or her apart from other people—from unbelievers. That happens when we live according to the instruction of verses 8 and 9. '...humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil...but blessing our enemy.' Such unworldly behavior prompts the worldly person to ask, 'Why? Why is that? What is this hope that you have?' —and we must be ready to answer when that kind of a question is asked. We must be ready to answer with a clear statement of the Gospel.

So, the implied exhortation here is, 'Live well and be prepared!' The opportunity may come unexpectedly; so set your mind on Christ; fill your mind with Him; think on Him, 'set yourself apart through the thoughts of Him—that prepares us for the unexpected.'

In the case of Peter's friends, those to whom he's writing here, the occasion to defend the faith and give the reason for their Christian hope may have been, (at least the context, I think, would suggest this), persecution. And the question that must loom in the mind of the enemy is, 'How can this person be hopeful while facing death or something else, like the confiscation of his or her possessions?'

Paul's opportunity to give the right response, and speak of the hope that he had, came when he was on trial for his life before the Jews in Jerusalem, then before Festus and King Agrippa in Caesarea, and finally before Nero in Rome. And there in Rome he stood alone; but 'the Lord stood with him and strengthened him', so that, as he wrote to

Timothy, "...through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished." (2Ti 4:17).

And it was—even before that august, frightening audience, the emperor himself.

But regardless of the circumstances, we're to be prepared to answer our critics and inquisitors and questioners clearly and tactfully, politely. The way we answer is equally important. Peter made that point here at the end; we are to be *gracious*. He wrote, be, "...ready to make a defense...yet with gentleness and reverence." (vs15c).

Paul was an example of that in Caesarea in Acts chapter 26. After giving a defense of the hope that was within him, speaking of the resurrection of Christ, His resurrection guarantees our resurrection, the resurrection of every believer, he speaks of that; he speaks of the resurrection of the dead, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. And Festus, this Roman governor, this materialist and skeptic, had heard enough at that point, and he shouted Paul down. "Paul, you are out of your mind!" he said. (Act 26: 24). And then saying, 'Paul, you're a madman, talking about the resurrection.'

Paul didn't get angry. He calmly responded that, 'He was not out of his mind', about what he was speaking of there before the governor and the king and the king's consort, Bernice, and a whole host of august, important people. It was a big occasion there in Caesarea, and the things he was speaking of he said, "has not been done in a corner." (Act 26:26). Or, 'These things were done openly; everybody knows about this; this was common knowledge.' Now that was a great defense: 'There is ample evidence for everything I'm saying, Festus. The evidence is there.' In fact, he goes to the king, to Agrippa, and he says, 'The king knows this to be true.' (ibid.).

Then he challenged the king, "King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do." (vs27). Agrippa did know the Prophets; and became uncomfortable. Now it's become very personal, so he shuts things down with, "In a short while you will persuade me to become a Christian." (vs28). And I'm sure there was some laughter in the audience, for he was mocking Paul. He was mocking that the very idea, and trying to get off the subject.

But Paul was gracious to him; he said with all sincerity, and with great emotion, (I imagine with tears in his eyes), "I would wish to God that whether in a short or long

time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains." (vs29).

It couldn't have been answered better than that. Those people saw those chains on his wrist and wondered, 'This man is a prisoner. This man is in chains, but he's boasting about his life. He's speaking about the greatness of his life, and wishing we could join him.' Well, all of that reflected who Paul was, the kind of man he was. By the life changing grace of God, he had been changed from a religious zealot to a lover of Christ and a lover of men's souls. He cared for those men before him and all of those around him.

And that will happen to us as we walk with the Lord daily, read and study the Scriptures, and pray. It's a lifelong process. But as we follow it, we are prepared for unexpected moments to witness for Christ. Consistent with that, Peter added in verse 16, "...and keep a good conscious so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame."

We will never be perfect in this life—but, we will do what Peter instructs here by avoiding willful sin. We struggle against sin, we fight against it, and we gain the victory; not always, but we do gain the victory. And when we do sin, (as we will, as we all do, as we do every day), we confess it to God and pray for forgiveness, according to 1 John chapter 1, verse 9; "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Earlier, Peter told husbands to honor their wives so that their prayers would be unhindered. I said last week, that in my mind, that really puts the greater burden of responsibility on the husband than the wife. If a husband will do that: Honor his wife and lift her up, her responsibilities will be so much easier. That's the husband's responsibility. In Ephesians 5, (verse 25), it's, "...love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church..." —which is totally sacrificial. So Peter has set forth these responsibilities for

husbands and wives, and then here, he instructs people generally to keep their conscience clear so that their witness will be unhindered.

Persecutors will be put to shame by such an example, by the example of obedient Christians. Meaning, they will be silenced by a Christian's good behavior, such that the result might be they consider the Gospel and believe.

That is probably the point Peter makes in verse 17, (or at least the thought behind his statement in verse 17), where he takes up the subject he had taught earlier in chapter 2 about suffering unjustly. Verse 17, "For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong." So, 'Why is it better to suffer unjustly?'

Well, *just* suffering, *deserved* suffering, suffering because we're guilty of something, discredits the Gospel—while 'unjust suffering' has reward for glorifying God; and by that is a witness to others that will possibly lead to bringing them to faith.

There are examples of that from church history. And one I'm sure I've referred to this before over the years in which I've taught, (because it's so dramatic), is that of Polycarp, who was the old, second century bishop of Smyrna—one of the seven churches of Asia minor listed in Revelation 2. Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John but late in his life, he was arrested by Roman authorities and told to, 'Deny Christ or die.'

He answered with gentleness and reverence, (and that is the standard of verse 15 here), by saying, "80 and 6 years I have served Him, and He never did me wrong. How can I now blaspheme my King who has saved me?" That was his testimony, that was his response—and he was burned at the stake.

But before that, when he was first arrested his response was calm and dignified. He surrendered with the words, "God's will be done." Then he showed his persecutors kindness: They were hungry, so he fed them a meal. Then he prayed for them, and he prayed for the church. Well, that really goes beyond anything we read here, but that's Peter's instruction; 'Be gracious to those who persecute you.'

Can I do that? Well again, I've pondered that question as I've gone through this text...Can I do that? Well I can answer this honestly, 'Not in my own strength; only in His.'

But that is true of all things Christian. It is a supernatural life. We can't live this life any other way than by the power of the Holy Spirit. And as we think on Christ, we are sanctified, and we are empowered more and more to do it.

We 'work out our salvation.' (Phl 2:12). We do it—we are responsible to do it. We live faithfully because, as Paul told the Philippians, "It is God who is at work in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." (Phl 2:13). And part of 'working out our salvation' is doing what Peter instructed in verse 15; again, "...sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts..." Recognize His reality in all things: His greatness, His dependability—and follow Him and grow in your relationship with Him.

But to do that you must first come to Him, believe in Him. If you're an unbeliever but hearing my voice, turn from unbelief, to Christ. Trust in Christ. You will find, as old Polycarp did, that He will never do you wrong. 'Taste and see that the Lord is good!' He'll never do you wrong, only good; only the best.

He will receive you, He will forgive you, He will make you a child of God, and He will give you eternal life, with a glorious inheritance. May God help you to do that.

And help all of us, to 'sanctify Christ as the Lord of our hearts.'

(Closing prayer) Father, we look forward to that day when we will be with You, when we will see Christ face to face. What a day that will be!

And help us to long for that day. Help us to become increasingly detached from this world, at least in our love for the things of this world, and long for that day when we will be with You, and we will be in the presence of Christ, and we will be transformed by that. It's all of grace, and we thank You for it. And as believers in Him, as Your children, as sons of God, we have that glorious future, that glorious inheritance. It's all because of Your grace; we thank You for it.

- 18 -

"No Pound Of Flesh" by Dan Duncan

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Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

(End of Audio)