

TABLETALK

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The Weightier Matter

PEOPLE SAY THAT THEY BELIEVE in love, that all you need is love, and that love always wins. While our culture may attempt to strip marriage of its sacredness, the desire to love and be loved remains, for cohabiting, marriage, and remarriage are as popular as ever. Aristotle argued that no one would choose a life without friendship, even if he possessed every other good. People need love.

Sadly, love in our day has been so redefined and twisted that what most people mean by love isn't love at all. By love, most mean something like momentary affection, lust, or desire. But true love, biblical love, is much deeper and more all-encompassing. Love begins and ends with God. God expresses His love among the persons of the Trinity before the foundation of the world, and that love flows out into His creation. His people are returned to Him by means of His love in Jesus Christ, and our ultimate end is to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength (Deut. 6:5)—communing with Him eternally, where we will love Him purely, finally, and forever.

In the meantime, we plod along in this broken and confusing world. Love in this life is often expressed like light through cracked windows: refracted, partial, and dim. This is especially true in the church, though we're told that we're brothers and sisters who should have a family affection for one another, "bearing with one another in love" (Eph. 4:2). And that's not to speak of the workplace and the larger world, where love is so misunderstood that it's hard to speak of it without wondering whether someone has ulterior motives.

Over the course of my time in the church, I've come to realize that we often think about how the world distorts love, but we rarely consider how the church struggles with it. Jesus Himself dealt with this, reprimanding the Pharisees for tithing mint and cumin and neglecting the weightier matters of the law (Matt. 23:23). They were more concerned that Jesus was healing on the Sabbath than that, out of His love and compassion, He was healing at all (Luke 14:1-6). This is what Christianity becomes when it goes wrong: legalism that misses the whole point. If the world will know us by the love we have for one another (John 13:35), then that must begin in earnest in the house of God. Perhaps instead of demanding that the world understand love, we work on helping the church understand it first—not simply in word but in deed. That's what Jesus did. He didn't just tell people to love. He demonstrated His love in dying for us (Rom. 5:8). 

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KYLE BORG

THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE



F

Few passages of Scripture are more familiar, or more misunderstood, than the famous “love chapter.” It is often read at weddings, quoted in greeting cards, and embroidered on wall decorations. Yet Paul did not write this chapter to celebrate romance or to offer a vague moralistic ideal. He wrote it to correct a fractured church and to reorder their understanding of true Christian maturity.

In the midst of spiritual rivalry, doctrinal pride, and competing claims of giftedness, Paul places love at the center of the Christian life. Not as an accessory or as optional, but as the more excellent way—a way superior to the one that the Corinthians were walking. Any consideration of love that ignores this chapter or strips it of its context will inevitably distort both what love is and why it matters.

LOVE AND THE PROBLEM OF CORINTH

The Corinthian church was rich in spiritual gifts but poor in spiritual health. They prized eloquence, knowledge, power, and visible expressions of spirituality. Yet beneath these gifts lay envy, boasting, arrogance, and self-interest. Instead of using the gifts of the Holy Spirit to serve one another, they used them to elevate themselves in the body.

Much of this lovelessness did not appear in scandalous behavior but in something

more subtle and more common. It appeared in the dominance of preferences, opinions, and personal judgments. The church fractured, not only because of false teaching, but because individuals insisted that their perspective, their favorite leader, or their sense of importance should govern the whole body. Knowledge became a tool of superiority. Orthodoxy became a platform for self-assertion. The result was a congregation “puffed up” rather than built up.

Paul’s extended discussion of love is therefore not a digression but a rebuke. It is deliberately placed within his discussion on the use and abuse of spiritual gifts. Love is not an interruption to the conversation. It is the interpretive key. Without love, gifts do not build up. When misused, they become an occasion for division and harm within the church.

As Paul describes love, the Corinthians were meant to hear correction. As they read what love is not, they were meant to recognize themselves. Love does not envy. They did. Love does not boast. They did. Love is not arrogant or rude. They were. Paul is not describing love in the abstract; he is holding up a mirror. In that sense, 1 Corinthians 13 is not a sentimental chapter at all. It is a pastoral intervention aimed at the life and fellowship of the church.

LOVE’S ABSOLUTE NECESSITY

Paul begins with an unsettling claim. Without love, even the most impressive spiritual accomplishments are worthless. One may speak with angelic tongues, possess prophetic insight, understand mysteries, or display mountain-moving faith. But without love, Paul says, “I am nothing.”

Notice the force of the statement. Paul does not say that such a person has little value or reduced usefulness. He says that he is a nobody. Spiritual giftedness, void of

Without love, even the most dramatic acts of devotion gain nothing.

love, empties a person rather than making him something.

Paul presses the point further. Even acts of extreme generosity or personal sacrifice—such as giving away all of one’s possessions or surrendering one’s body—can be worthless if they are not motivated by love. The issue is not the costliness of the act but the orientation of the heart. Self-sacrifice can still be self-directed. Generosity can still seek recognition, be a means of control, or give moral leverage. Without love, even the most dramatic acts of devotion gain nothing.

This cuts against a deeply ingrained instinct. We are prone to measuring spiritual maturity by visibility, intensity, or sacrifice. Paul insists that love—not giftedness, not knowledge, not zeal—is the essential mark of Christian maturity. Gifts matter. Sacrifice matters. But without love, none of it counts.

WHAT LOVE IS AND IS NOT

Paul then turns to the character of love itself. It is crucial to remember that love is not a free-floating or self-defined thing. In the Bible, the Holy Spirit gives us a God-determined description of love. Paul begins positively: “Love is patient and kind” (v. 4). These two qualities belong together. Patience is love’s restraint; kindness is love’s initiative. Love does not merely suffer long with others; it actively

seeks their good while bearing patiently with them.

Yet Paul spends more time defining love negatively than positively. Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. This is not because Paul is being negative but because love doesn’t have a simple definition. It must be known not only by what it does but also by what it refuses to do.

One striking feature of Paul’s description is that love is defined largely by verbs rather than adjectives. Love is not a mood or disposition. It is not mere affection or sentiment. It acts. It waits. It gives itself. It refuses certain postures and patterns of behavior for the sake of others.

Envy resents the good of another; love rejoices in it. Boasting draws attention to the self; love is content to labor unseen. Arrogance inflates self-importance; love walks in humility. Rudeness disregards what is appropriate and honorable in the way it treats another; love treats others with dignity.

At its core, love is fundamentally other-oriented. It is not preoccupied with self-assertion or self-protection. Paul says that love “does not insist on its own way,” using deliberately broad language. “Its own way” is open-ended. Rights. Preferences. Recognition. Control. Nothing belonging to the self is exempt.

LOVE, TRUTH, AND SELF-DENIAL

This insistence on self-denial places love in direct opposition to modern ideas of personal fulfillment. We are accustomed to thinking of love as self-expression or self-validation. Paul presents it as self-surrender.

Yet even in surrender, love is not morally indifferent. Paul is explicit: Love “does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth” (v. 6). Love does not redefine good and evil for the sake of peace. It does not affirm

sin in the name of compassion. Love’s reflex is joy, not in what is evil, but in what is good, true, and right before God. At its heart, love delights first in what pleases God and then in what genuinely promotes the good of others.

Because love is bound to truth, it is capable of both forgiveness and confrontation. Love covers sins not by denying them but by refusing to keep a record of wrongs. It overlooks offenses, yet it also seeks repentance and restoration. This covering love flows from the gospel itself. Those whose sins have been fully dealt with by Christ are freed to extend patience, restraint, and forgiveness toward one another.

In this way, love guards the church from two opposite dangers: cruelty disguised as truthfulness and compromise disguised as kindness.

LOVE’S ENDURANCE

Paul concludes his description with four sweeping claims. “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (v. 7). These statements are not blind optimism. Paul is not suggesting that love ignores reality or suspends discernment. He is describing love’s resilience.

Love bears burdens rather than fleeing from them. Love believes, not in the sense of gullibility, but in its refusal to default to cynicism. Love hopes, not because circumstances guarantee improvement, but because God is faithful and continues to work. Love endures, not because it is easy, but because it is anchored in something greater than present conditions.

These qualities remind us that love is neither effortless nor sentimental. It is demanding. It calls for perseverance in relationships that are often strained, disappointing, or painful. Love continues, not because the other deserves it, but because God is faithful and sustains it.

LOVE’S PERMANENCE AND PRIORITY

Finally, Paul contrasts love with spiritual gifts by highlighting love’s permanence. Prophecies will pass away. Tongues will cease. Knowledge will fade. “Love never ends” (v. 8).

Gifts belong to the present age, when we see dimly and know in part. Love belongs not only to this age but to the age to come. Faith will give way to sight, and hope will give way to fulfillment, but love will remain. As Jonathan Edwards famously said, “Heaven is a world of love.” The life of love to which Paul calls the church now is a foretaste of our future communion with God and with one another.

WALKING THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

Paul’s message to the Corinthians is as necessary today as it was in the first century. Churches still struggle with pride, rivalry, and self-promotion. Christians still confuse giftedness with maturity and sacrifice with love.

First Corinthians 13 cuts through these confusions. It reminds us that love is not optional, ornamental, or sentimental. It is demanding, costly, and essential. Without it, we gain nothing; we are nothing.

Yet this chapter does more than expose our lovelessness; it also directs us to hope. The love that Paul describes is not a bare obligation but a gracious privilege, and it is a love that the Holy Spirit has promised to work in the hearts of God’s people. Driven to Christ for forgiveness and dependent on the Spirit for transformation, the church is called to walk the most excellent way. It is the way that reflects the very character of God in our relationships, builds up His church, and endures forever. ■

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D. BLAIR SMITH

GOD IS LOVE



L

“Love is love.” Perhaps you’ve seen this statement on T-shirts and bumper stickers. You’ve heard it from cultural leaders and in political speeches. At first glance, it sounds harmless, maybe even virtuous. But if you pause to think for a moment, what does “love is love” actually mean?

On its own, it’s a tautology, which is a phrase that repeats itself without explaining anything, like saying “it is what it is.” The real meaning lies beneath the surface. The message is this: Whatever I love, however I define love, must be good and unquestionable. Love becomes its own authority. In that sense, “love is love” is not just a moral claim; it’s a deeply religious one. It enthrones love as ultimate. In doing so, it quietly enthrones the self. My desires and my identity become absolute.

Scripture has a name for this kind of move. In the final verse of 1 John, the Apostle writes, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (5:21). When love replaces God as the highest authority, it becomes an idol.

Our Trinitarian faith offers a very different claim, one that doesn’t close us in on ourselves but opens us up to our amazing God: Not “love is love” but “God is love.” That single sentence changes everything.

LOVE DEFINED

Twice in 1 John 4, the Apostle John says plainly, “God is love” (vv. 8, 16). This is a statement not merely about what God does but about who God is.

Our love changes. It grows and fades. It can deepen or weaken over time. But God’s love is not something that He possesses one day and loses the next. Love belongs to His very being. When God loves, He is simply being Himself.

This isn’t the only place where Scripture says that God *is* something. Elsewhere it says that God *is* spirit, God *is* light, and God *is* a consuming fire.

Some preachers and theologians who want to paint God in a certain way will say: “Yes, God has many attributes, but He *is* love, so you don’t have to fuss over His potential wrath or truly reckon with His righteousness. Since God *is* love, this is His true essence, an attribute par excellence that trumps all others in the end.” So the argument goes.

While love is not a singular attribute or activity of God, it—like all His attributes—does shape how we understand all His other attributes and activities. God is Judge and will judge, and He will be loving in His judging. God is holy; His love, therefore, is always holy love.

But where does this love come from? To answer that, we must look deeper—into God Himself.

Christians confess that God is one and that this one God eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This truth matters enormously for our understanding of love. From all eternity, the Father has loved the Son. The Son has loved the Father. The Holy Spirit is the living bond of love between them. Love is not something that God learned after creating the world. Love did not begin when human beings appeared.

Before there was anything else, there was Father, Son, and Holy Spirit existing in love. Among the persons of the Trinity, there is an eternally shared and personal love.

Therefore, when the Bible says, “God is love,” it is pointing us to the life of the Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit delighting in one another in perfect unity. And astonishingly, that eternal love does not remain closed in on itself. It moves outward. This brings us to the heart of the gospel.

LOVE DELIVERED

“Beloved, let us love one another,” John writes, “for love is from God” (1 John 4:7). God is love, and God loves. The love that marks the very life of God comes to us. But how?

“In this the love of God was made manifest among us,” John says, “that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him” (v. 9). This is love: not that we loved God first, but that He loved us. Christian love does not begin with human desire or sincerity. It begins with God, who He is and what He has done. Toward us, God took the initiative in sending His Son.

God’s love manifest in His Son, Jesus Christ, is displayed in a life of perfect obedience in our place and a sacrificial death for our sins. On the cross, God’s holy judgment against sin and His immeasurable love for elect sinners met fully and finally. As a result, we have reconciliation with our triune Creator.

This love stands in sharp contrast to the love celebrated in our culture. Today’s love often asks: *What do I feel? What expresses my sense of identity?* God’s love asks something different: *What does love look like in Jesus? What do others need? What builds others up even if it costs me?*

True love—a love defined by God—*gives*. It sacrifices. It moves toward those who are undeserving.

The glory of the gospel that is this love comes to us before we ever respond. “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Love is not our invention. We do not define it. It is God’s gift, which does not merely forgive us and leave us unchanged. It draws us into communion with Him.

John uses rich, intimate language to describe this in 1 John 4. God “abides” in us, and we abide in Him. Through the Holy Spirit, believers are united to Christ and welcomed into the life of God Himself:

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. . . . Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. . . . Whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (vv. 13, 15, 16)

This is breathtaking. The same love that eternally binds Father, Son, and Spirit is shared with us by grace. Through the gospel of Jesus Christ, we do not become divine ourselves, but we are brought into real fellowship with the divine, the living triune God.

As this love is defined by God’s Trinitarian life and is delivered in the Son and by the Spirit, it is to be distributed by God’s people.

LOVE DISTRIBUTED

In his gospel and letters, John repeats the command again and again: Beloved, let us love one another (see 1 John 4:7, 11, 21).

God’s love is meant to be shared. In fact, John is strikingly direct: If we claim to love God but do not love our brothers and sisters in Christ, something is wrong. Love for one

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another is not an option in the Christian faith; it is evidence that God’s love truly lives in us.

This love is not always easy. The church is filled with imperfect, unlovable people. We disappoint and wound one another because we still have sin within us.

But we have a mandate from heaven. The One whom the Father sent from heaven, our Savior, His Son, said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). As one author put it: “No-one who has been to the cross and seen God’s immeasurable and unmerited love displayed there can go back to a life of selfishness. Indeed, the implication seems to be that our love should resemble his love.”

The church is meant to be a living testimony to God’s love in a lonely world. In an age marked by isolation, transience, and shallow digital connection, Christian community offers something deeply human and deeply healing: real love rooted in Christ.

Even Jesus, in His perfect humanity, lived this way. He gathered disciples not only to teach them but also simply to “be with him” (Mark 3:14). In Gethsemane, in His hour of anguish, He asked friends to stay near.

The perfect human, our Lord Jesus Christ, desired human beings to be with Him and knew the exchange of human love. We see the man Christ with friends. We see how He loved children. We see Him weep over

Jerusalem. We see His affection for the rich young man. When we look to Christ, there is no tolerance for a detached, nonrelational, unloving Christianity.

He knew that there was only one way to love—to fully open Himself, to both the acceptance and the rejection of others, in claiming to be the Son of God. Here’s the hard part, and why so many might be reluctant to love others: Jesus knew that to love, He would not avoid pain.


For a human being to love other human beings is to risk pain. As C.S. Lewis famously wrote, the only way to protect your heart from hurt is to give it to no one. But such protection comes at the cost of becoming closed, cold, and ultimately unredeemable.

Yet Jesus loved us to the end, even when betrayed, abandoned, and rejected. His love endured the cross so that we might know God’s love, so that we might live in love with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

LOVE DISPLAYED

Finally, love does something beautiful: It reveals God. “No one has ever seen God,” John writes. “If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:12).

When Christians love one another, God’s invisible love becomes visible. The world sees something of who God is. This is not, of course, because we are impressive, but because His love is at work in us.

Our love is never the end goal. God’s glory is. We love because we have been loved, and in loving, we point beyond ourselves to the God who is love. We point to the eternally loving Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 

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JONATHAN L. MASTER

THE GREATEST LOVE OF ALL



H

How can we measure love? We could begin by measuring the distance between the lover and the object of his love. This distance illustrates how great the love is—the greater the distance, the more remarkable the love. Or perhaps we might evaluate the greatness of love based on its costliness. Love often leads to great sacrifices, and the measure of the sacrifice illustrates the greatness of the love. We might also evaluate based on its effect—receiving great love changes the recipient.

When Jesus points to the greatest human expression of love, He combines all these features. He said, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Here we see it on display. Great love bridges a great gap (death and life), it can cost everything, and it can save a life.

When we consider this, we cannot help but conclude that the greatest love of all is displayed in the incarnation, humiliation, and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The Creator God assumed a created human nature. He suffered humiliation, disgrace, and death. Jesus Christ, God’s only-begotten Son, shows the greatest love of all, and He shows that love by voluntarily accepting the greatest conceivable humiliation on behalf of those whom He created. It is in these acts of love that He brings those

who are eternally dead and hopeless to new life.

Think about this: The greatest love is shown to us through the greatest humility and humiliation. This is an extraordinary truth. We all want to be loved, but no one likes to be humiliated or disgraced. We never want to appear as failures. For some, this drive to avoid disgrace supersedes almost everything else. It becomes the deepest impulse of the heart. Many people will do anything to appear successful, even if it means lying to cover up their own failures. But even for those who accept humiliation out of obedience to God, there is still the deep-rooted impulse to avoid any unnecessary indignity. None of us wants to be looked down upon; all of us want to appear successful. But in Christ’s love, we see this great gospel irony on marvelous display.

Jesus Christ is the God-man. He is the One through whom all things were created (John 1:3); He is the source of all life (v. 4); He is the eternal Light (v. 5). He is the “I am” of the Old Testament (8:58). He is the One who had all glory from the Father before the world even existed (17:5).

Because of our human limitations, we can hardly imagine the Son’s heavenly glory. The glimpses that we are given show something beyond earthly comprehension. The responses of those who glimpse it illustrate this. When Moses spoke with God and beheld an earthly semblance of the heavenly glory, his face shone brightly because he had been talking with God (Ex. 34:29). When Isaiah was confronted with the glory of the Lord, he fell on his face and exclaimed: “Woe is me! For I am lost” (Isa. 6:5). When John saw something of the glory of heaven, he fell on his face immediately (Rev. 22:8). At the very least, these descriptions are a reminder that the visual manifestation of the glory of God’s Son is

something that humans on earth cannot picture, much less endure. Even a glimpse of it provokes immediate worship and fear.

This is the visible glory of God Himself. But the Son of God, clothed in indescribable glory and perpetually receiving worship from the angels, is also the One who says to His disciples on earth, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work” (John 4:34). This work required, by its very nature, total humiliation.

How was the God-man humiliated? First, by assuming a human nature: a human body and a reasonable soul. Jesus Christ was born of a woman. He entered the world in humble circumstances as a baby, born of the Virgin Mary. He grew up as a boy, “increas[ing] in wisdom and in stature” (Luke 2:52). He experienced great hunger when He fasted and great thirst as He traveled (Matt. 4:2; John 4:6). More than that, He experienced the emotions common to humanity. He had compassion when He saw suffering (Matt. 9:36; Luke 7:13). He wept when His friend Lazarus died (John 11:35). Even though He knew that Lazarus would be raised, He was “deeply moved in his spirit” (v. 33). All these characteristics are common to us as humans, but they were examples of utter humility and humiliation for the glorious Son of God.

The Apostle Paul reflects on this when he writes, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, . . . being born in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:5–7). The glorious, eternal God of heaven assumed a created human nature. This is an unrivaled display of condescension and humility.

This was only the beginning. Not only did the Son of God assume a human nature and experience human frailty, but He also

willingly subjected Himself to even greater disgrace. When we read the Gospels, we see Jesus rejected and subject to the follies and sins of those He came to save. He was looked down upon by others (John 1:46). He had to endure the burdens of life in a fallen world. He, the sinless One, entered a world of sinners and a world polluted by sin.

His years of public ministry began not with success or acclaim but with fasting in the wilderness and being tempted by the devil (Matt. 4:1–11). Throughout His life, He continued to be tested, having to endure the temptations that are common to human beings, though He was without sin (Heb. 4:15).

His suffering culminated in the events leading up to and including the cross. In those final hours, His humiliation and love were on fullest display. While in the upper room, Jesus shared a last meal with His disciples. He knew what was about to come, though they remained unaware. Then Jesus washed their feet. This was a menial task, performed on men who would turn on Him in a few hours. None of them seemed to truly grasp what He was about to do. Though He was fully aware of what awaited Him later that night, He voluntarily humbled Himself before them, doing the work that only a servant would do (John 13:1–30).

He then moved from the upper room to a nearby garden. There, the Son of God—the Word made flesh—pleaded with His heavenly Father about the suffering and humiliation to come. He alone understood the gravity of the events to come.

Here we must pause and remember that the suffering of Jesus Christ had been predicted hundreds of years before. Jesus surely knew the words of Isaiah and the significance of those words for what He was to face. Isaiah prophesied, “His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind”

(Isa. 52:14). “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (53:3). What we see recorded in the Gospels about the suffering of Jesus Christ—the rejection, the sorrow, the derision, the disfigured face—was prophesied before Jesus’ birth. He was acutely aware of what He was about to endure.

Yet He endured it. Jesus Christ was blindfolded and beaten (Luke 22:64). He was falsely accused (23:2). He was whipped, and branches with thorns were bent into a crown to be pressed into His head (John 19:1–2). Then He was crucified, enduring the most cruel form of torture and execution devised by the Roman Empire (v. 18).

While being crucified, He endured the indignity of mocking, and soldiers gambled for His clothes. While on the cross, He cried out to God, using the words of abandonment from Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46).

We cannot imagine the human pain and loss and abandonment that the Son of God experienced at that moment. All of us suffer as sinners. Though we may be suffering unjustly, we know that our suffering in this life is a result of our complicity in Adam’s fall. But Jesus was the spotless Lamb of God, the glorious Son of God.

This is the greatest love, which God demonstrates in that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). This is a transforming love. All of us in Christ can declare with Paul this foundational testimony of our salvation: “The Son of God . . . loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). ■

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JOHN C. KWASNY

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

J

John 13 reads like a scene out of a classic whodunit mystery novel. Twelve disciples assemble for the Passover meal. Jesus is deeply troubled in His spirit. Into what should have been a loving, celebratory atmosphere, Jesus makes a shocking announcement: “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me” (v. 21). One of Jesus’ closest friends will betray Him? Never! John asks, “Lord, who is it?” (v. 25). Can you imagine the suspense? Instead of saying his name, Jesus simply gives a morsel of bread to Judas and bids him to do what he has planned to do. Satan enters Judas, and

As important as orthodox theology, sound teaching,
and vital church ministries are, the world is also watching
how Christians treat each other.

he leaves the upper room (vv. 26–30). The disciples are clueless about what is really going on. They probably couldn't comprehend one of their own turning against their beloved Teacher.

Into this tense relational climate Jesus delivers one of His most important instructions to His disciples:

“Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (vv. 33–35)

This monumental betrayal by Judas left just a short time for Jesus to be with His closest followers. He would soon be crucified for the sins of His people. What more needed to be said? A commandment to love one another. Judas demonstrated hatred not only for Jesus but for the disciples of Jesus as well. This commandment is what disciples of Jesus, past and present, desperately need to be reminded of every day.

A NEW COMMANDMENT?

But there is something puzzling about Jesus' commandment, isn't there? He claims that this command is something “new.” Of

course, Jesus knew that the command to love other people is as old as the beginning of the world (1 John 3:11). What is so new about this commandment? The key to understanding its newness is in the phrase “just as I have loved you” (John 13:34). Jesus commanded our love for one another to be all about Him and not about us. As His disciples, we are to love with His love in our hearts and minds. We are to live *in* the love of Jesus as we live *out* the love of Jesus to other people. His love is the pattern for true, godly love for one another as believers.

We know that Jesus Christ makes all things new. So it makes sense that He makes our love for one another new as well. Without Jesus, our love for others can become too self-centered, seeking recognition, reciprocity, or a response that is pleasing to us. Without Jesus, our love can also become too others-focused. It can be defined merely by what others want or think they need from us. It can be more about people-pleasing than pleasing God. Loving others without having the love of Christ will produce a love that essentially looks like the world's various versions of love.

The Apostle John also speaks repeatedly about Jesus' new commandment. In 1 John 4:7–8, he frames it like this: “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

As Christians, we can love others only because we are first loved by God. We are His beloved children. Loving others demonstrates that we know God. And as Jesus puts it, it shows that we are His disciples. This new commandment is born solely out of the new life that we have in Christ.

“ONE ANOTHER” CONNECTIONS

Saul, known later as Paul, had absolutely no love for the disciples of Jesus, as demonstrated by his dogged persecution of them. His remarkable conversion to Christ produced not only a new life of love for Jesus but a new love for those who followed Jesus. This connection of love for God and love for other Christians is crystallized in each of his New Testament letters to churches and individuals. He repeatedly writes about the importance of love in all types of Christian relationships: Jew and Greek, husband and wife, parent and child, slave and free, and so on. Just as Jesus taught about loving one another, a relationship with Him must produce right relationships with His followers as well.

Paul was very fond of using “one another” language when highlighting the essential responsibilities that Christians have to each other. Many of these are connected to and build on Christ's central command to love one another. Consider just a sampling of these commands: Disciples of Jesus are to outdo one another in showing honor (Rom. 12:10), build up one another (14:19), care for one another (1 Cor. 12:25), serve one another (Gal. 5:13), forgive one another (Eph. 4:32), and be patient and bear with one another (Col. 3:13). These and many other “one another” commands help us learn exactly what loving one another in a Christ-centered way looks like.

In his letter to the church at Colossae, Paul makes the connection of the “one

another” commands to loving one another even clearer:

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (Col. 3:12–14)

Love for one another is what connects other virtues, such as compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness. This passage echoes 1 Corinthians 13, the quintessential chapter on what love for God and other people looks like. When we have doubts about what it means to love other people, we have Paul's letters to give us clarity. Paul, like John, knew that Christians' loving one another is the necessary result of believing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So why is it often such a challenge for Christians to love one another? It seems like being loved by God and having the love of Christ in us would make it fairly easy to love other believers. The simple answer is “sin.” But the more precise answer is that our sinful hearts, Satan, and this world tempt us to focus on everything that is less important than Christ. We can get caught up so easily in the differences that we have with other Christians—differences of personality, culture, interests, concerns, priorities, and so on. And yes, we can let our theological differences fuel our dislike as well. Add to that all the real relational hurts from others, and we have plenty of reasons not to love one another as Christ commands. We desperately need reminders to make our love for others all about Jesus and not ourselves.

ALL PEOPLE WILL KNOW

The new commandment to love one another just as Jesus loves us comes with a surprising end goal: “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). It wouldn’t be long before Jesus would send out these remaining disciples to be His Apostles. They would be responsible to preach, teach, and bear witness to the truth. Yet Jesus tells them that it will be their love for one another that will communicate the loudest. People will know and become convinced of authentic Christianity by its love.

So as important as orthodox theology, sound teaching, and vital church ministries are, the world is also watching how Christians treat each other. The Apostle Paul took Jesus’ words to heart, putting it this way: “If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Cor. 13:2). Our witness depends on our relationship to other Christians. Do we believe this? If we do, we all have work to do.

I often tell the couples I counsel that the best gift they can offer their children is a Christ-centered, loving marriage. This truth is a direct application of Christ’s new commandment to His disciples. By extension, the best gift that we can offer all people of this world is the love of Jesus. Our charge is to love one another in front of a watching world—with His love and in His love. If we truly want to show the lost what disciples of Christ look like, then we must be the most loving people they have ever seen, by the grace and love of God for us. ■

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DAVID W. HALL

LOVE FOR ENEMIES

T

To love one’s enemies is simply not ordinary. Further, such extraordinary Christian behavior requires more than one’s nature possesses. Jesus calls us precisely to that ethic, which is exemplified foremost in how God loves us.

In His Sermon on the Mount, before calling for this beyond-normal ethic toward our adversaries, Jesus sought to return the law to its original meaning. As a prelude to His teaching on loving enemies, He first needed to strip away the smothering scribal oral tradition. Similar clarifications may still be needed today.

PRELUDE TO THE EXTRAORDINARY

Jesus teaches that being re-created after the image of Jesus produces love with a different quality and to a greater degree. Christians, simply put, have a love greater than they should have. And it is by grace (not nature) that God gives what is beyond our natural propensity.

This extraordinary love that can come only from God is what Francis Schaeffer called “the mark of the Christian.” True believers will love even their enemies, but first one must die to self.

In Matthew 5:38–42, Jesus teaches us that we are to avoid seeking to exact vengeance on others. Instead of retaliation, as the scribes insisted on, we are to be a giving people. That is the principle taught by Jesus with several subsequent examples to reinforce.

The scribes, however, misunderstood the original scope of God’s law. Rather than mandating retaliation, the “eye for an eye” law was intended to prevent one victim from over-retaliating. The principle is this: If a man has inflicted an injury on another, an equivalent injury (not greater) is to be inflicted on him as punishment. This law was given to prevent excess and to provide justice. Nevertheless, the law with its measurable limit to retaliation never precluded mercy.

The scribes had perverted this original intent, urging the full volume of punishment. That is, they taught that if one were victimized, he should retaliate legally as much as possible. They lived in a litigious society (as do we), which taught that whenever one was wronged, that person had not only the right but also the moral responsibility to sue to the utmost.

PRACTICING THE EXTRAORDINARY

In their legalistic outlook, which thought primarily of their rights, the scribes were

therefore guilty of two main errors. First, they turned a negative (limiting) injunction into a positive (mandatory) provision; furthermore, they carried it out themselves, taking justice into their own hands.

Nevertheless, Jesus teaches differently. Rather than imitating this scribal standard and always trying to get even, Jesus’ disciples are to give something to show love to their neighbors (v. 40).

Don’t overlook that Jesus expected His disciples to be victimized, sued, slapped, and stolen from. He knew that they would live in an imperfect world. But in the face of opposition and injustice, the disciple is to persist in loving his neighbor and is not to seek to extract an eye from the offender in all cases.

Jesus, then, provides four illustrations, but we should not absolutize these examples. Instead, we should absolutize the principle. What is taught here is that Jesus’ disciples may often endure personal abuse and need self-sacrifice to follow Him. We are called to *extraordinary* love, patience, and suffering.

Jesus’ teaching here is that true disciples will exceed the expectations of our enemies. Our enemies expect us to retaliate, counter-sue, fight back, or resist. We are called by Jesus—who perfectly practiced this even unto death on the cross—to go beyond their expectations, yielding something extraordinary in our lives. This astonishing quality is love for enemies, which cannot spring from our own nature or strength.

The ordinary person responds in kind—like for like, dislike for dislike, love for love, and hate for hate, employing an economic exchange based on earnings. One unit is returned for one unit given. But the extraordinary Christian responds in grace to give love to the enemy who slaps us, insults us, commandeers us, or sues us.

Jesus concludes in verses 43–48 by

commanding how we are to love our enemies, contradicting the scribal tradition but not God's law.

The scribes taught that one was to love his neighbor and hate his enemies. The law of God, however, nowhere commands us to hate our enemies. This was a scribal addition and an unwarranted deduction. The scribes, in seeking to justify their own ill practice, argued that they were not naturally and easily disposed to loving their enemies, and so they added this parasitical growth (Charles Spurgeon's term): "And hate your enemies." Moreover, they defined "neighbor" as a small subset of the population—that is, "their own" or those who were kind to them—and presto, they'd fulfilled the law.

They'd compressed the law, and Jesus sought to decompress it, restoring it to its original extent.

REESTABLISHING THE EXTRAORDINARY

Thus, Christ startles audiences by commanding love for enemies (Matt. 5:44). It helps to understand two terms of this command. First, Jesus does not condone our hating, but we do have enemies who hate us. There will always be those who are not satisfied with us or are offended by us. These are the enemies in view. Second, *agapē* is the word used for "love" here. Although *agapē* is considered the highest of four Greek words for "love," it is not the most intensely emotional. That is *phileō* (brotherly love), a natural good feeling of affection that comes easily. This heartfelt *phileō* love occurs when we effortlessly like a person. *Agapē* love, however, refers not to feelings but to our will or commitment for the best of the other. This is like God's love shown to us in Christ—His active commitment to give us the very best, as He knows the best to be.

On the cross, Christ did not emotion-

ally enjoy the pain of bearing mankind's massive sin. But His *agapē* love is demonstrated in that He loved us and died for us—even though it didn't feel good. That love willed His commitment. This is the *agapē* love that we are to have for enemies. We may not feel great throes of passion for enemies or enjoy everyone around us, but we are to commit ourselves, by an act of our will, to acting lovingly toward them. "True love is not sentiment so much as sacrificial service," says John Stott. Furthermore, we are commanded to pray for those who persecute us, which is a signature of love.

Notice what this accomplishes. The result of this extraordinary love for our enemies is that we resemble our heavenly Father (v. 45), who has this kind of love for all His creatures. God, whose love is more expansive than ours, causes the natural elements—sunshine and rain—to fall on all people indiscriminately. He acts in love toward both the just and unjust—both His loving children and rebellious enemies. Thus, we love the unjust and our enemies as He does.

Many take this as a classic passage exhibiting common grace, but the context is more closely associated with forgiving one's enemies—an area in which both believer and unbeliever alike are impoverished. Spurgeon notes that when God causes His sun to shine on bad people, He is rendering good for evil, wishing well to those who reject Him, and extending favor to those who spitefully use Him. If we view that as the focus of this text, God is not commanding us to do what He will not do Himself. He bids us forgive, signaling that sunshine and showers prove His unparalleled readiness to forgive.

THE DIVINE PRINCIPLE AS THE BASIS OF THE EXTRAORDINARY

God is intent on saving extraordinary sin-



ners by an extraordinary act of love. He loved us when we were enemies (Rom. 5:6–8), adopting us, justifying us, and preserving us by His love.

The result is that God's children are different from others in the world. We are unlike all the rest. "To the natural man," wrote Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the very idea of loving his enemies is "an intolerable offense and quite beyond his capacity." But extraordinary Christianity is different.

In Matthew 5:46–47, Jesus provides an irrefutable argument. He argues that it is easy and natural to love our own (that's what the scribes did). Even the tax collectors (a despised traitorous group) and pagans are like that. But the Christian is to be different.

It's hard to argue against this; even murderers, rapists, drug addicts, and non-Christians love people who love them. If you love only those who love you, what

is different about you? And if you publicly favor only people in the same class as you or neatly dressed folk or the upper echelon, then what are you doing more than anyone else? How are you extraordinary? It's easy to love a person who thinks you're great and who affirms you. But you're no different from pagans if that's all you do. It's easy to love those in whom we delight. It's difficult to love those who not only are different from us but also use us, hurt us, and seek to take advantage of us. Thank God that the Lord Jesus does not leave us to our own devices, for this extraordinary love, once appropriated, leads us to love our adversaries. ■

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JORDAN STONE

LOVE NEVER ENDS



I

In 1 Corinthians 13, the Apostle Paul ends his magnificent hymn to love with a statement that stretches our minds to eternity: “Love never ends” (v. 8). In a world where everything rusts, fades, and crumbles, where relationships fracture and even mountains wear down to sand, Paul says that love will not pass away. Love, the supreme Christian virtue that sent Christ to the cross and that now beats in the hearts of His people, will outlast the stars themselves.

Only love lasts. Faith and hope, those other pillars of Christian existence and experience, won’t remain the same. Paul writes, “As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away” (v. 8). In context, the Apostle’s logic is clear: Faith will become sight, hope will be swallowed up in possession, but love will remain. Thus, he can say, “So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (v. 13).

Why is this so? What makes love the supreme virtue, the one thing that we will carry with us into eternity?

WHEN FAITH BECOMES SIGHT

By definition, faith is oriented toward what we cannot yet see. “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen,” the author of Hebrews explains

(Heb. 11:1). Faith demands believing in a Savior we have not seen with physical eyes and trusting in promises not yet fulfilled in our lives. Life in our day-to-day experience advances by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7).

Faith is essential now but is ultimately temporary. One day (and what a day it will be) we will see Christ face-to-face. John tells us that “we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). The veil will dissolve completely. Every shadow will flee. The substance that we have grasped through faith will be immediately, gloriously present. Yet future fulfillment doesn’t diminish faith’s importance now. Faith serves as the instrument by which we lay hold of Christ, an empty hand that receives everything by grace. Remember, though, that instruments are laid aside when their work is done. A telescope is a wonderful thing for viewing a distant star, but when you arrive at the star itself, you put the telescope away. In the life to come, faith will have done its appointed work as we’re delivered into the presence of the Lord we have trusted. We will no longer need to believe what we cannot see, for we will see what we have believed.

WHEN HOPE IS SWALLOWED IN REALITY

Hope, too, is essentially forward-looking. It ignites the eager expectation of good things to come, the confident anticipation of glory yet unrevealed. “Hope that is seen is not hope,” the Apostle Paul reminds us. “For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Rom. 8:24–25).

Hope sustains the Christian life. We hope for the resurrection of our bodies (Phil. 3:21), for the restoration of all things, for dwelling forever in the house of the Lord. We groan inwardly as we wait for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Rom.

8:23). Hope sustains us through suffering, anchors us in storms, and lifts our eyes above the brutal facts of a fallen world to the glorious certainties of God's promises.

But hope, by its very nature, also won't last forever. When the thing hoped for arrives, hope transforms into something else—the joyful satisfaction of possession. You don't hope for what you already have. When we see the new heavens and the new earth, when we receive our glorified bodies, when every tear is wiped away and death itself is thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 21:4), what will remain to hope for? All will be consummated. Everything will be complete. Hope will have brought us home, and our eternal home is where hope is put to rest.

WHY LOVE ABIDES FOREVER

Love is different. Love is not mainly about our need for salvation. Love is about relationship, one rooted in God Himself. John explains, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). It is of His very nature to love. The Father loves the Son. The Son loves the Father. The Spirit proceeds as the eternal love of the Father and Son. Love is essential to the inner life of God, and God is eternal, unchanging, infinite. If God is love, and God never ends, then love never ends.

When we love, we reflect the character of our Creator. We were created to love. Sin corrupted this capacity, twisting love into self-serving desire and idolatrous attachment. Yet grace restores our love. The indwelling Spirit is transforming us into Christ's image, which means that we are being formed into people who love truly, with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and who love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:37–39; Mark 12:30–31).

Such holy love will flourish all the more when we see Christ clearly. "Now I know

in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known," Paul writes (1 Cor. 13:12). Our love for God will deepen infinitely when we comprehend more fully the height and depth and length and breadth of His love for us (Eph. 3:18). Our love for one another will grow richer when we see each other as glorified, perfected, fully ourselves yet completely Christ's.

Therefore, love doesn't become obsolete when its object is fully present. It intensifies. A lover doesn't stop loving when the beloved enters the room. Rather, the love blazes brighter. When we stand before Christ, when we dwell in the city whose architect and builder is God (Heb. 11:10), when we walk among the redeemed from every tribe and tongue (Rev. 5:9), love won't dissipate. Love will blossom into its glorified state. Love will be the atmosphere we breathe, the language we speak, and the activity that fills eternity. As Jonathan Edwards explained so memorably, heaven is "a world of love."

LOVE IN THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

What will love look like in the new creation? We will love God with undivided hearts. Every competing affection will have vanished, and every idol, disintegrated. We will see Him as He is, and adoring love will flood our souls. Worship will be effortless, joy constant, and gratitude unending. We will love Him not out of duty but out of delight, as we finally behold Him who is altogether lovely.

Furthermore, we will love one another without the distortions of sin. No more jealousy. No more wounded pride. No more bitterness or betrayal. We will serve one another gladly and rejoice in one another's glory. Christ's body will function perfectly; every member will contribute his part, and love will suffuse the whole of redeemed

*The love that never ends isn't only
about a future reality. It has everything
to do with how we live now.*

humanity. And perhaps most wonderfully, we will be loved perfectly forever. God's love for us will be manifest in ways that we can scarcely imagine. We will know, deeply and constantly, that we are beloved. The insecurities that plague us now, the doubts about our worth, the fear of rejection—all of it will be gone. We will rest secure in God's love. Perfect security will free us unto full and forever love.

LIVING IN LIGHT OF FOREVER LOVE

The love that never ends isn't only about a future reality. It has everything to do with how we live now. If love is the one thing that will last, should not love reign supreme in our lives?

Paul understood this. After his soaring description of love's eternal nature, he commands the Corinthians to "pursue love" (1 Cor. 14:1). Make it your aim. Chase after it. Live faithful to the Apostle's command: "Let love be genuine" (Rom. 12:9). Every act of genuine love that we perform now fits our

souls for heaven. When we love our spouses faithfully, when we serve our neighbors sacrificially, when we forgive those who wrong us, and when we show patience with difficult people, we are doing something that will echo in eternity. We are practicing for heaven. We are becoming the kind of people who will be at home in a world where love is all.

Faith will become sight. Hope will be fulfilled. But love will never end. Let us, then, be people of love—not sentimental or shallow love, but the robust, Christ-shaped, cross-bearing love that reflects God's heart. Let us carry this love through the gates of death and into the Lord's glorious presence, where love never ends. **TL**

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MAY 2026 DAILY BIBLE STUDIES

INTO *the* WORD

SUFFERING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE

ALL PEOPLE EXPERIENCE suffering in this life, but not for the same reasons. Some will suffer the effects of a disease that they could not have predicted or prevented. Others endure painful consequences of the crimes or other sins that they have committed. Christians suffer at times because of righteousness, because they choose to follow Christ instead of going along with the ways of the world.

Peter's first epistle addresses primarily the suffering that believers endure for the sake of righteousness. This subject receives particular focus in 1 Peter 2:18–4:6, which we are studying this month.

**“WE SHALL BEST
BEAR OUR OWN
SUFFERINGS
WHEN WE FIND
FELLOWSHIP WITH
CHRIST IN THEM.”**

—C.H. Spurgeon, from his sermon “Unparalleled Suffering”

The Apostle describes how we are to live as we suffer for Jesus.

As Peter gives instruction for how to remain faithful in suffering, he considers the roles and responsibilities of husbands, wives, and servants as well as the duties that all Christians share in the church and our response to unbelievers. The Christian's proper response is always grounded

in sound theology, so Peter directs us to the work of Christ and His exaltation to encourage us in our trials. May the Lord strengthen us to remain faithful to Him and persevere through the suffering that we experience on account of Him. **✠**

ABIDING IN THE WORD

These verses parallel the themes of the studies each week. We encourage you to hide them in your heart so that you may not sin against the Lord:

Week of May 3	1 PETER 2:24
Week of May 10	PSALM 133:1
Week of May 17	1 PETER 3:15
Week of May 24	ISAIAH 52:13
Week of May 31	PROVERBS 10:12



THE GRACE OF CORRECTION

KYLE BORG

1 PETER 2:18-20 “Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust” (v. 18).



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Matthew Henry comments, “The sinful misconduct of one relation does not justify the sinful behaviour of the other; the servant is bound to do his duty, though the master be sinfully forward [hard to deal with] and perverse.” This principle has wide application. Christians are to obey their leaders wherever God has placed them—at home, at work, and in the wider society—unless those leaders call them to sin.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Genesis 39
Colossians 3:22-25

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

1 Kings 4-5
Luke 23:26-43

THE WEEKEND

1 Kings 6-10
Luke 23:44-24:12

The Apostle Peter has been describing how believers in Christ must live their lives (1 Peter 2:1-12). He has made clear that the Savior’s holy people honor Jesus by honoring the various human institutions that God has established, including the civil authorities (vv. 13-17). In today’s passage, Peter applies his teaching on human institutions further, looking specifically at how Christian servants and slaves are to relate to their masters.

As we look at 1 Peter 2:18-20, we note that Peter addresses how Christian slaves and servants are to relate to non-Christian masters. His words, of course, have application to a servant’s relationship to masters who profess faith in Christ, but Peter primarily has non-believing masters in mind. Second, Peter is dealing with involuntary servanthood or slavery, but he does not directly call for it to be abolished. God’s Word does not, however, commend slavery as an ideal. The Bible is a very practical book, and passages such as 1 Peter 2:18-20 are given to help believers live faithfully under a societal evil that at the time they had no real way to overcome. As one commentator puts it, it would have done first-century Christian slaves no good to read a letter railing against slavery when it would have been impossible for believers, a small minority of Romans at the time, to change the institution overnight.

Our natural inclination would be to think that servants have no need to obey unjust masters, but Peter says otherwise. Servants must respect not only “good and gentle” masters but also those who are unjust and even perverse (v. 18). Obviously, this does not mean that we have a license to do what is sinful if a master or other authority commands it. When anyone commands us to do something that God forbids or forbids us from doing something that God commands, “we must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Peter’s point is that the wickedness or harshness of a master does not justify disobeying his lawful orders. In fact, we will receive a special blessing if we follow those in authority over us even when it is hard to do so, provided that obeying them does not cause us to sin (1 Peter 2:19-20).

Peter’s words do not mean that subordinates should never make use of their rights when they are mistreated by an authority. Paul appealed to his rights as a Roman citizen when he was mistreated in Philippi (Acts 16:25-40). Yet such appeals, if we are able to make them, do not negate our responsibility to obey lawful orders.

Correction is not something that we often welcome. Our instincts are to defend ourselves, to explain, or to dismiss those who challenge us. Yet Scripture repeatedly presents correction not as an enemy of grace but as its faithful servant. God does not merely save us from the penalty of sin, but in the life of discipleship He also trains us away from sin. One of the primary tools that He uses is loving, timely correction.

Ecclesiastes 4:13 gives a vivid contrast: “Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice.” The difference is not ultimately between youth and age, nor between poverty and wealth, but between wisdom and folly. The wise remain teachable. The foolish become deaf.

The Bible teaches that correction must be given carefully and rightly. It begins with discernment. Correction is not about conforming others to our personal preferences or opinions but about addressing what is truly wrong according to God’s Word. Paul corrected Peter only because his conduct was out of step with the gospel (Gal. 2:14). When we substitute ourselves as the standard, correction becomes self-serving rather than sanctifying.

Correction must also be offered with respect. God assigns roles and relationships, and correction should honor those distinctions. Timothy was instructed not to rebuke an older man but to encourage him as a father (1 Tim. 5:1). No one is beyond correction, but how correction is given matters. Truth spoken without regard

for relationships and roles often wounds rather than heals.

Above all, correction must be motivated by love. God disciplines those He loves, not those He despises (Heb. 12:6). Christian correction is not an outlet for irritation, impatience, or self-righteousness. It is to be an expression of love. When correction is necessary, it must be given with patience, kindness, and humility.

Yet the grace of correction is also seen in the one who receives. A wise person acknowledges that we all need correction. Scripture says that we all stumble in many ways (James 3:2). The fool is always right in his own eyes, but the wise welcome counsel even if it is uncomfortable (Prov. 12:15).

Receiving correction requires more than hearing words. It requires listening to understand rather than listening to respond. It also requires submitting to correction when it aligns with God’s Word, even if the messenger is flawed or unwelcome.

Finally, correction must be put to use. Unapplied correction hardens the heart. Scripture warns that those who repeatedly reject reproof will eventually be broken beyond healing (Prov. 29:1). But correction received with humility bears fruit.

Correction is not easy to give or receive. It humbles us and exposes us. Yet it is a gift of grace. Better to be poor and wise than rich in every other way and too foolish to receive God’s correction.

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THE EXAMPLE OF THE SUFFERING CHRIST

1 PETER 2:21 “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

John Calvin comments, “Nothing seems more unworthy, and therefore less tolerable, than undeservedly to suffer; but when we turn our eyes to the Son of God, this bitterness is mitigated; for who would refuse to follow him going before us?” When we suffer unjustly, let us remember Jesus and imitate Him by enduring the suffering without compromising or otherwise sinning.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Daniel 6
Matthew 5:10–12
Romans 8:12–17
James 5:7–11


THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

1 Kings 11–12
Luke 24:13–35

Explaining the Christian’s responsibility to human institutions, Peter makes clear that believers must subject themselves to their leaders in civil government and—if they are slaves or servants—to their masters (1 Peter 2:13–18). In other words, we are to follow orders from the authorities placed over us. As we have noted, however, the submission that we render is not to be an unthinking subjection. The Apostle commands us to subject ourselves, to willingly put ourselves under the authority of others, so he has in mind a thinking obedience. Obviously, this means that we cannot obey a command to sin, for when such commands are given we must follow God rather than man, as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did when they disobeyed the king’s order to commit idolatry (Dan. 3). But even when our leaders are unjust and harsh, we are to obey them, as long as they do not forbid us from doing something that God commands or command us to do something that God forbids.

This means that believers will sometimes suffer at the hands of cruel masters who may not command us to sin but who may mock Christians or weigh us down with backbreaking workloads. In such cases, we are to obey our leaders and endure, knowing that God rewards those who suffer for doing what is right (1 Peter 2:19–20). Moreover, we obey the Lord even if it brings unjust suffering, for in so doing we imitate Jesus, who Himself suffered for doing good (v. 21).

In being called to follow Jesus, we have been called by the Lord God Almighty to suffer. This does not make our pain any less real, but it does tell us that there is no such thing as meaningless suffering for the Christian. All of it is ordained by God for our ultimate good and His final glory, even if we cannot always understand how this can be the case while we are suffering. Here is where knowing the character and attributes of God brings real comfort. Because God is in full control of all things and is also supremely good and loving (Ps. 118), we know that “there is purpose even in our suffering,” as Dr. R.C. Sproul writes in his commentary on 1–2 Peter.

Jesus told us that His disciples must take up their cross and follow Him (Matt. 16:24). He is our example, and we are to suffer as He did insofar as it is possible (1 Peter 2:21). Our suffering cannot atone for sin, after all, so we do not imitate Christ in that respect. But we can imitate Jesus in our suffering by obeying God even when it might bring pain. 


THE SINLESSNESS OF CHRIST

1 PETER 2:22 “[Christ] committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.”

Christians are called to obey those in authority except when human institutions command us to sin. This remains true even if those over us are personally unjust and cruel (1 Peter 2:18–20). We are called to this in imitation of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose entire life was characterized by unjust suffering, and yet He remained ever faithful to His Father (v. 21). A disciple is not above his teacher, so if Jesus the Master Teacher had to suffer before entering into His glory, we should not be surprised that the same path of suffering is given to us (Matt. 10:24; Luke 24:26).

Having presented Jesus as the paradigm for suffering in a godly manner (1 Peter 2:21), the Apostle Peter spends the next few verses reflecting on the reality of how Christ suffered and what it accomplished. Peter uses Isaiah 52:13–53:12 as the interpretive lens for understanding the suffering of Jesus, and in today’s verse he echoes 53:9 in particular when he writes that Christ “committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:22).

Since Jesus is the example to follow in suffering, Peter wants us to imitate the Lord by not committing sin while we suffer. Given that no Christian yet to be glorified can honestly claim to be without sin (1 John 1:8–9), we know that sinlessness while suffering is an ideal that we must constantly aim at but will not reach before our deaths or the return of Jesus, whichever comes first. Nevertheless, we must pursue holiness even if we will never reach perfection in this life.

Jesus is not less than an example for us, but we know that He is also much more. The actual sinlessness of our Savior is a fact with profound consequences, for He could not have redeemed us if He had committed even one sin. We remember that according to the parallel that God established between Adam and Christ, Jesus had to succeed where Adam failed in order for those who are united to Christ by faith to receive His gift of righteousness (Rom. 5:12–21). The blood of Jesus saves us because it is the blood of the perfect Lamb of God without blemish, who was foreshadowed in the old covenant sacrificial system (1 Peter 1:18–19; see Lev. 1:3, 10; 4:3; 6:6). Because Jesus knew no personal sin, He could become sin for us, taking our place under the wrath of God, so that in Him we are the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). Matthew Henry comments that Jesus “wrought no iniquity of any sort whatever,” and because of that He can save us from our sin. 



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

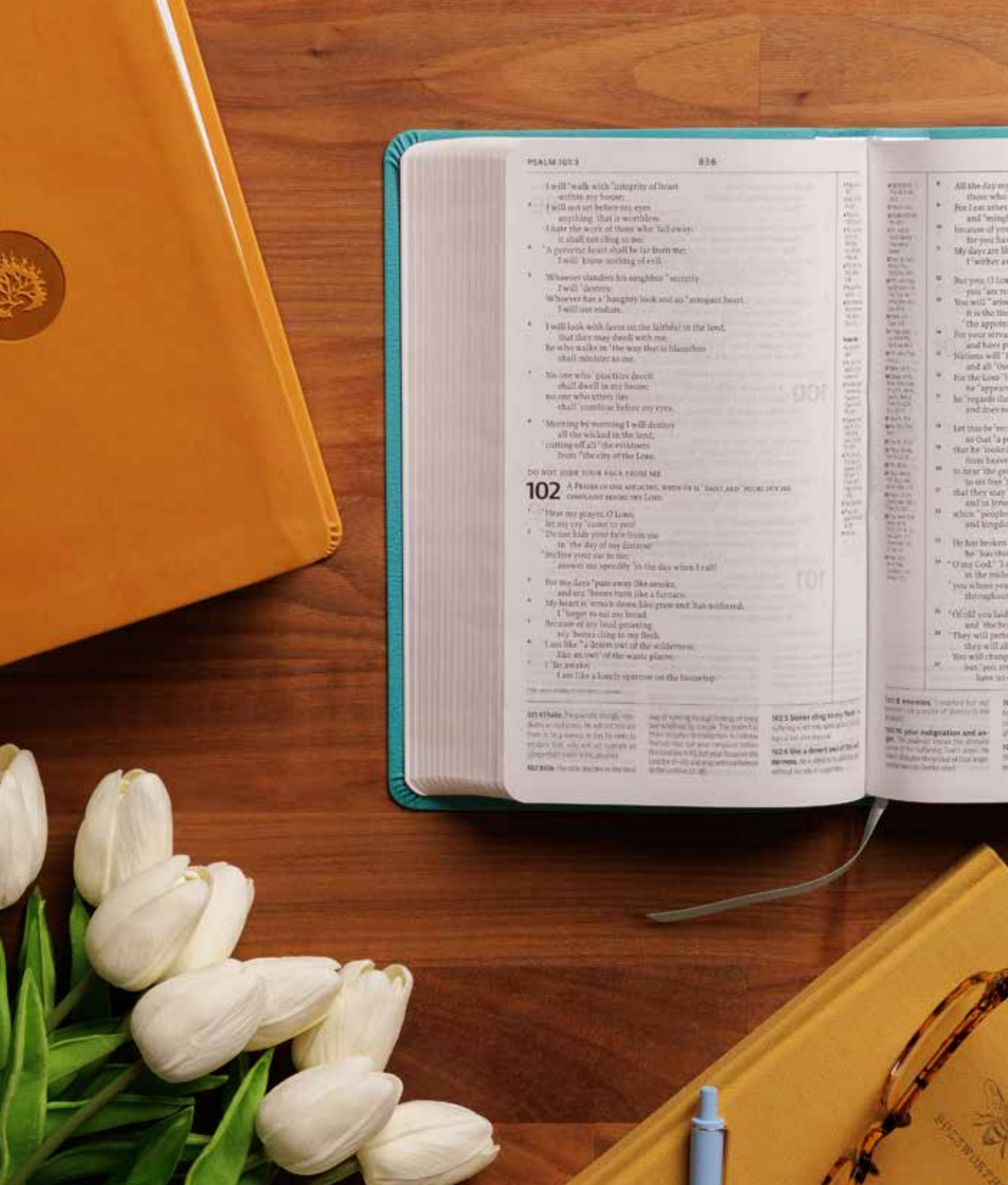
Jesus stands out in the pages of Scripture and in the history of the world as the one human being who never committed any sin. Some have tried to argue that Jesus committed sin, but we cannot compromise on this doctrine, for the sinlessness of Christ is required for our redemption. Let us stand firm on this truth and share it with others as we share the gospel.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalm 26
Matthew 27:4
Hebrews 4:15
1 John 3:5

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

1 Kings 13–14
Luke 24:36–53



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SUFFERING WITHOUT RETALIATION

1 PETER 2:23 “When [Christ] was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

We are required to take all of Scripture into account regarding faith and practice. When it comes to Christian practice, ethical decisions and application of the principles of biblical polity often require great wisdom for us to recognize and do the right thing. A multitude of godly counselors who know God’s Word well are a great help to us.

FOR FURTHER STUDY


Genesis 50:15–21
Proverbs 10:12
Romans 12:17
1 Corinthians 4:12

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

1 Kings 15–16
John 1

Continuing our look at 1 Peter 2, we remember that while Jesus is more than an example to be imitated, He is certainly not less than that. How our Lord responded to suffering does serve as a paradigm for how we are to suffer even if there are aspects of Jesus’ suffering that we cannot imitate because of Christ’s unique role as our Mediator. Today’s verse tells us how we can imitate Jesus in our suffering even as we must also remember that there are things that Jesus did as Mediator that are not required of us.

In 1 Peter 2:23, the Apostle likely has Isaiah 53:7 in mind. Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would not open His mouth in response to the unjust suffering that He would endure, and Jesus fulfilled this when He did not respond in kind to His tormentors. When the soldiers and Jewish leaders reviled and threatened Him, He did not revile and threaten in return. Instead of retaliating, Peter writes, Jesus entrusted Himself to God, knowing that He judges justly and would vindicate Him (1 Peter 2:23; see Mark 15:1–20). Likewise, we are not to return insult for insult, threat for threat. In fact, when Jesus tells us to turn the other cheek, He is using a metaphor that means that we are not to respond to verbal revilings in kind (Matt. 5:39). John Calvin comments that like Jesus, we are “calmly to bear wrongs, and not to avenge wrongs. For such is our disposition, that when we receive injuries, our minds immediately boil over with revengeful feelings; but Christ abstained from every kind of retaliation. Our minds, therefore, ought to be bridled, lest we should seek to render evil for evil.”


While we must not retaliate in kind against those who cause us to suffer unjustly, this does not mean that we can never seek justice and must passively resign ourselves to unjust suffering. Jesus did not appeal to His legal rights or even to His own innocence to avoid suffering; He endured it all the way to death. This was a consequence of His unique role as Savior. Scripture’s teaching on the need to seek justice and the right to self-defense, as well as the Apostles’ example of appealing to their legal rights, indicates that we are not always to shun attempts to alleviate suffering (Ex. 22:1–3; Isa. 1:17; Acts 16:25–40). Yet if we use our rights or seek legal redress, it should be only when a crime has been committed or there is no other way to find restoration. Even then, we must not be motivated by a retaliatory spirit. 

OUR SIN-BEARING SAVIOR

1 PETER 2:24 “[Christ] himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”

Jesus serves as our example of how to endure unjust suffering in a godly manner (1 Peter 2:21). He is the only human being whose every suffering was wholly unjust, for He was not conceived in a condition of original sin, and He committed no sin of His own. The rest of humanity brought suffering into the world when we sinned in Adam, even if not all of our suffering is due to a specific sin that we have committed personally. Christ shows us that suffering unjustly in a holy way involves avoiding sin and deceit, not reviling or threatening those who cause us pain (vv. 22–23). We will never get to a point in this life at which we endure unjust suffering with perfect holiness (1 John 1:8–9). Nevertheless, we are responsible to aim at it throughout our lives.

We can follow the example of Christ in these ways when we suffer unjustly, but there are aspects of His suffering that we cannot imitate. Today’s verse gives us the chief way that our Lord’s suffering is inimitable. Peter writes that Jesus “bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24). Christ’s suffering and death have an atoning significance, but our suffering does not.

The Apostle Peter here alludes to Isaiah 53:4–5, 10–11, part of the great prophecy of the Suffering Servant who would take the place of His people on the cross and receive the wrath of God for their sins. Peter makes clear that the death of Jesus is a substitutionary sacrifice. Suffering and death are the curse that is due to sinners (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23), but the Lord in His grace has ordained that He will allow an innocent man, a righteous man who is God in the flesh, to receive the curse in our place. Jesus did this when He hung on the tree, when He endured crucifixion on the wooden cross (1 Peter 2:24), for “a hanged man [on a tree] is cursed by God” (Deut. 21:22–23). On the cross, God put on Jesus all the sins of everyone who trusts in Christ alone for salvation, and Jesus bore the curse in their place so that they would receive eternal life. God is perfectly just, so He must punish sinners. Jesus took this punishment upon Himself so that we who trust in Him do not suffer it ourselves. John Calvin comments, “Christ’s death was a sacrifice for the [forgiveness] of our sins; for being fixed to the cross and offering himself a victim for us, he took on himself our sin and our punishment.” 



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

The truth that Jesus on the cross received the curse that is due to sinners is summarized in the phrase *penal substitutionary atonement*. Christ’s atonement was more than just a penal substitution, but that is its core. If we reject this truth, we are compromising a core tenet of the gospel and the Christian faith. Christ bore the curse that sinners deserve so that they will receive eternal life through faith in Him alone. This is the good news of the gospel.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Genesis 22:1–14
Leviticus 17:11
John 11:45–53
Galatians 3:10–14

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

1 Kings 17–18
John 2



1 PETER 2:25 “You were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

**CORAM DEO**

Living before the face of God

The atonement provides us with many benefits, but the most fundamental is reconciliation with God. There is no greater problem that one can have than to be estranged from our Creator, and only our Creator could restore us to fellowship with Him. Let us be grateful for this reconciliation and never forget the great cost that Jesus paid to secure it.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Isaiah 40:9–11
John 10:1–18

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

1 Kings 19–20
John 3:1–21

THE WEEKEND

1 Kings 21–2 Kings 4
John 3:22–4:42

Penal substitutionary atonement affirms that Jesus took the sins of His people on Himself and suffered and died in their place to pay the penalty that we owe for breaking God’s law. Without penal substitution, we cannot understand all that is required for our redemption or make sense of texts such as Isaiah 52:13–53:12, Romans 3:21–31, and 1 Peter 2:21–24. Yet we cannot limit the benefits of the atonement to the judicial sphere, to the forgiveness of sins and our receiving a new righteous status in God’s sight (see also 2 Cor. 5:21). In dying for us, Jesus did more than secure the pardon of our sins and establish peace between us and God.

First Peter 2:24 describes two other benefits of Jesus’ atonement. Consider first Peter’s statement that by Christ’s “wounds you have been healed.” Promoters of the Word of Faith false teaching often cite this text as evidence that the atonement secures physical healing for believers on earth and that we can receive it by confessing that it has already happened. The atonement does ultimately lead to physical healing, but it is an error to teach that such healing is guaranteed before the return of Christ. Jesus had to die and rise again to secure the new heavens and earth (John 12:23–24; Rev. 1:9–18; 21:1–22:5). Ultimately, believers will enjoy the full restoration of all things, including their physical health, when they have resurrected life in the new creation. Until then, physical healing is not a guarantee, though spiritual healing (forgiveness of sins) is for every Christian before Jesus’ return.

In 1 Peter 2:24, we read also that Jesus bore our sins on the cross so “that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.” Here we see that the atonement of Jesus also provides power for sanctification, for our growth in holy obedience to God. As Paul puts it, we have died to the power and dominion of sin and death through our union with Christ and can now use our bodies as “instruments for righteousness” (Rom. 6:1–14). John Calvin comments, “The death of Christ is efficacious for the [forgiveness] of sins, and also for the mortification of the flesh.”

The atonement of Jesus provides many benefits, and Peter concludes his look at the Savior’s death by returning to reconciliation with God through Jesus (1 Peter 2:25). Referencing Isaiah 53:6, the Apostle says that believers were like straying sheep, but that we have returned to the “Shepherd and Overseer” of our souls. We are the sheep of Christ and the subjects of His perfect loving care.

THE AXE HEAD MIRACLE

JOHN C.A. FERGUSON

Elisha’s miraculous recovery of the axe head in 2 Kings 6:1–7 is illustrative of the gospel, for it portrays six key features of the good news.

1. *The effects of sin.* A man among Elisha’s prophetic guild was cutting a tree with a borrowed axe when the iron head flew off the handle and sank to the bottom of the nearby river Jordan. Its loss incurred a debt. Similarly, our sin results in a debt before God because we sin with bodies and souls. He made and gave to us and for which we are accountable to Him. The iron sank to the bottom of the river, and sin leads to death and the grave, “for the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

2. *Appeal to God for deliverance.* When the axe head sank into the river, the laborer cried out to the prophet Elisha for help: “Alas, my master!” (2 Kings 6:5). The Bible teaches us to appeal to God for deliverance from sin. Only God can rescue us. Through the prophet, God supplied the man’s need. Mercifully, God provides for our need through His Son, Jesus Christ.

3. *Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice.* Elisha recovered the axe head by cutting off a stick from a tree and throwing it into the river. Christ is also called “the Branch” (Zech. 3:8) who was forsaken, “cut off” (Isa. 53:8), who gave Himself for us on a tree, the cross.

4. *Christ’s descent and ascent.* Now with Christ in view, the path of the iron to the riverbed anticipates His entry into our plight. He came “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3), bore our sin, died, and

was buried. The Lord Jesus was baptized in the same river and publicly committed Himself to this path. As the axe head was miraculously raised, so also God miraculously raised Jesus from the dead, never to die again.

5. *Salvation through faith in Christ.* Elisha’s instruction to “take it up” (2 Kings 6:7) might easily be overlooked because of the extraordinary events of the miracle. The man must take the axe head; otherwise, it remains out of his possession, and he is still in debt. Likewise, it is vital to respond to the gospel with faith in Christ. Without faith, we remain in sin, but with faith we benefit from the power of His death and resurrection. Elisha’s words moved the man to take the axe, and Christ moves us by His Spirit to take up His offer of forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Him.

6. *The free offer of the gospel.* The prophet raised the axe head and restored it to the man without fee. Our greatest need is met by God’s free gift: “The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

The miracle of the axe head leads us to the depths that Christ entered and God’s gracious provision of faith, forgiveness, and eternal life through Him. “Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!” (2 Cor. 9:15).

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THE DUTY OF WIVES TO HUSBANDS

1 PETER 3:1-2 “Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

John Calvin comments: “Peter’s words are not to be so understood as though a holy life alone could lead the unbelieving to Christ, but that it softens and pacifies their minds, so that they might have less dislike to religion; for as bad examples create offenses, so good ones afford no small help.”
Unbelieving husbands must hear the gospel to be converted. Still, they are unlikely to consider Christianity if their wives are disrespectful and impure.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Genesis 31
Proverbs 19:14
Ephesians 5:22-24
Colossians 3:18

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

2 Kings 5-6
John 4:43-54

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ leads to reconciliation with God and to a specific way of life. With respect to various authorities, Peter has stated that Christians are to be subject to every human institution, including the government, and that servants are to obey even unjust masters (1 Peter 2:13-25). Continuing his discussion of the believer’s relationship to authority, Peter in today’s passage turns to address wives and husbands.

The Apostle writes that wives are to “be subject to [their] own husbands” (3:1). This admonition raises questions for us, including whether Peter means that wives are inferior to their husbands. Peter, of course, teaches no such thing. Just a few verses later, he states that wives are co-heirs with their husbands of “the grace of life” that comes from God through Jesus (v. 7). A greater affirmation of the equal worth of wives and husbands—and by extension women and men—could hardly be imagined. Peter is referring not to worth but to what Dr. R.C. Sproul calls “a division of labor.” We remember that God created mankind to exercise dominion over the earth, with man created first and then woman created from the rib of man to be a helper to man (Gen. 1-2). God established male headship, especially in the home, so that human beings could fulfill the dominion mandate. Dr. Sproul comments, “The position of headship or leadership is a division of labor, and in a division of labor, being subordinate does not imply inferiority.”

Human beings owe absolute submission only to God, so a husband’s authority does not mean that he may command his wife to do whatever he wants or that a wife must follow any direction he gives. One example of this is if her husband commands her to do something that God forbids or forbids her from doing something that God commands. Peter teaches this implicitly in his reference to unbelieving husbands (1 Peter 3:1). In the ancient Roman world, wives were expected to obey their husband’s religion. The Apostle’s instructions assume that Christian wives will remain believers and not follow their husband’s faith if it is not Christianity.

Speaking of non-Christian husbands, one motive that Christian wives should have in submitting to unbelieving husbands is so that they may be won to Christ. In God’s providence, a non-Christian husband may take note of a wife’s respectful and pure conduct and begin considering the claims of Christ (v. 2).

GODLY ADORNMENT

1 PETER 3:3-6 “Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious” (vv. 3-4).



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Matthew Henry comments, “The ornaments of the body are destroyed by the moth, and perish in the using; but the grace of God, the longer we wear it, the brighter and better it is.” Physical appearance is not to be ignored, but we must emphasize development of godly character by the grace of God, and this is true not only of wives but also of all believers. True godliness never wears out.

God established the family order in creation wherein a wife is to submit to her own husband and follow his lead (Gen. 1-2; Eph. 5:22-24). Some people have argued that male headship is a product of the fall done away with by Christ. Scripture, however, explicitly grounds male headship in the created order before the fall (1 Tim. 2:12-14). Sin corrupts this order, but it does not destroy the structures that God established for creation. Therefore, the gospel does not eliminate the responsibility of wives to submit to their husbands. Moreover, this submission serves an evangelistic purpose. When a Christian wife submits to her non-Christian husband, he may begin to see the beauty of her faith (1 Peter 3:1-2). A godly wife’s submission to her husband, then, reveals that the gospel redeems and strengthens creational realities.

Expanding on his instruction to wives, Peter in today’s passage makes clear that they should focus on beauty of character. Instead of emphasizing physical loveliness through beautiful hair, jewelry, and clothing, wives should develop “the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious” (vv. 3-4). Peter does not mean that wives have no say with their husbands. After all, Proverbs 31:10-31 notes that an excellent wife competently oversees her home and speaks wisely. The point is that wives should not be unnecessarily contentious. Dr. R.C. Sproul writes: “Incorruptible beauty is displayed in a gentle and quiet spirit, but this does not mean that a wife is prohibited from giving her opinion. Peter’s point is that a quiet spirit is not a tempestuous spirit.”

Note, however, that an emphasis on beauty of character does not mean that wives should give no attention to physical beauty. John Calvin comments: “It would be an immoderate strictness wholly to forbid neatness and elegance in clothing. If the material is said to be too sumptuous, the Lord has created it; and we know that skill in art has proceeded from him. Then Peter did not intend to condemn every sort of ornament, but the evil of vanity.” Wives (and all other women) must refrain from immodest and ostentatious dress and adornment, not from all makeup, jewelry, and so forth.

In submitting to their husbands, Christian wives imitate Sarah, who respected Abraham even into old age (1 Peter 3:5-6; see Gen. 18:12). May Christian wives fulfill their high calling.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalms 119:1-8
Proverbs 12:4
Matthew 6:19-21
1 Timothy 4:7-8

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

2 Kings 7-9
John 5:1-29

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THE DUTY OF HUSBANDS TO WIVES

1 PETER 3:7 “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

First Peter 3:7 also says that husbands are to live with their wives in an understanding way so that their prayers are not hindered. Prayers can be hindered by wrong motivations, by not being able to think well of one's spouse, or by being distracted by sin. Loving our spouses affects our relationship with God.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Ruth 2–3
1 Corinthians 5:1–7
Ephesians 5:25–33
Colossians 3:19

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

2 Kings 10–11
John 5:30–47

Having addressed the responsibility of Christian wives to submit to their own husbands (1 Peter 3:1–6), Peter next deals with the duty of husbands toward their wives. In today's verse, we learn the specific way that husbands are to exercise their authority over their wives.

Let us start midway through 1 Peter 3:7, where the Apostle gives the theological basis for his instruction—namely, that wives are “heirs with [their husbands] of the grace of life.” As we said in an earlier study, this statement indicates that God's order of authority and submission in the home is not grounded in the inherent superiority or inferiority of either man or woman. Both believing husbands and wives will inherit the fullness of resurrected life in the new heavens and earth—the final grace that we will receive when Christ returns—so they have equal worth in God's sight (1:13; see 2 Peter 3:13). This equality creates a mutuality in the relationship wherein we see that while the wife has a duty to her husband to submit to his authority, the husband also has a duty to his wife.

The duty of the husband to his wife is to exercise his authority in their relationship in a godly and loving way. Christian husbands are to live with their wives “in an understanding way” (1 Peter 3:7). Husbands are to understand what God requires of them and to understand their wives' personalities and desires so that they can lead with kindness and godly authority. In particular, a husband must honor his wife, remembering that the woman is “the weaker vessel.” Peter is referring to physical strength here, not saying that women are somehow emotionally or spiritually weaker than men. Generally, men are physically larger and stronger than women, and they can use that strength to bully and intimidate their wives. They must not do so. Husbands are to be kind without being pushovers, to respect and esteem their wives and their needs and desires. John Calvin comments, “Nothing destroys the friendship of life more than contempt; nor can we really love any but those whom we esteem; for love must be connected with respect.”

Christian marriages are to be characterized by mutual respect and love, and as the leader in the home, the husband has the responsibility of fostering this by not mistreating his wife. Blessed is the husband who is grateful for receiving a prudent wife from the Lord and makes that clear to others (Prov. 19:14).

A CALL TO CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

1 PETER 3:8 “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.”

The gospel renews souls and reconciles God and sinners, but it does not destroy lawful human authorities or eliminate the believer's duty to submit to these authorities even when it is difficult to do so. Peter has made this plain in 1 Peter 2:13–3:7 while addressing how these principles should be applied with respect to the state, servants and masters, and husbands and wives. In today's verse, he begins to close out his writing on these matters by addressing relationships within the broader church.

Peter uses the word “finally” in 1 Peter 3:8 not to indicate that he is concluding the entire letter but to tell us that he is ending his discussion of the Christian's duty of submission. With that in mind, Peter's guidance here explains the principle that Paul gives in Ephesians 5:21 that believers have a duty to submit to one another out of reverence to Christ. This broader duty of submission that Christians owe to one another does not erase differences in authority between people in the church and society. Church elders, for example, retain authority over church members as it is defined in Scripture. Instead, this broader submission of Christians to each other encompasses the duties that all Christians owe to one another regardless of their position in the church, state, or home.

The Apostle states that believers are to aim for “unity of mind” (1 Peter 3:8). Without oneness on the meaning and mission of the Christian faith and the church, believers will accomplish nothing of lasting value. Christians need not be on the same page about everything, but they must be united on the fundamentals of the faith. Dr. R.C. Sproul comments: “We should be single-minded in our understanding of the person and work of Christ. We can—and must—be united in our confession of the essentials of the Christian faith, but there is plenty of room for differences in lesser matters.”

From unity of mind flow other essential aspects of Christian character and practice—sympathy, brotherly love, tenderness, and humility (1 Peter 3:8). When we share the same view of Christ, we will agree on what Christian discipleship and living mean, fostering mutual love and support in the church. Matthew Henry comments, “Christians should endeavor to be all of one mind in the great points of faith, in real affection, and in Christian practice; they should be like-minded one to another, according to Christ Jesus (Rom. 15:5), not according to man's pleasure, but God's Word.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Many problems in the church could be avoided if we were to have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, tender hearts, and humble minds. As much as we can, we should seek to sympathize with each other and to understand others' circumstances so that we can have healthy dialogue. In all this, we should be willing to learn from one another in all humility and to have tender, brotherly love for one another.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalms 133
Proverbs 28:26
Romans 14:1–15:7
Philippians 2:1–2

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

2 Kings 12–14
John 6:1–21



SERVANTS AND STEWARDS

JOEL KIM

1 PETER 3:9–12 “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing” (v. 9).



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Dr. R.C. Sproul comments that “when we return good for evil and blessings for cursing, we stockpile an inheritance of blessing.” The more that we pursue godly nonretaliation and do good to those who have done us ill, the greater blessing that we will enjoy in eternity.

Unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, a humble mind—these things result when church members properly submit to one another, prioritizing the needs of others (1 Peter 3:8; see Eph. 5:21). Having addressed relationships within the church, Peter in today’s passage returns to the subject of how believers are to relate to those outside the covenant community.

As 1 Peter 3:8 dealt with the general kind of submission that believers are to practice with other believers, verses 9–12 address the general kind of submission that believers are to practice in their relationships with non-Christians, particularly when they are reviled or otherwise mistreated. Peter tells us first of all that we are not to repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling (v. 9). Once again, Jesus serves as our example here; the Apostle has already reminded us that when Jesus was reviled, He did not respond in kind (2:23). Peter’s instructions also mirror Jesus’ counsel in Matthew 5:38–39 to turn the other cheek by not insulting those who insult us. As we have noted in past studies, this guidance does not mean that Christians must never avail themselves of their legal rights or can never otherwise seek to protect themselves from abuse. The point is that the believer’s first impulse should not be retaliation and that we should avoid responding in kind unless it is necessary to protect others from harm.

It is our duty not to respond to mistreatment in kind, but Peter gives us an additional motive to follow these instructions by promising blessing to those who do so. Quoting Psalm 34:12–16, the Apostle promises that life and “good days” will come to those who turn away from evil and keep their tongues from deceit, to those who do not respond to evil with evil. Our turning from evil is connected to our receiving our final reward in glory. We do not earn eternal blessing by our good works, but good works form the path that all those who have been saved by grace alone through faith alone follow (Rom. 8:12–17; James 2:14–26). Those who flagrantly and impenitently disobey God cannot assume that they have actually trusted in Christ.

The early church father John Chrysostom comments on today’s passage that “if a man is wise, he will put [bad thoughts] aside and in their place choose thoughts which will be advantageous and profitable for him.” Walking the path of good works, of godly non-retaliation, begins with the renewal of the mind, with learning the ways of God in Scripture (Rom. 12:1–2).

The Apostle Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 4:1–5 strike a note that sounds foreign to our success-driven culture: “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” In Corinth—a city obsessed with status, eloquence, and influence—Paul’s self-description was countercultural. The Corinthians admired Apollos for his eloquence and Cephas for his experience, but Paul? He seemed unimpressive, lacking the rhetorical polish and social clout they prized. Yet Paul reminds them—and us—that Christian leadership is not about prominence but about faithfulness.

Paul uses two metaphors: *servants* and *stewards*. Much can be said about both terms, but they underscore two realities: living in dependence and living under authority. Paul was not an independent guru but a servant whose authority was delegated to him by Christ, his Lord. His task was clear: to steward “the mysteries of God”—God’s plan of salvation revealed in His Son, hidden for ages but now proclaimed in the gospel (Col. 1:25–28).

This perspective challenges our assumptions. We often measure success by priorities demanded by the world, but Paul reminds us that our future and calling are not self-determined but are given to us by the Lord. For those to whom the Lord delegated responsibility, the one and only requirement is that they “be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2). The question for those who serve the church is simple: Have we been faithful to the Lord’s calling in our lives?

Paul then addresses accountability. Who judges one faithful? Not others. The Corinthians have already judged Paul, but their judgment does not concern him. He understands that their criteria for judgment are misguided. He does not even trust his own self-assessment: “I do not even judge myself” (v. 3). The only judgment that matters is the Lord’s. “It is the Lord who judges me” (v. 4). On the day of Christ’s return, He will disclose what is hidden and commend His servants (v. 5).

Paul’s teaching liberates us from the tyranny of human approval and the anxiety that often accompanies self-evaluation. Christian living and certainly leadership are not a popularity contest. Our worth is determined not by likes, titles, or trophies but only by the Lord.

But here is the foundation of Paul’s comfort: His confidence rests not in himself but in God’s faithfulness—He “will sustain you to the end” (1 Cor. 1:8–9). Excellence matters, yet Christian excellence is measured not by what the world demands but by ordinary faithfulness—living in dependence, serving under authority, and seeking to make much of the Lord. The real measure of success is hearing the words of our Lord: “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

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FOR FURTHER STUDY
Proverbs 25:21–22
1 Thessalonians 5:15

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR
2 Kings 15–17
John 6:22–59

THE WEEKEND
2 Kings 18–22
John 6:60–7:36

SUFFERING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE

1 PETER 3:13–14 “Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Because God is for us in Christ, we need not fear what man can do to us if we are faithful to Him. Remembering that God and His help are enough for all the difficulties that we face and the suffering that we endure will assist us in remaining faithful to our Creator. John Calvin comments, “If this conviction takes full possession of our minds, that the help promised by the Lord is sufficient for us, we shall be well fortified to repel all the fears of unbelief.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalm 46
Isaiah 49:22–26
Matthew 5:10
Romans 8:18

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

2 Kings 23–24
John 7:37–52

First Peter’s original audience was clearly suffering because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, for the epistle references Christian suffering throughout and provides guidance for how to suffer well. Peter even states that Christians are called to suffer to maintain our witness to the truth of the Savior, with Jesus serving as our example of how to suffer in a godly manner (1 Peter 2:20–23). In today’s passage, Peter takes up again the topic of suffering for the sake of righteousness.

The Apostle asks, “Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?” (3:13). It is a rhetorical question, and the expected answer is “no one.” We need to inquire, however, whether Peter is asking about the present or the future. Is Peter’s point that few non-Christians will bother us if we are doing good and will come after us only if we do what is not good? Or does he mean that no one can ultimately harm Christians because God will vindicate us at the last day and preserve us from eternal destruction? Both points are true, though the first option is more of a general truth and not a rule for all times and places. John Calvin observes that “though this commonly happens [that non-Christians leave alone Christians who do good], yet it is not always the case; for the children of God, how much soever they may strive to pacify the ungodly by kindness, and show themselves kind towards all, are yet often assailed undeservedly by many.”

Since the immediate context has in view final judgment and reward (3:9–12), 1 Peter 3:13 more likely means that nothing can ultimately harm us if we do good—that while believers might suffer in the short term, nothing can separate us eternally from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:31–39). Ultimately, we will reign over creation alongside Christ (2 Tim. 2:12). First Peter 3:14 confirms this, for the Apostle says that we are blessed even if someone harms us for doing good. This must refer to final judgment, for we are not always rewarded in this life for the good that we do and the suffering that it can bring. Augustine of Hippo aptly comments, “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.” Seeking first the kingdom of God may lead us into suffering, but all who truly seek the kingdom receive it, and everything else besides, on that final day (Matt. 6:33). **📖**

MAKING A DEFENSE

1 PETER 3:15 “In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Matthew Henry writes, “The hope and faith of a Christian are defensible against all the world. There may be a good reason given for religion; it is not a fancy but a rational scheme revealed from heaven, suited to all the necessities of miserable sinners, and centering entirely in the glory of God through Jesus Christ.” Many good works on apologetics are available to help us prepare ourselves to give an answer for the hope that is within us.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalm 53:1
Acts 17:16–34;
18:24–28
Philippians 1:7

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

2 Kings 25–1 Chron. 2
John 7:53–8:11

Christians are called to suffer for the sake of the Lord Jesus, to maintain their confession of faith in Christ and to follow His instructions even when they are persecuted and mistreated (1 Peter 2:21–23). When we suffer for the sake of righteousness, we should not fear those who can inflict pain on us, for no earthly power can ultimately harm us (3:13–14). After all, God is for us in Christ Jesus, nothing can separate us from His love, and we will inherit the earth at the last day (Matt. 5:5; Rom. 8:31–39).

We are not to fear those who would persecute or harass us, but more is required of us when people cause us suffering for doing good. As today’s verse tells us, we are to “honor Christ the Lord as holy” in our hearts (1 Peter 3:15). Believers are to regard their Savior as morally perfect and set apart as the King of kings and Lord of lords. His perfection and sovereign rule qualify Him to sit as the supreme Judge over all creation, judgment having been entrusted to Him by God the Father Almighty (John 5:19–29). Thus, we must reverently fear Him by remembering who He is, the authority He has, and the promises that He has made. Doing this, in fact, will enable us to fulfill the admonition not to fear lesser powers (1 Peter 3:14). If we fear Christ properly, we will understand that we have nothing to fear from anyone who would seek to hurt us. We will know that because we fear Christ by faith, when He returns we will be raised in victory over all earthly powers who have tormented us.

We who fear Jesus will live differently than those around us, prompting some of them to ask us why. When that happens, Peter says, we are to be “always . . . prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks [us] for a reason for the hope that is in [us]” (v. 15). This admonition establishes the discipline of apologetics, the defense of the faith. Christianity is not a blind leap into the dark; there are good reasons for our beliefs, including eyewitness testimony to the events and person at the heart of our faith and nature’s witness to the Creator (Ps. 19:1–6; Luke 1:1–4; Rom. 1:19–20; 1 Cor. 15:1–11; 2 Peter 1:16–21; 1 John 1:1–4). Believers are to be ready to give at least some basic reasons that Christianity is true, and the Holy Spirit may use the defense as part of His drawing an unbeliever to faith (1 Peter 3:15). Matthew Henry comments, “Christians should have a reason ready for their Christianity, that it may appear they are not actuated either by folly or fancy.” **📖**

Pass Down *the* Christian Faith

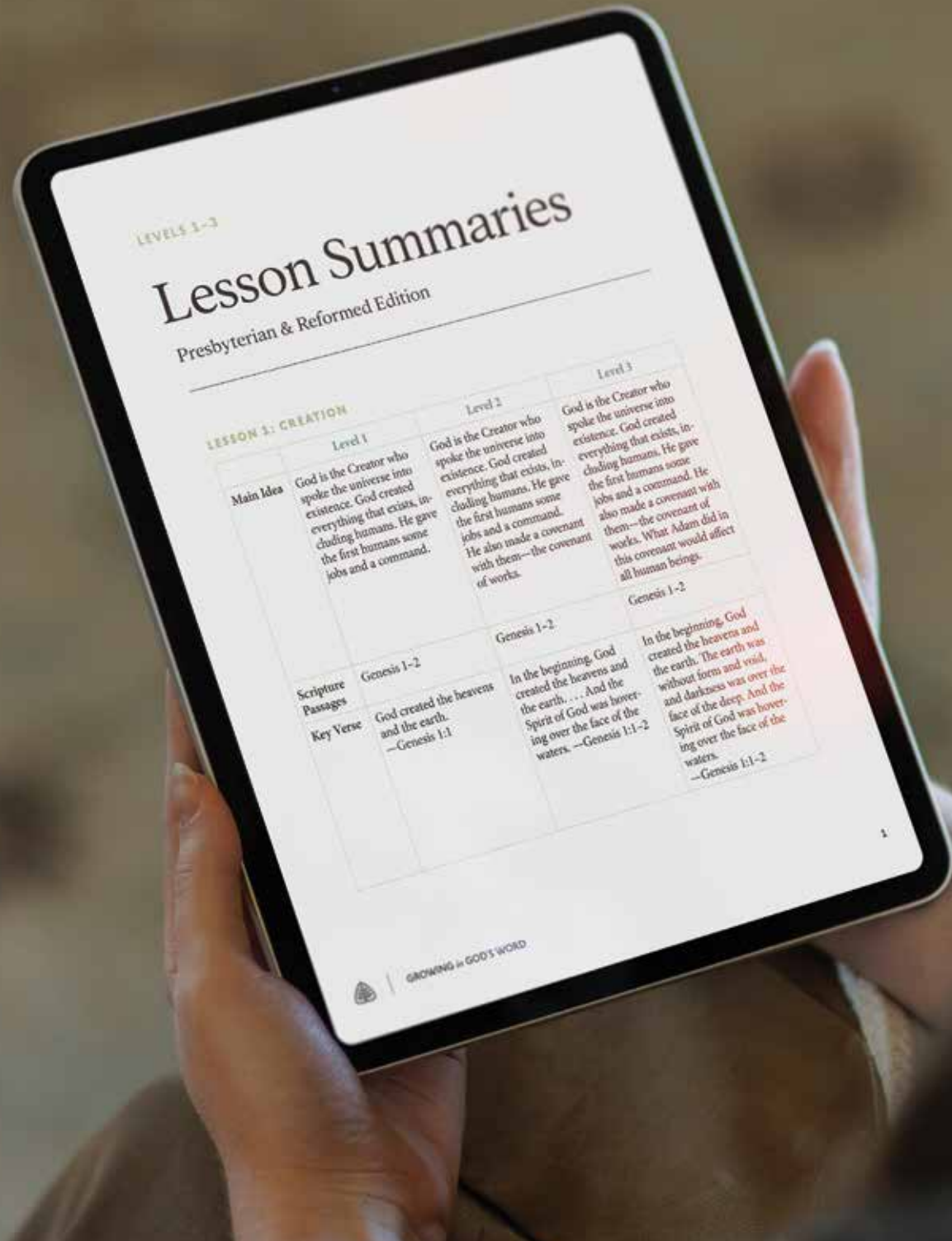
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HAVING A GOOD CONSCIENCE

1 PETER 3:16–17 "...having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil."



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

John Calvin comments on today's passage that "the defense of the tongue will avail but little, except the life corresponds with it."

We cannot guarantee that people will listen to us charitably if our manner of life is consistent with the faith we profess. We can almost certainly guarantee, however, that no one will take our words seriously if our life is significantly out of step with what we claim to believe.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Genesis 39
Acts 6:8–15
1 Thess. 4:9–12
1 Peter 2:15

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

1 Chronicles 3–5
John 8:12–38

Not all believers in Jesus are called to be professional apologists who devote their careers to formulating arguments for the Christian faith and engaging in public debate regarding Christianity. As we have seen in 1 Peter 3:15, however, all Christians must be prepared to give an answer for the hope that is within us when we are asked why a person should believe in Christ. We need to have ready at least some basic reasons that faith in Christ is a rational act. Happily, good resources on apologetics—the defense of the faith—are widely available today, so it is easier than ever to prepare ourselves to give reasons for the hope that is within us.

As important as having ready a basic intellectual defense of the faith is the manner in which we present this defense. We must answer critics of the faith "with gentleness and respect" (v. 15). Peter's instruction here practically applies the truth that "a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1). It is easy for us to develop intellectual pride the more that we consider the reasons for our faith, and this pride can manifest itself in condescension toward others, impatience, and other sins. People are accountable for their rejection of the truth, but we want to make sure that if they reject the truth, they are actually rejecting the truth and not rejecting us because we are rude and haughty.

Peter develops this point in 1 Peter 3:16 by encouraging us to have such a good conscience that those who slander us may be put to shame. Presenting a defense of the faith with gentleness and respect does not guarantee that the unbeliever will come to faith or even treat us more kindly, but slanderous charges against us will not stick in the eyes of fair-minded people if we are kind, patient, and godly. Moreover, on the last day, if not before, those who attack us even though we do good will be shown to have been utter fools. John Calvin notes in his commentary that if our adversaries can allege nothing against us but that we follow Christ, they will finally be ashamed of their wickedness, for our good conduct will disprove their false allegations.

All this is to say that our willingness to suffer at the hands of others is pleasing to God only if they are coming after us because they hate our righteousness. There is no credit for our suffering when we suffer because of our own bad behavior (1 Peter 3:17; see 2:20). If we suffer for doing evil, we are getting what we deserve. **TC**

PREACHING TO THE SPIRITS IN PRISON

1 PETER 3:18–20 "Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison" (vv. 18–19).

In giving direction to believers who suffer maltreatment because of their faith in Christ, Peter has set forth Jesus as the paradigm to follow (1 Peter 2:21–25). This makes good sense. After all, Jesus sets Himself forth as an example to imitate (John 13:15). Moreover, no one has endured more unjust suffering for the truth than our Lord, since He never sinned and spoke only the truth. Thus, there is no better model than Jesus for showing us how to faithfully suffer mistreatment for doing what is right.

Peter gives Jesus as an example of what happens to those who suffer for the sake of the truth in 1 Peter 3:18–22 to remind us that suffering was not the last word for our Savior. Instead, it led to resurrection, vindication, and exaltation. The Apostle has told us that we cannot be ultimately harmed and will be finally vindicated if we suffer for the sake of the truth (vv. 13, 16), and Jesus is the proof of his teaching. Believers who follow the example of Christ in their suffering can expect an exaltation similar to the one He enjoys.

Jesus' suffering and then exaltation, we read in today's passage, meant death in the flesh and being made alive in the spirit (v. 18). Christ died in the body, was resurrected by the Holy Spirit, and now lives in the Spirit. Jesus retains His resurrected physical body and dwells in the realm of the Spirit until the new creation that He ushered in through His death and resurrection is consummated at His return.

The Apostle then explains that Jesus went to proclaim "to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah" (vv. 19–20). This is a difficult text that raises many questions. Are the spirits that Peter mentions human souls, angels, or demons? Did this happen in the days of Noah or after Christ's resurrection? Were the spirits in prison in Noah's day or later? It seems best to affirm an interpretation that goes back at least to the days of Augustine in the fourth century. This view says that Peter is referring to Christ's preaching by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of Noah to those in his generation who mocked him for building the ark and that these people—"spirits"—who rejected Noah are now "in prison," or suffering judgment. The point is that Christians can be confident that those who mistreat believers impenitently will not escape condemnation. Followers of Christ, on the other hand, will finally be saved just as Noah was. **TC**



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Noah was mocked but finally vindicated. Jesus was put to death but raised in the power of the Holy Spirit. These examples of suffering and vindication are just a few such accounts that we find in Scripture. If we are tempted to despair while we are suffering mistreatment for following Jesus, let us remember that God has a proven track record of vindicating those who suffer for righteousness' sake.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Genesis 7
2 Timothy 4:18
Hebrews 11:7
2 Peter 2:4–10a

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

1 Chronicles 6–7
John 8:39–59



1 PETER 3:21 “Baptism, which corresponds to this, 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.”

**CORAM DEO**

Living before the face of God

John Calvin comments that “the external symbol [of baptism] is not sufficient, except baptism be received really and effectually.” It is not necessary for us to know exactly how and when God gives grace through baptism. Instead, we must trust in the promise of salvation that is given in baptism, knowing that without faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we cannot be saved.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Acts 2:38
Romans 6:3

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

1 Chronicles 8–10
John 9:1–23

THE WEEKEND

1 Chronicles 11–14
John 9:24–10:21

Vindication will certainly come to all those who suffer for the sake of Christ, maintaining their trust in Him alone. This has been Peter’s point throughout 1 Peter 3:8–20, with Jesus Himself serving as the supreme example of the person who suffers for righteousness and is then vindicated, for He rose from the dead and ascended to God’s right hand. Peter has also given the patriarch Noah as a pattern. Ancient Jewish tradition said that Noah was mocked as he built the ark, but he continued to obey God and was even used by God to preach repentance to his generation. In the end, Noah was vindicated because the judgment he preached fell on the earth and he was saved from the floodwaters by the ark (vv. 18–20). Similarly, followers of Christ who persevere as they are mistreated, believing and obeying Him to the end, will receive the fullness of salvation in the new creation (see 2 Peter 3:13).

In today’s verse, Peter says that baptism, which corresponds to the rescue that Noah enjoyed, now saves us (1 Peter 3:21). As we consider this text, we must be clear on two matters. First, we must affirm that the rite of baptism in itself saves no one. Peter teaches as much when he says that baptism saves us “as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” In other words, baptism does not save anyone who does not exercise saving faith in Christ. Second, we must not so divorce the work of God from the moment of baptism that Peter’s statement that “baptism . . . now saves you” becomes meaningless.

Thus, there is an inseparable link between baptism and salvation. We do not mean that one cannot be saved if one is never baptized; rather, ordinarily in the application of Christ’s redemption by the Holy Spirit, God gives grace to His elect through baptism. We cannot say much more than that, for the Lord has not said much more than that. There is a “sacramental union,” as Westminster Confession of Faith 27.2 puts it, between the sign (baptism) and the thing signified (salvation) such that we can speak of being saved in baptism without meaning that every baptized person is saved at the moment the water is applied. One can receive the grace of regeneration before, during, or after the rite of baptism. Some who have been baptized in water never receive the grace. The sovereign work of the Holy Spirit determines when and to whom the grace signified in baptism is applied (John 3:1–8).

THE SNARE OF MAN-FEARING

TESSA THOMPSON

Nobody likes to be caught in a trap, and that’s why “snare” is an effective word choice when Scripture speaks of the love of money (1 Tim. 6:9), idols (Ps. 106:36), and foolish lips (Prov. 18:7). In Proverbs 29:25, Solomon warns us of another trap: “The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.”

The fear of man is not an uncommon struggle, and it probably wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that many of us encounter it on a regular basis in our thoughts, emotions, and actions. What does the fear of man look like most often for you? Sitting silently in the lunchroom at work while surrounded by unbelieving coworkers? Strategically avoiding the crowded fellowship hall after church? Lying awake in bed while your mind pesters you with replays of the day’s interactions (or the potential of tomorrow’s)? Solomon’s words remind us that the fear of man is not simply an unwelcome friend to put up with but rather a dangerous trap that we ought to steer clear of.

Consider two different images that help us understand how the fear of man is indeed a trap. When we think of a mouse-trap, one of the first images that comes to mind is a piece of cheese. Why? Because catching the unwelcome intruders is often most successful when they are lured by something they want. The typical nature of a trap is to entice the victim by disguising danger and destruction as attractive and beneficial. Likewise, the fear of man *promises* us something that it doesn’t actu-

ally deliver. It tells us that if we act on our fears by speaking flattery, staying silent, rejecting opportunities, embellishing facts, or flat-out avoiding people, we’ll have better control over what others think of us. And that mirage of control promises the peace of safety and self-preservation. Let us not be deceived. If we are walking in the fleshly fear of man, we are not walking in Spirit-wrought fear of God. Only the latter will bring the peace that our restless hearts desire.

The second image is of a net that suddenly swoops down to capture an unsuspecting passerby. It doesn’t necessarily destroy the victim, but it certainly keeps him from getting where he needs to go. In the same way, the fear of man *paralyzes* us from a life of sincere love and service. When we walk in the fear of man, it is as if we are imprisoned in a net or tied to a tree with our hands behind our backs. There are good works that the Lord has “prepared beforehand” for us to walk in (Eph. 2:10), but the fear of man makes us so consumed with self that our lips don’t move, our hands don’t open, and our feet don’t walk.

The fear of man is a dangerous trap, “but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe”—unfettered and roaming freely in the steadfast love of God, which is ours in Christ Jesus, and then boldly extending that love to others.

TESSA THOMPSON is author of *Laughing at the Days to Come: Facing Present Trials and Future Uncertainties with Gospel Hope*.

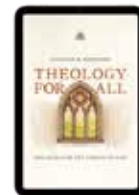


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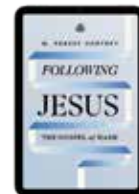
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CHRIST'S ASCENSION AND SESSION

1 PETER 3:22 “[Christ] has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Christ was vindicated for His faithfulness to God, having completed His mission, and now He reigns over all. Scripture describes Him as our forerunner (Heb. 6:20), so while we will not be supreme over all, we will rule over the earth under His direction (2 Tim. 2:12). Let us be encouraged that our vindication for faithfully following the Lord Jesus Christ is coming.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalm 37:34
Isaiah 52:13
Ephesians 1:15–23
Revelation 11:15

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

1 Chronicles 15–17
John 10:22–42

Baptism is a vital means of grace that God has given to His church for the sake of salvation (1 Peter 3:21; see Matt. 28:18–20). Thus, it is to be taken seriously, and we are to understand that while the mere application of water in the name of the Holy Trinity does not save anyone who never trusts in Christ, we cannot divorce salvation entirely from the sacrament. Moreover, we note that judgment is connected to baptism. We remember that in the story of the ark, which corresponds to baptism, the waters destroyed all those who did not believe God even as Noah was carried to safety upon them. Dr. R.C. Sproul comments, “The water that saved Noah and his family saved them because they put their trust in the promises of God, and for those who did not, that same water was the occasion of their utter destruction.” Those who are baptized but never believe in Christ will receive a judgment most severe.

Those who are saved through baptism are those who have “an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus” (1 Peter 3:21)—that is, those who put saving faith in Jesus. In today’s verse, Peter looks to the exaltation of Jesus to conclude the teaching he began in 1 Peter 3:8 regarding suffering for the sake of righteousness as the way to vindication. As we have noted, Jesus is the preeminent example of the person who suffers for the sake of the truth and is not ultimately destroyed even if He did pass through death. That is because death could not hold Him. His enemies did the worst that they could to Him by killing Him, and He rose again after three days. Moreover, He “has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him” (v. 22).

The Apostle here refers to the ascension of Christ, His return to heaven in victory after the resurrection, and the session of Christ, His being seated in authority over all at the right hand of God. After His resurrection, Jesus began His mediatorial reign, His exercise of supreme authority as the God-man for the sake of the church and the spread of the gospel (Eph. 1:22–23). Psalm 2 and other passages predict the enthronement of the Davidic King over all for the sake of the expansion of God’s kingdom and the subjugation of all of God’s enemies. This is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who now must reign until He has put all things under His feet, until all things acknowledge His lordship (1 Cor. 15:25). The suffering Messiah has been supremely vindicated as King over all. **✠**

LIVING FOR THE WILL OF GOD

1 PETER 4:1–2 “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

John Calvin comments on today’s passage, “We are really and effectually supplied with invincible weapons to subdue the flesh, if we partake as we ought of the efficacy of Christ’s death.” If we are convinced that doing God’s will is better than sinning even when it means suffering, and if we are confident that suffering is only temporary but our exaltation will be eternal, then we will be well equipped to live according to God’s will and not sin.

Christ Jesus walked the path of suffering that resulted finally in His exaltation. He serves as our example, for all those who are willing to suffer for Him will likewise enjoy exaltation at the last day (1 Peter 3:8–22). This truth, we read in today’s passage, has ramifications for our own growth in holiness.

Peter writes, “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh . . .” (4:1). This is a key statement for understanding the person and natures of Christ. Classical orthodox theology affirms that Jesus is one divine person—the Word or Son of God—in whom are perfectly united the divine nature and a human nature. These natures are united without confusion, change, division, or separation, and each nature retains its own properties. Because these natures belong to the person of the Son, the Son possesses all the properties of each nature, but the divine nature does not acquire properties that belong to the human nature and the human nature does not acquire properties that belong to the divine nature. Thus, the person of the Son is always the One who acts, but what is uniquely human in His actions manifests His human nature and what is uniquely divine in His actions manifests the divine nature. Athanasius of Alexandria, the early church champion of the deity of Christ, comments: “The Apostle did not say that Christ died in his divinity but in his flesh, so as to emphasize that it was not his divine nature which suffered but his human one. The sufferings are those of the one to whom the body belongs. Since the flesh belonged to the Word, the sufferings of the flesh must be attributed to the Word as well.” The incarnate Son truly suffered in His human nature, not in His divine nature.

We must arm ourselves with the same way of thinking—that it is better to suffer for doing right than to escape suffering by doing evil—because those who suffer in the flesh cease from sin (1 Peter 4:1). Jesus chose doing God’s will over sinning even though it led to suffering, so if we are more willing to suffer than to violate God’s will, we show that sin no longer controls us. Peter does not mean that we will attain sinless perfection before death if we are willing to suffer rather than sin. Instead, Peter observes that those who live according to the rule of the Holy Spirit, not the rule of sin, are those who in the main seek to do what is right even when it brings them pain. Those who will sin to escape suffering will live for human passions and not for the will of God (v. 2). **✠**

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Job 2:1–10
Daniel 3
Philippians 3:8–11
Hebrews 11:24–26

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

1 Chronicles 18–20
John 11:1–27

THE WAYS OF THE GENTILES

1 PETER 4:3 “The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

John Calvin writes that “it would be most unreasonable were we not to change the course of our life after having been enlightened by Christ.” Our lives indicate what we truly believe about Christ and the gospel, and we have only truly and rationally grasped the saving truth of our Lord if we seek to live in a manner consistent with what we say we believe.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Numbers 25
Proverbs 14:22
Galatians 5:16–26
2 Peter 2


THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

1 Chronicles 21–23
John 11:28–44

Men and women who have trusted in Christ and display that trust by their willingness to suffer if that is what it takes to obey God rather than to sin demonstrate that they have indeed been freed from the dominion of sin (1 Peter 4:1–2). Yet we should not think that our being willing to suffer rather than sinning is optional. Passages such as Romans 6 and 8:13 indicate that putting sin to death and cultivating life by the Holy Spirit are essential for our sanctification and thus ultimately for our salvation. After all, our new life in Christ is incompatible with the old life of sin, and those who are not striving against sin in any way show that they may not be regenerate. We do not earn redemption by mortifying sin, but mortifying sin is the necessary consequence of living, saving faith. As the great Reformed theologian John Owen famously said, “Be killing sin or it will be killing you.”

The purpose of Christianity, among other things, is to make us a people who live our lives in the flesh—our lives in the body—not for sinful human passions “but for the will of God” (1 Peter 4:2). This means nothing less than endeavoring by the Holy Spirit to live a life consistent with the holy character of our Redeemer. Thus, Peter in today’s verse draws a sharp difference between the way of life in sin and the way of life under the dominion of Christ and His Spirit.

Peter tells us that “the time . . . is past . . . for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry” (v. 3). Although one could find Jews here and there in the ancient world who might engage in such vices, these sins were more characteristic of pagan gentiles than the Jews. Hence, Peter says that these are things that the gentiles do. The picture that the Apostle paints of sin is bleak indeed and shows how low people can descend when there is little restraint and no renewal by the Holy Spirit. Matthew Henry comments, “While the will of man is unsanctified and corrupt, he walks continually in wicked ways; he makes them his choice and delight, his work and business, and he makes a bad condition daily worse and worse.”


The Apostle notes that the time for such behavior is well past (1:3). His point is that believers cannot continue in the wanton breaking of God’s moral law. Sinlessness, we know, is not obtainable before we are glorified (1 John 1:8–9), but growth in grace and the shunning of excess is possible when we walk in the power of the Spirit. 

THE SURPRISE OF THE UNBELIEVING WORLD

1 PETER 4:4–5 “With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”

Encouraging believers to remain faithful to Jesus even if it leads to suffering, Peter has made it plain that those who are no longer under the dominion of sin through faith in Christ are prepared to do what is right even if it costs them much. Such persons understand that their past lives of sin and debauchery are wholly incompatible with Christian discipleship (1 Peter 4:1–3). These were good reminders for Peter’s original readers, but many of them had already taken these lessons to heart and were refusing to follow the ways of the world.

We know this to be the case because the Apostle comments that non-Christians were surprised at how the believers he addressed would not join in debauchery. This surprise moved these non-Christians to malign believers for not following the world’s moral code (v. 4). Peter’s words here imply that the persecution his first readers endured was likely characterized more by verbal insults (“they malign you”) than by physical harm. Scripture warns us that we will have trouble in this world and even be hated because we follow Jesus (John 15:18–21). This hatred need not always blossom into attacks on our physical well-being. Often, the world’s mistreatment of Christians amounts only to verbal insults and exclusion from “polite society.” This can be true even when Christians have blessed a culture. Many nonbelievers, Matthew Henry comments, “will speak evil of good people, though they themselves reap the fruits of their charity, piety, and goodness.”

When this happens to us, let us remember our Savior’s words that those who are hated, excluded, reviled, and spurned on account of Jesus will have a great reward in heaven (Luke 6:22–23). Furthermore, let us take to heart Peter’s reminder that all those who harass us for following Christ “will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead” (1 Peter 4:5). Keeping in view the fact that God will judge the world through Christ at just the right time helps us persevere through every attack, for we know that our Father in heaven will not take lightly the abuse of His children. We can endure faithfully because we know that our enemies will not have the last say. John Calvin wrote, “This it is that can sustain us against all assaults, that is, when we patiently wait for that day, in which Christ will punish all those who now presumptuously condemn us, and will show that we and our cause are approved by Him.” 



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Matthew Henry comments, “The malignant world shall in a little time give an account to the great God of all their evil speeches against his people. . . . They will soon be called to a sad account for all their curses, their foolish jests, their slanders and falsehoods, uttered against the faithful people of God.” When the world’s hatred of Christianity seems to be on the rise, we should not despair. One day, all who speak against God’s people will give an account.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalm 89:50–51
Proverbs 14:9
Galatians 6:7–8
Jude 17–21

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

1 Chronicles 24–26
John 11:45–57



THE VALUE OF CATECHESIS

KEVIN D. GARDNER

1 PETER 4:6 “This is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Living in the spirit the way that God does begins in regeneration, continues as we grow in holiness in our sanctification, takes a great leap forward when we go to be with God in heaven after we die, and reaches its culmination in the final resurrection from the dead. We confess Christ and seek to obey Him now in preparation for our perfected state in the new heavens and earth. Let us serve Him this day and always.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Job 33:4
Romans 8:11

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

1 Chronicles 27-29
John 12:1-19

THE WEEKEND

2 Chronicles 1-6
John 12:20-13:20

Suffering Christians who are being persecuted for trusting in Christ and not following the ungodly ways of the world need encouragement to maintain this truth. When we are under pressure from unbelievers, we are tempted to deny Christ and may even give in, at least for a time. The Apostle Peter knew this well, for he denied knowing our Savior when he was pressed to confess Jesus during our Lord’s trial (Mark 14:66-72). Thankfully, Peter found true repentance and was finally reconciled to Jesus and restored to ministry (John 21). Given all that Peter went through, it does not seem to be too much of a stretch to think that at least one reason that Peter writes so extensively about enduring suffering in his first epistle is that he loved his audience so much that he did not want them to go through the pain that he had experienced by denying Jesus.

In any case, Peter counsels those who are being maligned for their faith in Christ to take the long view. Yes, suffering for Jesus is painful in the short term, but the day of final judgment is coming, when all will give an account of their lives and whether they have trusted in the Savior (1 Peter 4:1-5). Suffering today to maintain our trust in Jesus until the very end is worth it because all those who persevere in faith will be resurrected unto everlasting glory. This is Peter’s point in today’s verse.

Referring back to verse 5, the Apostle writes that “this”—the final judgment—is the reason that the gospel has been preached to the dead; although they have been judged in the flesh as people are, they may live in the spirit as God does (v. 6). Peter is referring to believers who have already died, and their judgment in the flesh is physical death, which comes to all people, believer and unbeliever alike. Apparently some non-Christians were arguing that believing in Christ offers no advantage over denying Him because believers do not escape physical death. The Apostle answers that this overlooks one key truth—namely, that believers who die live in the spirit. Peter refers here to our physical resurrection unto glory on the final day, paralleling his teaching that Jesus was made alive in the spirit in His resurrection (3:18). Christians must continue believing because even though they die, they will be given glorified bodies in the new heavens and earth. This final resurrection will occur by the power of the Holy Spirit, which is the consummation of the new life that the Spirit gives us in regeneration. ☞

B.B. Warfield told the tale of a U.S. Army officer in a city that was in the midst of tumult. As he passed through the chaos, the officers spotted a man with remarkable bearing and calm. The two men turned toward one another, and the stranger asked the officer the famous first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism: “What is the chief end of man?” The officer replied at once: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” “Ah!” said he, “I knew you were a Shorter Catechism boy by your looks!” “Why, that was just what I was thinking of you” was the rejoinder.”

Catechesis—a form of religious instruction through memorization, often in the form of questions and answers—is immensely helpful in raising covenant children in “the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4) and in fulfilling the command of Moses:

“These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” (Deut. 6:6-7)

I am a dyed-in-the-wool Presbyterian, and two of my proudest moments as a father were those when I felt most Presbyterian. The first was when my daughters were baptized shortly after we adopted them. The second was when my older daughter publicly professed faith and was received as a communicant member of our church.

Like many other churches, our church takes children through a communicants

class to prepare them for taking the Lord’s Supper for the first time. The class covers the basics of the Reformed faith, what constitutes a credible profession of faith, what happens in the Lord’s Supper, and the meaning of the church’s membership vows. To teach these things, the class makes heavy use of the Shorter Catechism. Like countless other Presbyterian children through the ages, my kids have been learning the Shorter Catechism, so my daughter already had many of the answers memorized.

It is hard to overstate how helpful it is to have close at hand scriptural answers to important questions and to therefore be able to think through the concepts that the answers teach. When young Christians struggle with assurance, they can recall that they are justified not because of their own works but “only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone” (WSC 33; see Eph. 2:8-9). When they want to explain to a friend what it means to believe in Jesus, they can say that it means to “receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel” (WSC 86; see Gal. 2:15-16).

Catechesis helps Christian parents prepare their children to stand on their own in the faith. Well, therefore, did Warfield conclude: “It is worthwhile to be a Shorter Catechism boy. They grow up to be men. And better than that, they are exceedingly apt to grow to be men of God.” ☞

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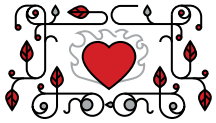
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God Our Refuge

ANDREW KERR

HOW QUICK WE ARE to call on friends. Yet we often drag our heels in calling on God in prayer. In this world, the hearts of saints are often weighed down by sorrow and stress. Yet in Psalm 62, the Spirit of Christ has furnished the church with a song and sigh for help. Its theme is one of the Reformation *solas*: By faith alone we walk the path to grief's relief.

URGENT TRUST

David in Psalm 62 urges trust on every Israelite. What had been a practical necessity for David himself, he now preaches to the church. His prayer began with lips tightly zipped (probably through fear of speaking ill-judged words that he might later regret): Having rolled his burden onto the Lord, he quietly waits for God's response (vv. 1–2). Heat from Absalom's insurrection had dissipated by the time that Jeduthun employed these lyrics in public worship. David had been blindsided by a heartbreaking insider's assault. A cunning smear campaign had badly damaged his reputation. As is typical with wicked, ruthless enemies, when they saw a man in a weakened state, they rushed to give the prince a final push to knock him off his perch. Yet this cracked dam did not burst (vv. 3–4). Through faith,

David, though badly shaken, was not greatly moved. In urging us to trust amid panic-inducing assaults, David informs God's people that faith always works.

SECURE TRUST

No additional insurance policy is required if Yahweh is our confidence. When Saul breathed down his neck, David, God's refugee, was never safer than when he was on the run to stony caves, clefts, or crags, for Yahweh was his Rock. Like one who peers down on vast enemy ranks from vertiginous peaks of Edom or the secure walls of Zion, the fugitive, though embattled and encircled, was safe in God's impregnable safe house (vv. 2, 6–7). Trust in the Lord put Jesse's son both out of sight and out of reach. Though all the other tribes had by then defected to his son Absalom and royal strategist Ahithophel had urged Absalom to take David out by night in a swift, surprise, precision strike, David stood back and watched the Lord providentially work an amazing deliverance: Hushai foiled the plot, and spies brought an intelligence report—David forded the Jordan and escaped to Gilead (2 Sam. 15:1–37; 16:14–17:24). Remember: If all earth makes threats and plots against God's

Christ, believers who trust Him will obtain rescue and relief.

SINGLE TRUST

There is a tiny Hebrew word that is applied to God and that crops up repeatedly in this prayer as the first word of Psalm 6:1, 2, 5, and 6. The word is a characteristic feature of this psalm and can be taken in two ways. Either it adds stress and is best translated “truly,” or it has a single focus with the meaning “only.” In other words, surely and solely, emphatically and exclusively, Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, is the only true object of saving hope, in life and death, for His saints. Two strong encouragements are added to bolster the believer's faith. First is divine power—nothing is impossible for our God, for though we are weak, all who rely only on Him are strong (v. 11). Second is divine promises—“steadfast love” is Yahweh's covenant love, for He proves faithful to His pledge and performs all His oaths (v. 12). Just as David survived to sire a royal line of kings, so God “comes through” for us who make Christ our single trust.

RIVAL TRUST

We must sharply distinguish between divine and merely human trusts (vv. 9–10). David sharply warns us that the latter are light; they are insubstantial. The influential big hitters, movers and shakers, or heavyweights of earth are nothing of the sort. They ultimately and always disappoint: Weighed in old-fashioned balances, they never tip the scales. They are insignificant, untrustworthy, vain, useless lightweights, or, as Derek Kidner described them, mere “puffs of wind” (v. 9). Their rescue repertoire is curtailed to rebellion, resistance, slander, shouting, scheming, and striking—“only” this, and nothing else. Yahweh, by contrast, has limitless, infinite glory (weight) and gravitas: He always produces the goods and

delivers on time, as promised. Neither does spiritual compromise, or moral shortcut, protect or insulate us from harm (v. 11): Power that oppresses, or robbery that extorts, cannot secure or save. Surely you know that pensions, portfolios, privilege, and position cannot save us. Rescue from sorrow or sin comes only to saints who put their trust in Christ.

PRAYERFUL TRUST

Twice King David gushes praise to God (a different verb); three times he pours out his heart before the Lord (Pss. 42:4; 62:8; 142:2). To pour out the heart means to empty out a flood of tears or a river of sorrows before the Lord. Every drop of grief, bottled up inside, is spilled in a copious, abundant, voluminous, surging, saturating torrent of Spirit-given prayer. A poured-out soul is like a jar of water, tipped upside down, with all its contents emptied out. If the spirit of Gethsemane and Golgotha pours out prayer to God, nothing remains inside the heart, and every burden tumbles out; no detail is held back or left out. If “we are all too apt . . . to shut up our affliction in our own breast” (John Calvin) and make matters worse, let us not stifle pains or bottle griefs: Instead of “hanging dirty laundry out in public” or “bending every open ear,” let us pray lengthily, with fervency, to God. “Let it all out” in the hearing of the Lord. Martin Luther has helpful, colorful advice about pouring out the heart:

Just throw it in a pile before Him, as you open your heart completely to a good friend. . . . Come right out with it, even if all you have is bags full of need. Out with everything. . . . Do not dribble your requests before Him. ☞

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Standing Together

GEOFFREY THOMAS

I AM **WARY**, when speaking of truths, of categorizing them into “first-class truths” and “second-class truths.” For example, in *A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity*, Albert Mohler distinguishes between first-order doctrines (a denial of which represents the eventual denial of Christianity itself), second-order doctrines (upon which Bible-believing Christians may disagree but that create significant boundaries between believers, whether as distinct congregations or denominations), and third-order doctrines (upon which Christians may disagree but yet remain in close fellowship, even within local congregations).

I do appreciate the sensitivity that exists in creating such labels. Some chapters in the Bible, such as the first ten chapters of 1 Chronicles, are not as important for Christian doctrine as the ten chapters of the combined letters to the Ephesians and Colossians. They are all equally inspired and God-given portions of the Word, but they fulfill different purposes at different epochs in the history of redemption. Those ten Pauline chapters are among the most doctrinally valuable in Holy Scripture.

So, too, we believe that some divine revelations have a huge significance. I like the familiar metaphor of trunk-and-branch truths

as compared to twig-and-leaf truths. I like the softer impact of the biological metaphor between things that are primary and more significant, and things that are secondary and less consequential. Christian unity will necessarily make some similar sorts of distinctions. We have to do so if we are going to continue happily in our fraternal, publishing houses, magazines, and conferences.

Erik Thoennes’ perspective (from his first essay on “Doctrine” in the *ESV Study Bible*) also seeks to discern the relative importance of certain theological beliefs. He considers this discernment to be vital for effective Christian life and ministry. He reckons that both the purity and unity of the church are at stake in such distinctions. How does he divide theological issues? Four ways:

1. *absolutes* define the core beliefs of the Christian faith;
2. *convictions*, while not core beliefs, may have significant impact on the health and effectiveness of the church;
3. *opinions* are less-clear issues that generally are not worth dividing over; and
4. *questions* are currently unsettled issues.

He further suggests weighing each issue according to at least seven considerations:

1. biblical clarity;
2. relevance to the character of God;
3. relevance to the essence of the gospel;
4. biblical frequency and significance (how often in Scripture it is taught, and what weight Scripture places upon it);
5. effect on other doctrines;
6. consensus among Christians (past and present); and
7. effect on personal and church life.

These criteria for determining the importance of particular beliefs must be considered in light of their cumulative weight. The whole impact on your hearers and readers should be considered collectively in determining how important an issue is to Christian testimony and

fellowship. Thoennes writes, “The ability to rightly discern the difference between core doctrines and legitimately disputable matters will keep the church from either compromising important truth or needlessly dividing over peripheral issues.”

I personally place in the category of twig-and-leaf truths such convictions as the following: various schemes of church government; the meaning of the millennium; ideas about the relation between church and state; watching TV on the Lord’s Day; exclusively singing metrical psalms in corporate worship; employing musical instruments other than an organ in Sunday worship; singing exclusively unaccompanied; what version of the Bible you use; what collection of manuscripts from the Greek New Testament you

champion; whether you drink alcoholic drinks; whether you celebrate Christmas; whether you go to movies; and whether your church holds to a large old confession of faith. I consider such convictions to be understandable but generally see them as twig-and-leaf beliefs. Holy obedience to God does not require that other Christians be enthusiastic about all of my convictions, however dearly I hold them. I am hardly ever asked about such things. Do not make a rejection of twig-and-leaf beliefs a ground for isolating yourself theologically.

Our priority is the system of Christian teaching that is summarized in the great confessions of faith in both their moral

and theological statements. Biblical unity with these priorities promotes love and fellowship among believers. We actually meet one another in those gatherings and sing praise together. “An evil man is ensnared in his transgression, but a righteous man

sings and rejoices” (Prov. 29:6). We are united in Christ. In His great prayer, the Lord prayed that we might be one (John 17:21). Paul exhorts:

[Be] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Eph. 4:3–6) ☩

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Walking as Children of the Light

IVER MARTIN

THERE IS NOTHING VAGUE about what Paul has in mind when he directs his readers to “walk as children of the light” (Eph. 5:8). For one thing, anyone familiar with the Old Testament would instantly recognize the imagery of the Israelites’ being led through the wilderness by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. This great column was nothing less than the presence of Yahweh, who had “come down” to accompany and guide His covenant people. The light was God Himself, personally opening up the way in front of them as they made their way to the promised land.

For New Testament believers, it is no different. They, too, have the presence of God in the person of the Holy Spirit, the same God who has now condescended to accompany, guide, and nourish His new covenant people as they walk an often difficult path. So when Paul directs his fellow believers to “walk as children of the light,” he is specifically thinking of the reality, presence, and power of God in us and among us.

For Old Testament Israelites, to live each day in the near presence of God also meant a lifestyle that conformed to His law. As they listened to and submitted to Yahweh, their personal and corporate conduct was to

be different from that of the pagan nations that surrounded them, and therefore, their lifestyle was a witness. Their consecration to the living God was a visible sign of His reality. For New Testament believers, it is no different. The regenerate life means a new way of living: a new Godward life and new lifestyle.

Paul’s description of the unbelieving world as “the sons of disobedience” (v. 6) provides an important context for what it means to walk in the light. If darkness means disobedience, then “walk[ing] as children of the light” clearly means obeying God. The light that guided the Israelites was the God who gave Moses His law, so walking in the light as children of obedience meant being guided and directed by God’s commands. Which, in the New Testament, raises the question, Obedience to what?

For too many Christians, obedience to law is regarded as merely an Old Testament concept. But for the Apostle Paul, the law, while futile as a way of salvation, when understood as the guide by which God’s regenerate people are to live, takes on a whole new meaning. For Christians, God’s law, instead of being discarded, comes to life as the clear guide by which redeemed people should live.

Anyone in any doubt as to the abiding

place of the Ten Commandments in a New Testament context needs to read the letter to the Romans. For one thing, Paul expresses his admiration for the law in the most positive terms. He calls it “holy and righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12). In another verse, he asks a crucial question: “Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law” (3:31). In yet another verse, Romans 6:17, Paul puts it as clearly as this: “You . . . have become *obedient from the heart* to the standard of teaching to which you were committed” (emphasis added).

Obedience “from the heart” is therefore the key to living in the light of God’s directives. God our Father has not only loved us but has placed a new love in our hearts toward Him and His will.

Therefore, the outcome is an end to our hostility toward His law because, through the gospel, He has removed our resistance to it. We now read it differently, not as rebels, but as children, though with an imperfect yet genuine “heart obedience” to the Great Commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind” (Luke 10:27).

In the light of the gospel, “heart obedience” to the Great Commandment means that we are consecrated exclusively to the only living and true God, the God who loved us and gave Himself for us. As His new creation, we have become an adoring people, for whom worship is not a chore but a deeply rooted pleasure.

The other commandments are similarly welcomed by God’s regenerate people. We want to avoid anything that might become an idol in our hearts. In our times, the sheer

number of potential distractions from singular devotion to God is breathtaking. Walking in the light means a disciplined navigating through many voices that will too easily occupy our affections and draw us away from Jesus. As transformed people, we approach God reverentially and make good and healthy use of the day that has been recognized as the Lord’s, treasuring the privilege and pleasure of worshiping with others and enjoy-

ing the good things that He has provided. Heart obedience means a life of faithfulness to our spouses and control of our sexual impulses. It means respect for one another, the sanctity of life, and personal safety. It means the securing of property, the guarding of our integrity, and thankful contentment with what God has given us.

WALKING IN THE LIGHT MEANS A DISCIPLINED NAVIGATING THROUGH MANY VOICES THAT WILL TOO EASILY OCCUPY OUR AFFECTIONS.

It’s tempting to imagine that there’s a particular method to respond to the unique challenges of the twenty-first century. Understanding the times is helpful, but our first responsibility is to continually listen to God’s voice and respond with obedience from the heart. Whether navigating the murky waters of first-century Rome or the complexities of the twenty-first-century West, the light in which Christians are commanded to live doesn’t change. The Bible is God’s manifesto for every age, and living by it will not only ensure our safe passage but send a powerful message to the surrounding culture. “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

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Longing and Contentment

ERIK RAYMOND

WESTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC was long built around consonance—notes that fit, harmonies that resolve quickly, and dissonance used only to sweeten the return to stability. But in the last couple of centuries, composers began to push against that order. Some delayed resolution, others stretched tension to the breaking point, and many used unresolved chords to echo the anxiety and injustice of their age.

By the twentieth century, some pieces ended without resolving at all. The music stops, but your ear never gets the final chord it longs for. The result is intentional discomfort—dissonance that hangs in the air.

Life in a post-Genesis 3 world feels much the same. We crave the harmony of Revelation 21 but instead encounter confusion, contradiction, and pain. It's like living inside a modern symphony where the tension won't resolve. This makes us restless. We may even wonder whether the divine Composer knows what He's doing. Contentment feels elusive.

This unresolved tension is not imaginary; it's the reality of living east of Eden. Yet the God who governs all things has not left us hopeless or helpless. Ecclesias-

tes meets us in this dissonant world—not to silence the tension but to teach us how to trust Him within it. As we listen to the Preacher, we begin to learn what contentment looks like for people who long for the world to be made new.

UNDERSTAND YOUR CONTEXT

How would you describe the world? It's not an easy question. The answer shifts with the day. Some days feel like a major chord; others slide into minor. Life under the sun tastes sweet and bitter in alternating bites—full of joy, full of ache, full of longing for something more.

The Preacher calls this life “under the sun,” and his repeated conclusion is that it's vanity. He chooses a word that is intentionally difficult to pin down. It's vapor—there for a moment, then gone. He walks through the world and keeps finding things that don't quite make sense. He scratches his head, asks hard questions, and admits that life often feels more like a riddle than the kind of story we wish we were living.

Why? Because this isn't heaven. Something foundational is crooked (Eccl. 1:15). We want the world to carry the full weight of our desires, but it can't. Ultimately, it's not home, and it's not

meant to be. So we become restless and weary, longing for somewhere better and something fuller.

The first step toward contentment is simply acknowledging this: The world cannot

ious, or envious? What conditions provoke grumbling in the heart?

Ecclesiastes, once again, proves to be a faithful companion. The Preacher helps us see the cracks—both around us and with-

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bear the freight of your deepest needs and desires. It's too broken for that. And so are the people in it—including us.

That realization leads naturally to the next step: identifying where our discontentment comes from.

IDENTIFY SOURCES OF DISCONTENTMENT

Contentment is a word that we like but rarely define. The English Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs describes it as “an inward, quiet, gracious spirit.” Contentment is not loud, not frantic, not scrambling for the next thing. It is quiet. Steady. Grace-shaped.

And that definition also helps us diagnose discontentment. What disturbs that inward quiet? What makes us restless, anx-

ious. He also shows us the reality of our work and mortality.

Once again, the Preacher in Ecclesiastes is a good friend. He tells us the truth and helps us along.

The crooked world around us. Sometimes discontentment grows simply through our looking at the world. Things are not the way that they should be.

Some people spend their lives trying to do what's right yet face hardship after hardship. Meanwhile, others live wickedly and seem to prosper (8:14). It feels backward.

Suffering runs rampant. Many who suffer do so quietly, without anyone to comfort them (4:1–3). Leaders who are supposed to



promote justice sometimes use their authority to harm (5:8). Courtrooms meant to defend the innocent can become places where justice is twisted (3:16).

Life under the sun feels out of tune. The world's dissonance unsettles us, and we long for resolution. That longing, if left unguarded, breeds discontentment.

The conflicted hearts within us. But the world is not our only problem. There is tension inside us, too. Our desires, motives, and relationships fracture easily.

We know it theologically and experientially: Our hearts are selfish. There is no one who doesn't sin (7:20). And this isn't due to some flaw in God's design; He made humanity upright, but we've wandered (v. 29).

That internal bent shows up everywhere. Envy and rivalry motivate far more of life than we'd like to admit (4:4). Fear of failure isolates us. The Preacher imagines a man who works endlessly yet cuts himself off from others, and his isolation deepens his wound (vv. 7–12).

So we work harder. But work doesn't give us what we want, and we feel the sting of exhaustion layered on top of loneliness. Our own hearts sabotage us. It's miserable.

The frustrating and fleeting work that we do. Work matters, but it can't become our identity or our measure of worth. Ecclesiastes reminds us that there is no lasting gain from all our toil (1:2). The harder we try to squeeze meaning from it, the more discouraged we grow (2:18–23).

Even when work leads to financial gain, that gain isn't a guarantee of joy. In fact, it can introduce new anxieties. Sleep—one of life's simplest gifts—can slip through our fingers (5:10–12).

Unmet expectations pile up. Disappointments stack. Anxiety grows. This, too, is a picture of discontentment.

The unsettling fragility of life. Running underneath all this is the quiet reminder that our time is limited. The Preacher tells us plainly: Death comes to the wise and the fool alike (2:14–16). We all return to the dust (3:19–20).

As mortality comes into view, we feel pressure. We take stock of what we have done and what we haven't. We feel the window closing. We try to climb faster. But as we push harder toward achievement, we discover how far off true wisdom still is (7:23–24).

We try to summit the hill of our accomplishments, but the climb drains us. Then we turn around and face the headwind of our mortality, and our souls groan. We discover—again—that contentment rooted in this world is sheer vanity. It cannot hold us.

So what do we do? How do we find contentment in a world of unsatisfied longings?

PRIZE THE GIFT THAT GOD GIVES

In Ecclesiastes, the Preacher shows us how to live in a world with dissonance. He doesn't remove life's troubles, but he points us to truth.

What truth? In a world that seems futile, you can find meaning by fearing God and enjoying the gifts He gives.

Count and enjoy your blessings. He gives us the ability to enjoy the little things in life (2:24–26; 3:12–13; 5:18–20; 8:15; 9:7–10). The Preacher doesn't erase the problems, but he points us to joy in the midst of them.

It's good to count our blessings. In fact, you should make a list of everything you have that you don't deserve and then another list of everything you don't have that you do deserve. When you look at the list of blessings, you'll be reminded that the Lord has richly blessed you. If you need extra reminders, don't forget that all have sinned and, on their own, deserve hell. For those of us forgiven and alive in this world, what we encounter is far better than we deserve.

Hear the chorus. But there's still a nagging question: When will the dissonance end? When will the tension finally be removed?

While the Preacher doesn't answer this fully, the Apostle Paul does. He tells us that God has subjected all of creation to futility (Rom. 8:20). This is the same vanity that the

Wait with hope. This shared longing drives us to wait with patience and trust (vv. 23–25). No matter our circumstances—whether we have little or much—we can endure with contentment because our hope rests in the God who never changes and remains faithful (Phil. 4:11–13).

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Preacher highlights. Yet God does this “in hope” that creation one day will be set free from its bondage (vv. 20–21). There is hope. The tension will be removed when God ushers in the new creation in its fullness.

Until then, we long. We groan. But we are not alone. All creation groans (v. 22), and the Holy Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words (v. 26). Our longing echoes this groaning creation, forming a kind of chorus that cries out for renewal and redemption.

As we enjoy the small gifts of life while longing for what's to come, the dissonance lifts just a bit. We lean in closer to listen, anticipating the day when the notes will resolve perfectly. We may not hear the full consonance yet, but we trust the Composer and the promise of our heavenly home. ■

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