

1 Peter 3:8-12

CALLED TO BLESSING

How many times have people hurt you deeply by things they've said and done? What is your reaction when they do this to you? If you're at all like me the hurt may fuel instant anger and a desire for retaliation. The thought of hurting them as much or more than they've hurt you can be very appealing. There was also a time in my life when I would not hesitate to retaliate to such hurt with a vengeance. And do you know how I felt after doing so? I simply felt miserable. I still felt the hurt and on top of that I felt an anger and rage that wouldn't go away. No matter how badly I could hurt the person who hurt me, it didn't give me a feeling of relief to retaliate.

Peter taught that believers should offer a sincere blessing¹ to those who hurt them, not just one muttered through clenched teeth. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:22—2:12 that this sincere blessing should flow out of sincere love. There is a close relationship between giving and receiving a blessing, according to 1 Peter 3:9. We will see how this plays out later in today's message. We will also see in verse 10 how "*Enjoying life*" and seeing "*happy*" or "*good days*" is the miraculous possible outcome of faith and obedience in the midst of life's problems.

We sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts and lives by doing the will of His Father, as we'll see in verses 13-16. "*Sanctify*" here means to set aside for a special purpose. Peter continues the discussion in verse 20 concerning suffering for the sake of righteousness. He pointed out that believers who maintain a clear conscience while suffering unjustly will put their critics to shame.² We'll get to that next week. Now let's see exactly what Peter is teaching us in today's passage.

1 Peter 3:8-12 NLT:

8 Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude.

*9 Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, **pay them back with a blessing.** That is what God has called you to do, and he will bless you for it.*

*10 For the Scriptures say, "If you want to enjoy life and see many happy days, **keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies.**"*

¹ Blessing includes such goods as vitality, health, longevity, fertility, and numerous children and descendants..

² Hughes, Robert B. ; Laney, J. Carl ; Hughes, Robert B.: Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Tyndale House Publishers, 2001 (The Tyndale Reference Library), S. 691.

11 Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace, and work to maintain it.

12 The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right, and his ears are open to their prayers. But the Lord turns his face against those who do evil."

Peter calls us to “*be of one mind*” in verse 8. Another translation of that verse calls us to “*all be harmonious.*” Harmony in music means the various parts go well together, and produce a pleasant sound; the parts are not dissonant or working against each other. This may well grow out of Peter’s experience at Pentecost where, as we learn in Acts 2:1 the disciples were “*of one accord*” in the same place, the upper room, when the Holy Spirit came upon them. It also reminds us of Paul’s injunctions to the people in Philippians 1:27 NLT, where he writes:

27 Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News.

..and in Philippians 2:2-5 Paul says:

2 Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

3 Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.

4 Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

And James continues this reasoning as he describes the attributes of Christ in James 3:17 NLT:

17 But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere.

Perhaps you’ve already recognized that love is a recurring theme in Peter’s letters, not only God’s love for us, but also our love for others. Peter had to learn this important lesson himself, and he had a hard time learning it. Jesus had great patience with Peter on more than one occasion. And during Jesus’ trial, when Peter denied he even knew Jesus, what did Jesus do later? He made it perfectly clear that He had forgiven Peter. How tremendously blessed Peter must have felt when Christ gave him opportunity to affirm and re-affirm his love for Jesus (John 21:15-17).

All of God's people should show love and forgiveness to one another. Human relationships are fulfilled in love and provide many opportunities to forgive. This applies to every Christian and to every area of life. This love is evidenced by a *unity of mind* (Philippians 2:1-11). Unity does not mean uniformity; it does not mean that we think and act the same, like a community of robots. Unity means cooperation in the midst of diversity. The members of the body work together in unity and harmony, even though they are all different. Christians may differ on how things are to be done, but they must agree on what is to be done and why. A man once criticized D.L. Moody's methods of evangelism, and Moody said, "Well, I'm always ready for improvement. What are your methods?" The man confessed that he had none. "Then I'll stick to my own," said Moody. Whatever methods we may use, we must seek to honor Christ, win the lost, and build the church.

So we've seen that one evidence of love among Christians is *harmony* or *unity*. Another evidence of love is *compassion*, which is a sincere feeling for the needs of others. Our English word "sympathy" comes from this word. We dare not get hardhearted toward each other. We must share both joys and trials (Romans 12:15). The basis for this is the fact that we are brothers and sisters in the same family.³ We learn in 1 Thessalonians 4:9 that we are "*taught of God to love one another.*"

Love reveals itself in a tender heart toward others. In the Roman Empire this was not a quality that was admired; but the Christian message changed all of that. In today's world we are overwhelmed with so much bad news that it is easy for us to get numb to almost any kind of feeling. We need to train ourselves to be compassionate, and actively show others that we are concerned about their needs. Peter in verse 8 also calls us to be *humble* as we show love. Another translation of this could be to say that our love will be courteous. Now being courteous involves much more than acting like a polite lady or gentleman.

Humility is the foundation for courtesy, for the humble person puts others ahead of himself or herself; it is totally lacking in arrogance of any kind.

Not only should we love God's people, but we should also *love our enemies* (1 Peter 3:9). Christ had taught this concept in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:43-47) and now Peter is showing clearly some ways to practice it. The recipients of this letter were experiencing a certain amount of personal persecution because they were doing the will of God. Peter warned them that official persecution was just around the corner, so they had better prepare. The Church today had better prepare as well, because all the indications are that difficult times are ahead for us too.

As Christians, we can live on one of three levels. 1) We can return evil for good, which is the satanic level. 2) We can return good for good and evil for evil, which is the human level. Or, 3) we can return good for evil, which is the divine level. Jesus is the perfect example of this latter approach as we learned back in 1 Peter 2:21-23. Peter told us:

³ 1 Peter 1:22; 2:17; 4:8; 5:14.

21 For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.

22 He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone.

23 He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly.

As God's loving children, we must do more than give "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (Matthew 5:38-48), which is the basis for *justice*. We must operate on the basis of mercy, for that is the way God deals with us (Ephesians 4:32). Mercy includes forgiveness.

This must have meant a great deal to Peter himself because he once tried to fight Christ's enemies with a sword (Luke 22:47-53). Paul, before his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus, used every means possible to persecute the Church. But after he became a Christian, Paul never resorted to such tactics when fighting God's battles.⁴ When Peter and the Apostles were persecuted, they depended on prayer and God's power, not on their own wisdom or strength (Acts 4:23ff). What a tremendous model for us today.

We as believers in Christ and God's children are called to inherit a blessing. "Blessing" is a very misunderstood word in our culture today so let's take a few minutes here to try to define it. When you hear many people using the word *blessing* these days they are often using it synonymously with "good luck" or "*feeling happy.*"

If we look at how the word *blessing* is used throughout the Scripture, we see that the term is used in several ways. One of the meanings is an expression of grateful praise. When God has done something good for us and we want to say "Thank you," we praise Him. In that way we are blessing God. When people give praise, honor, and glory to God they are blessing Him. For instance, the psalmist called us in to Psalm 103:1-5, 20-22, NAS:

1 Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name.

2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits;

3 Who pardons all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases;

4 Who redeems your life from the pit; who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion;

5 Who satisfies your years with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle.

20 Bless the LORD, you His angels, Mighty in strength, who perform His word, obeying the voice of His word!

21 Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, you who serve Him, doing His will.

22 Bless the LORD, all you works of His, in all places of His dominion; bless the LORD, O my soul!

⁴ Romans 12:17-21; 2 Corinthians 10:1-6.

When Christ, took the five little loaves and two fish from the young boy and used it to feed the 5000 (Matthew 14:16-19; John 6:9-11), He first took the bread in His hand and *blessed* it or gave thanks to God for it and for the miracle God was about to perform.

So giving thanks to God can often be a way of providing a blessing for other people.

So we often use the word *blessing* to describe the many good things God provides for us daily, whether material things such as sunshine, food, air to breathe, water to drink, or most importantly, the spiritual blessings including: love, joy peace, improved relationships, closeness with God, and answered prayer.

We see, therefore, that there are 3 kinds of *blessing*: 1) God blessing people; the most supreme blessing of all being the grace God gives us to receive Christ as our personal Savior and having the Holy Spirit within us at all times, to guide, teach, and strengthen us. 2) people blessing God by giving Him thanks and praise; and 3) one person blessing another person. We have written records of such blessings in both the Old and New Testaments, including the passage we're looking at today.⁵

Peter in these verses in chapter 3 links blessing with suffering. The suffering we experience on earth today only adds to that blessing of glory in Heaven some day. Jesus said in Matthew 5:10-12 NLT:

10 God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

11 "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers.

12 Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.

But we also inherit a blessing today when we treat our enemies with love and mercy. We should love one another, love our enemies, and *love life* (1 Peter 3:10–12). By sharing a blessing with our enemies, we receive a blessing ourselves. Persecution can actually, believe it or not, be a time of spiritual enrichment for a believer. The saints and martyrs in Church history all bear witness to this fact. The news of impending persecution should not cause a believer to give up on life. What may appear to be "*bad days*" to the world can be "*good days*" for a Christian, if he/she will only meet certain conditions.

Verse 10 begins by stating: *For the Scriptures say, "If you want to enjoy life."* Here Peter looks back to the Psalmist in Psalm 34:12-16 to support his teaching that this Spirit-directed and empowered way of denying oneself for others is what really provides a life of blessing, the outcome of which is

⁵ Genesis 9:26, 27; 27:27-29, 39-40; 49; Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:28, and 1 Peter 3:9.

protected and guaranteed by God. In these verses Peter is giving practical principles for living peacefully in a hostile pagan culture.

King David, long ago in the Old Testament, gave us the secret for a successful life when he wrote in **Psalm 34:12-16 NLT**:

12 Does anyone want to live a life that is long and prosperous?

13 Then keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies!

14 Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace, and work to maintain it.

15 The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right; his ears are open to their cries for help.

16 But the Lord turns his face against those who do evil; he will erase their memory from the earth.

Peter quoted His statements in chapter 3 from Psalm 34:12–16, which describes what God means by “*happy days*.” They are not necessarily days free from problems, for the psalmist wrote about fears (Psalm 34:4), troubles (Psalm 34:6, 17), afflictions (Psalm 34:19), and even a broken heart (Psalm 34:18). A “*happy day*” for the believer who wants to “*enjoy life*” is not one in which he/she is pampered and sheltered, but one in which he/she experiences God’s help and blessing because of life’s problems and trials. It is a day in which he/she shouts praises to the Lord (Psalm 34:1–3), experiences answers to prayer (Psalm 34:4–7), tastes the goodness of God (Psalm 34:8), and senses the nearness of God (Psalm 34:18). The next time you think you are having a “*bad day*,” and you hate life, read Psalm 34 and you may discover you are really having a “*good day*” to the glory of God!⁶

There are three major emphases in 1 Peter 3:10-12, which come from Psalm 34:

1) Whoever desires to love life must not speak evil

First, we must deliberately decide to love life. This is an act of the will. It is an attitude of faith that sees the best in every situation. We can decide to endure life and make it a burden, escape life as though we were running from a battle, or enjoy life because we know God is in control. Peter was not suggesting some kind of unrealistic mental gymnastics that refused to face facts. Rather, he was urging his readers to take a positive approach to life and by faith make the most of every situation.

Verse 8 contained a listing of Christian characteristics that keep a tongue from speaking evil. Christians are to be like minded. Christians are urged to be sympathetic, loving one another. Christians are to be compassionate and humble. The language Peter uses here stresses the importance of Christian qualities which keep the Christian from cheating and

⁶ Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Pe 3:8

taking advantage of others.

We must control our tongues. Many of the problems of life are created by using the wrong words, spoken in a harsh manner. Every Christian should read James 3 regularly and pray Psalm 141:3 daily. James 3 NLT says:

1 Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly.

2 Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.

3 We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth.

4 And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong.

5 In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire.

6 And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.

7 People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish,

8 but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison.

9 Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God.

10 And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right!

11 Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water?

12 Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring.

13 If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom.

14 But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying.

15 For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.

16 For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind. 17 But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere.

18 And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a

harvest of righteousness.

..and Psalm 141:3 NLT prays: *“Take control of what I say, O Lord, and guard my lips.”*

Peter knew first hand the sad consequences of blurting out things without thinking first. There is no place for this type of conduct in the life of a saint, and there is also no place for lying as well.

2) Do not repay evil with evil

This is the message in verse 9. Verse 11 tells us to Turn from evil. This means that there is to be no retaliation against those who have hurt you.

Listen to Paul’s words on this same subject in Romans 12:17-20 NLT:

17 Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable.

18 Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” says the Lord.

20 Instead, “If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.”

Jesus taught this same law of love in Matthew 5:39: *“If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”* This is easy to talk about, but much harder to actually do. In fact, I searched for several hours trying to find some current illustrations of people obeying this verse. And it was extremely difficult to find any. We can think of Elizabeth Elliott and Rachel Saint whose husbands were martyred by the Auca Indians in Ecuador almost 50 years ago, leaving these two women widows with young children. And what did they do? They returned to the same tribe of Indians who had killed their husbands and ministered to them, eventually winning them to the Lord. Then there is the following story, which was originally told by Jim McGuiggan in *Jesus, Hero of Thy Soul*:

An army sergeant and his buddies were all "hard men"; none harder than one corporal. But then the corporal gave his life to Christ and was baptized. He was transformed: no more booze, foul language, brawling or lascivious stories. The soldiers were first amused, then skeptical, then awed. But eventually they began to provoke the corporal with insults, jeers, vile jokes, bawdy songs, drunken truculence and threats of violence. One day the men returned from a long day's march, mud covered and bone weary. The sergeant pulled off his boots and collapsed on his cot. Glancing across the tent, he saw the corporal down on his knees by his cot. Irritated, he grabbed a muddy boot and flung it at the man, hitting him on the shoulder. The corporal continued to pray. Now the sergeant,

incensed, grabbed the other boot, and flung it hard at the praying man's head. It struck home, and the corporal grunted and rubbed and rubbed his head ... and prayed and prayed.

Later the sergeant wakened to find the corporal gone and his own filthy boots shined and polished, sitting by his cot. That, said the sergeant, was the last straw. He, too, turned to God.⁷

3) Rather than returning evil for evil, Christians are to seek peace and pursue it, according to verse 11 of 1 Peter 3.

In verse 9 Peter told us that peace is pursued by returning a **blessing** when someone insults us. "*Blessing*" (*eulogountes*) here means to speak well of someone.

In Matthew 5:44 Jesus said, "*Pray for those who persecute you,*" and Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 4:12: "*When we are cursed, we bless.*" This is the compassionate way in which Christians should pursue peace. As a result, again according to verse 9, believers inherit a blessing. Look back at verse 9: "*Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will bless you for it.*" And just what is that blessing? Look back to 1 Peter 1:4; "*we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay.*" What more of a blessing could anyone ask for than eternity in a perfect place?

We must do good and hate evil. It is not enough for us to avoid sin because sin is wrong; we ought to avoid it because we hate it.

In Matthew 5:9, In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: "*Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.*" If a Christian goes around looking for trouble, he or she will find it; but if they go around seeking peace, they can find that as well. This simply means that a Christian does not create problems because he or she wants to have his or her own way.

But what if certain people take advantage of us? A Christian might ask. "*We may be seeking peace, but they're looking for a fight.*" Peter gave them the assurance that God's eyes are on His people and His ears open to their prayers. We need to work hard at trusting God to protect us and provide for us, for He alone can defeat those who are looking for a fight.

Verse 12 said "*The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right, and his ears are open to their prayers.*" The "*eyes*" and "*ears*" of the Lord are figures of speech,⁸ which

⁷ Adapted from *Jesus, Hero of Thy Soul* (Howard, 1998). And quoted as Corporal Punishment (from *Christianity Today* online. Men Of Integrity.net, Nov/Dec, 2000, Thursday, Nov. 16 <http://www.christianitytoday.com/moi/2000/006/nov/14.14.htm>

⁸ Anthropomorphisms

attribute human physical characteristics to God. Here the figures emphasize God's watchful care and never ending attention to His people's needs. What did Peter say back in chapter 2, verse 25? "*Once you were like sheep who wandered away. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls.*"

1 Peter 3:12 is a sobering verse in some ways. Because while it contains the glorious promise that God hears the prayers, the cries, of His children and He responds to them, it also contains a grave warning. "*The Lord turns His face against those who do evil.*" Please note, this is written to Christians, not to unbelievers. Are you wondering why your prayers are not being answered? While there could be a number of reasons, one important reason that you cannot overlook is that you are not living as God wants you to live. You are not practicing what Peter has been talking about in these verses. David knew this truth well, when he wrote in Psalm 66:18-19 NIV:

*18 If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;
19 but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer.*

As Peter wrote in chapter 1 verses 15 and 16 we are to be holy. We are to let the Holy Spirit work in our lives so that we can follow the guidelines Peter has been giving us. In that way we will be living the kind of life that God wants us to and He can freely answer those prayers we pray which are for the good of ourselves or others and that are in accordance with His will and His timing. When we are living as Christ wants us to live, we need have no fear of God turning His face from us and not listening to our prayers.

Our Lord was called the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). When we turn to Him to be our Savior from sin, He empowers us through the Holy Spirit to be what He calls us to be. However, we must constantly yield our hearts and lives to the power and control of the Holy Spirit if we want to walk in the paths that Jesus calls us to. God told His people that when they were obedient to Him, He would cause them to live in peace with even their enemies (Proverbs 16:7); and in Romans 12:18 we are told that as much as we can we are to live in peace with others. But wouldn't peace be the crowning blessing when we can follow these guidelines Peter has given us?