

1 Peter 3:9-12

Introduction

After Peter's introduction to his letter (indicative and imperative), he introduces the main body, and certainly one of the main themes of his letter with these verses:

- 1 Peter 2:11–12 — **Beloved, I urge you** as sojourners and foreigners to abstain from the cravings of the flesh, which wage war against your soul, **keeping your conduct among the Gentiles good**, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your **good deeds** and give glory to God on the day of visitation.

The emphasis here is on how we're to live in relationship to the unbelieving world around us as the sojourners and foreigners that we are; and, specifically, how we're to live in relationship to a world that even speaks evil against us as evildoers. Peter says we're to keep our conduct among the Gentiles "good"... that they may see our "good deeds." And then he goes on to describe the "good" that we're to do before the Gentiles as a fearless submission that's the ultimate expression of our freedom in the Gospel.

- **"Submit yourselves** to every human creature [**even to Nero's and Pontius Pilate's**]... For this is the will of God, that **by doing good** you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people." (2:13, 15)
- **"Slaves, submit yourselves** to your masters [**even to "unjust" masters**]... For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if **when you do good** and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God." (2:18, 20)
- **"Wives, submit yourselves** to your own husbands [**even to "disobedient" husbands**]... You are [Sarah's] children, **if you do good** and do not fear anything that is frightening." (3:1, 6)

Do you see the constant theme of "doing good" in the context of submission to unbelieving, Gentile authorities – especially to those who are unjust and actively disobedient to the Word? But what about the Christian who happens to be in a place of authority? What about Christian husbands?

- "Husbands, live [in the marriage relationship] according to knowledge, bestowing honor on the female as the weaker vessel, as also heirs together with you of the grace of life in order that your prayers may not be hindered." (3:7)

Did you notice that none of the major ingredients in the last three sections are present here? There's nothing about submission, the wives are actually Christians and not unbelieving Gentiles, and Peter never says anything about "doing good." That's not to say that husbands don't do "good," but Peter reserves this language of "doing good" for the lifestyle that we live in relation to the unbelieving, Gentile world around us. So, when Peter addresses the husbands in verse seven, there's a sense in which this is a major break from the main theme. His main theme has been vulnerable Christians living under pagan Gentile authorities. But even though the husband is not vulnerable in this way, and even though he's not called to do "good" in the

context of submission, he's still accountable to the very same Gospel truths as is his wife. So Peter begins his conclusion to this entire section with these words in chapter three, verse eight:

- “Finally, **all of you** [whether husband or wife, male or female, master or slave, parent or child, rich or poor, young or old, in authority or under authority—all of you], be like-minded, sympathetic, loving-the-brothers, tenderhearted, low-minded.”

Here's the common ground between the Christian wife and the Christian husband. They're *both, equally*, to be characterized by all of these things: being like-minded and low-minded, sympathetic and tenderhearted, loving the brothers and sisters – and, of course, that means loving each other. They're both, equally, to live out these identical Gospel realities in the very different contexts of submission and God-given authority.

Peter's still assuming relationships between Christians – between brothers and sisters in Christ. We've all been begotten anew by the same Father through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3), and so that means that now, even though we all have different stations in life, we're all brothers and sisters in the same family. **And yet**, there's also a sense in which we all have the **same lot and station** in this world **when it comes to the unbelieving Gentiles around us**. And that's because all of us, equally, are sojourners and foreigners in the world, and by definition to be a sojourner and a foreigner is to be more vulnerable; it's to be more exposed to oppression, and persecution, and unjust treatment. And so what Peter is wanting us to see is that there's a sense in which we can all find ourselves in the same boat with that Christian slave of an unjust master or that Christian wife to a disobedient husband. If we thought the lot of those Christian slaves and Christian wives was difficult—and even, in the flesh, impossible—then what we need to realize is that their lot and their calling is, in a sense, the lot and the calling of us all. The world may unite in treating us unjustly as sojourners and foreigners, in insulting and reviling, in slandering and mocking, or with any other kind of persecution. And then what? How are we supposed to respond when these things happen? And the answer is this: No differently than if we were a Christian wife living with a disobedient husband, and no differently than if we were a Christian slave bound to a harsh and unjust master. The radical, “impossible,” supernatural calling of the Christian slave and the Christian wife is actually identical to the divine calling upon each and every single one of us living as sojourners and foreigners in a hostile world. And so now, in his conclusion, Peter picks up again the main theme that he's had throughout this whole section – the theme of doing “good” even when—and **especially** when—we're being treated unjustly. After his exhortations to the Christian slave of an unjust master and the Christian wife of a disobedient husband, Peter writes:

I. 1 Peter 3:9a — Finally, **all of you**... Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling...

If, in our fleshly, sinful nature, we didn't all **want** to repay evil for evil and reviling for reviling would we have to have this command **not** to do it? Whenever there's a negative command in the Bible (“do not”), the first thing we should do is let that command be a window into the true nature of our own sinful hearts – revealing to us in crystal clear, high definition who we all are and what we all are apart from Christ. So this is what we just need to know about ourselves: When I'm treated badly, my “natural” fleshly instinct is always to repay that evil in kind. Maybe we're thinking to ourselves that that's already obvious and self-evident; but doesn't that only

confirm the full extent of our depravity? We need to really understand what this says about our hearts and our daily need for the transforming power of the Gospel in our lives – even if we’re not daily being treated badly. When I’m reviled—insulted, slandered, accused, or mocked—my “natural” instinct (the instinct of the “old man”) is always to give back exactly what I’ve been given – to insult, or slander, or accuse, or mock in return. Do we know this about ourselves? And does it cause us to be humbled and to feel the total helplessness of our flesh?

What does a child do when his brother or sister hits him? He hits him back. What does he do when his brother or sister says something unkind? He says something unkind back. What does he do when he’s treated badly, he treats badly back. We were all children and these are the things we all did; but the exact same sin nature that was in us then is still in us now. Maybe we’ve become more “sophisticated” – more subtle and more secretive, and even more “self-controlled,” but God sees our hearts. We may not give back on the outside, but we’re often giving back on the inside, very often without ever really admitting it to ourselves – imagining, wishing, hoping.

It’s amazing how wonderfully friendly and nice and kind and considerate we can all be – until the moment that I’m treated wrongly; until the moment that someone insults me or treats me unjustly. But Jesus said that doing good to those who are good to us and treating kindly those who are kind to us is no better than what the Gentiles do and may, in the end, say absolutely nothing at all about the condition of our hearts. (cf. Lk. 6:32-34) It’s only how we respond when others treat us with evil intent that we’ll have that genuine litmus test of who we are inside. Given the right trigger, given the right set of circumstances, that part of us that we’re able to keep hidden so well even from ourselves may very easily and quickly be exposed.

So, this is our Lord’s command: “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling.” But how is this possible? How can I not even be imagining that repayment or wishing for it in my heart? How can it be possible that there isn’t anything even lying hidden in my heart? In the end, there’s only, ever, one way.

II. 1 Peter 3:9b — Finally, all of you... Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may inherit a blessing.

Instead of repaying evil for evil or reviling for reviling we are, instead, to bless those in the world who treat us badly – to bless those who insult us and slander us and mock us. If there was ever anything that ran counter to our flesh, this would be it. We are to sincerely desire and pray for God’s mercy and His grace and His kindness and favor to be upon the very people who have attacked us and treated us wrongly. We’re to sincerely want and pray for their peace and their well-being.

We may feel, at first, that this is even more impossible than the first part of the command (“do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling”). And there’s a sense in which for the unregenerate person, it is. But for us who are “in Christ,” it’s actually this positive side to the command that makes the first part truly possible, and even in some wonderful way, “easy.” I don’t mean “easy” in the sense of “easy” in the flesh, but rather in the sense of completely and totally free in the Gospel. How does the Gospel free us to never repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling – to never give back what we’ve been given, not even in our hearts? It does this by calling us to

actually do the opposite: to bless those who treat us badly so that we might inherit the blessing that we ourselves have already been promised. That's the beauty and the power of the Gospel – of Christ in us.

The command to bless those who treat us badly doesn't come to us isolated and all by itself; it comes to us completely wrapped up in Gospel context – both in terms of our past and also looking forward to our future. (“...on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called [past], that you may inherit a blessing [future].”)

Our responsibility to be always “blessing” is **now**, in the present, but what Peter wants us to see is that this is what we were already **called to** in the **past**. (cf. 1 Pet. 2:21) What is this calling of ours? It's God's saving and redeeming call. It's the call that comes only to those who are totally unworthy and undeserving, and unresponsive, and even at enmity with God and that then transfers them out of darkness into His marvelous light. (cf. 1Pet. 1:15; 2:9) It's the “voice” of Jesus that calls all of His sheep by name so that they never fail to hear and recognize that voice and follow after Him in true saving faith. (John 10:3, 27) That's the call that Peter is thinking of here when he talks about our duty and our obligation to bless those who revile us and treat us with evil intent. And right away, maybe we're thinking to ourselves: There must be two calls – a call to salvation and blessing, and another, different call to obedience and holiness. But that's thinking wrongly. There's only one call that we've all received wholly of God's free grace, and that call is equally—both/and—to blessing and to obedience. The same gracious call that has guaranteed our blessing is also the call that enables and guarantees our obedience – that obedience without which none of us will ever inherit the blessing. (cf. Heb. 12:14) See how these two things, obedience and blessing, are both rooted in our one calling? We can never split the free and gracious and merciful calling of God into two parts; it's only one – calling us to blessing and also at the same time calling us to obedience in order that we might inherit that blessing.

So Peter says: “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, **FOR** to this you were called [past], **that you may inherit a blessing** [future].” What is this blessing that we're all still waiting and striving to inherit (*kleronomeo*) through an obedience that's empowered by God's gracious, saving call? Back in chapter one Peter wrote:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abounding mercies, has begotten us anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance [*kleronomia*] that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Pet. 1:3-5)

So now we see that returning blessing for evil is not just a mark of the super-elite, super-spiritual Christian. It's actually one of the most basic marks of all who will inherit eternal life. It's one of the most fundamental marks of every true follower of Jesus Christ who, when He Himself was hanging on the cross and suffering for our sins, said, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Lk. 23:34) **Instead** of reviling, Jesus blessed. **Instead** of paying back evil for evil, Jesus prayed for God's mercy and grace upon the very ones who mocked Him as He suffered and died. And now all the true followers of Jesus can be very easily identified as those

who do the same things because the Gospel of Jesus Christ—of their **past** calling and their **future** inheritance—has set them free to follow in His steps. (1 Pet. 2:21)

We said that to bless means to sincerely desire and pray for God’s grace and favor upon another. It means to sincerely want and pray for someone’s true peace and well-being. But this, then, assumes even more. How can we pray for someone’s peace and well-being without being motivated to **do good** to that person ourselves and to actively seek, ourselves, for his or her true welfare? The point of “blessing” can never just be our words – it also requires our actions. Peter goes on, now, in verses 10-12, to quote from Psalm 34 (vv. 12-16a):

III. 1 Peter 3:10–12 — For

“Whoever desires to love life and see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil
and **do good**; let him seek peace and pursue it.

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

Now David wasn’t necessarily thinking specifically of situations where others are doing evil to us and reviling us. But Peter’s point in quoting this Psalm is just this: Evil is always equally evil no matter to whom it’s done. Reviling is always reviling even if it’s only giving back to someone else what they’ve already given to us. In our flesh, we want there to be a difference, don’t we? But there’s never any difference at all in the eyes of God. So, when David says, “Let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil,” Peter hears this: “Do not **repay** evil **for evil** or reviling **for reviling**.” And when David says, “[Let him] do good; let him seek peace and pursue it,” Peter understands this to mean: Bless even those **who revile you** and do good even to those **who treat you with evil intent**. In other words, there are never any exceptions or qualifications to the rule of blessing and doing good. Remember, it’s only how we respond when others treat us unjustly that we’ll have that genuine litmus test of who we are inside, and therefore the assurance of both our past calling and our future inheritance and blessing.

In Peter’s quotation from Psalm 34, you can see that this blessing is what David begins and ends with; but for David—and so also for Peter—the blessing that we inherit isn’t **just** something future. David talks at the beginning about loving—or enjoying—life (**this** life!) and seeing good days (**these** days!). Who wouldn’t want that? But then at the end of the quotation, David says that the only life that’s truly full of joy is the life that the Lord watches over and cares for, and the only days that are truly good are the days of the one whose prayer the Lord always hears. This is the man, and this is the woman, and this is the child whose life and days are truly blessed. David certainly wasn’t saying that the righteous will live a carefree, pain-free life. David knows as well as anyone that that’s not true; and so does Peter. Instead, the message of both David and Peter can be summed up with these verses, also from Psalm 34:

- Psalm 34:19–20 — Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.

The Apostle John tells us that this Scripture was fulfilled in Jesus, who, even though He suffered and died on the cross, was ultimately delivered out of all His afflictions. (Jn. 19:36) Jesus knew this blessedness of living every day with the Father's eyes always upon Him and His Father's ears always open to His prayer. (cf. Heb. 5:7) Do you know this blessedness, too? I like what one commentator says:

- “The eschatological [end-times] salvation is encountered [today] as blessing because it is mediated through the active consolation[s] of God [consolations which flow to us every day through our fellowship and union with Christ].” (Goppelt)

And so we see that the reason we bless those who revile us and the reason we do good to those who treat us wrongly is not just so that we might inherit a future blessing, but so that we might taste of that blessing even today – so that we might know the assurance of the Lord's eyes upon us and that unutterable joy of knowing that His ears are always open to our prayers.

Are you one who desires to love life and to see good days? David warns us: “The face of the Lord is against those who do evil”; and Peter clarifies: “The face of the Lord is against those who **repay evil for evil.**” But then David encourages us: “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayer”; and Peter clarifies: “The eyes of the Lord are on those who bless when they're reviled and who do good when they're treated unjustly, and His ears are always open to their prayers.”

Conclusion

Remember, if we thought the lot of Christian slaves bound to unjust masters and Christian wives married to disobedient husbands was difficult—and even, in the flesh, impossible—then what we need to realize is that their lot and their calling is, in a sense, the lot and the calling of us all. The world may unite in treating us—as sojourners and foreigners—unjustly; in insulting and reviling, in slandering and mocking, or with any other kind of persecution. And then what? How are we supposed to respond when these things happen? And the answer is this: No differently than if I was that Christian wife living with a disobedient husband, or that Christian slave bound to a harsh and unjust master. The radical, “impossible,” supernatural calling of the Christian slave and the Christian wife is actually identical to the divine calling upon all of us living as sojourners and foreigners in a hostile world. So Peter writes: “Finally, **all of you...** Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may inherit a blessing.”

“The command [to bless those who desire our hurt] calls us not to a legalistic and begrudging compliance but to a confidence in the transforming power of the new birth, which allows Christians in all sincerity to speak and act toward adversaries from a heart that truly desires their blessedness.” (Jobes)

So the next time you're spoken against or treated in any way wrongly or unjustly, how will you respond?

- Exodus 23:4–5 — If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him.
- Luke 6:27–31 — Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:15 — See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

The next time you’re spoken against or treated in any way wrongly or unjustly, will this be your opportunity to experience more fully the joy of your calling and to taste more fully, even today, the blessings of your future inheritance?