

Note to Editors: There is a difference in how the translations split verses 15 and 16. The last part of verse 15 in KJV and NIV is the first part of verse 16 in CSB.

Character Counts

Session 6

August 31, 2025

*Integrity*

**The Point:** Be the same Christ-centered person at all times.

**Session Passage:** 1 Peter 3:8-17

## 1 Peter 3:8-12

**Connection to the Point.** We are to pursue goodness and righteousness rather than evil and deceit.

**1 Peter.** Simon Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, wrote this letter to various churches scattered across Asia Minor—modern-day Turkey (1:1). Peter’s purpose was to encourage these believers to stand strong in their faith even though they endured suffering and persecution for Christ.

**Be like-minded and sympathetic** (v. 8). Christians who possess integrity live the same way no matter what the present circumstances of their lives. Peter called his audience to demonstrate and cultivate certain attitudes as believers even in the midst of suffering and persecution. They were to live in harmony. To be *like-minded* is to share a common heritage of faith and ethical values. The Greco-Roman society valued this attribute as it bound people together as a cohesive community. These Christians were to be like-minded in their beliefs about Jesus. Paul challenged the believers in Rome (Rom. 12:16) and Philippi (Phil. 1:27; 2:2) to live in harmony, having a common connection through the gospel. Being like-minded did not mean that these believers would never have any differences. They had various backgrounds, spiritual gifts, and personalities. However, even with those differences they needed to promote unity, not division, in the church.

These believers were to demonstrate a *sympathetic* spirit, meaning they were to care deeply about the needs, joys, and sorrows of others. Built upon the Greek word for “passion” and the preposition meaning “together,” the Greek term for *sympathetic* means to share a common passion for one another. Sympathetic people care deeply about and show concern toward others.

**Love one another** (v. 8) translates the Greek word for “brotherly love” and challenged these believers to treat one another as respected family members. This was an important emphasis in Peter’s letter (1 Pet. 1:22; 2:17; 5:9). The theme of loving fellow believers is also emphasized in John’s Gospel (John 13:34-35; 15:12,17), Paul’s writings (Rom. 12:10; 13:8), and John’s letters (1 John 3:11; 2 John 1:5). Jesus said that loving one’s Christian brothers and sisters is the mark of true discipleship (John 13:34-35).

**Compassionate** (v. 8). The experience of the believer in having been forgiven by God at the cross should lead him or her to be merciful or tenderhearted (Eph. 4:32). Paul and John also emphasized the need for believers to be compassionate (Col. 3:12; 1 John 3:17).

**Humble** (v. 8). Humility motivates people to place the needs of others above their own (Phil. 2:3-4). While humility was a characteristic looked down upon in the first-century Greco-Roman world, Peter elevated it as a vital trait for Christians to have. Philippians 2:7-8 states Jesus humbled Himself and became

obedient to the point of death on the cross. Christians who walk with Jesus are to display this same attitude of sacrificial love toward others.

**Evil for evil** (v. 9). The Old Testament limited the extent to which persons could seek retribution upon offenders for wrongs done (Lev. 24:19-20). As tempting as it might be to strike out when experiencing evil and hatred, Jesus taught His disciples not to repay evil with evil. He commanded His followers to respond to evil, insults, and hatred with love and blessings (Luke 6:27-36).

**Blessing** (v. 9) means to speak well of someone. In the New Testament, the act of blessing someone meant providing benefits or gifts to the person blessed and/or asking God to bless the individual as well. It's very easy to respond to gossip, hurt, and/or slander in kind. However, Jesus called His followers as people of integrity to respond by blessing and doing good to their enemies (Luke 6:35-36). He set the example when He asked His Father to forgive those who nailed Him to the cross (23:33-34).

**Called for this** (v. 9). The Greek term for *called* has the meaning of to summon or invite, and by extension being called to receive certain benefits or experiences. The invitation of believers to receive salvation with all its benefits by grace through faith in Christ should lead them to be gracious and merciful toward others.

**For the one who wants to love life** (v. 10). In verses 10-12, Peter quoted from Psalm 34:12-16. Psalm 34 speaks of how God delivers those in the midst of suffering and affliction. King David wrote the psalm, and its background is when David fled from King Saul to the Philistine city of Gath. However, fearing King Achish of Gath, David faked insanity to prevent the Philistines from attacking him (1 Sam. 21:10-15). Just as God delivered David, He will deliver believers who trust in Him. While in the context of the psalm, **life** and **good days** refer to experiences in this world, in Peter's context they refer to eternal life that believers will fully experience in the age to come (1 Pet. 1:3-8).

**Let him** (vv. 10-11) appears three times in these verses. Those being persecuted for their faith should guard their tongues by not speaking evil or deceit, turn away from evil, do what is good, and seek and pursue peace. All these instructions describe a believer with integrity. In addition to having received mercy and salvation from God, another motivation for living as God expects us to live is that the Lord watches over the righteous and hears their prayers. But He opposes those who do evil (v. 12).

## 1 Peter 3:13-15

**Connection to the Point.** Rather than fear, we are to live under the lordship of Christ.

**Harm you** (v. 13). Peter made a general statement by asking a rhetorical question. *Harm* is not the normal expectation for those who do good. However, sadly, in this life that is not always the case. With the "living hope" believers have in Christ in mind (1:3-9), "Peter assured believers that nothing can ultimately harm them if they continue to walk in God's paths, that the pain inflicted on them now is only temporary, and that they will be vindicated by God on the last day"<sup>1</sup> (see Rom. 8:31-39).

**Devoted** (v. 13). This term refers to zeal, specifically to a person who is completely committed to a cause. In this context, it describes a zealous pursuit of virtue, even when faced with persecution for doing the right things. Those who steadfastly follow the ways of the Lord soon find themselves paddling upstream in relation to society, and it can lead to persecution in this life but not harm in the eternal sense.

**Suffer for righteousness** (v. 14). While people suffer for many reasons—poor choices, unfortunate circumstances, and the evil of some around them—this specific kind of suffering is for one's faith in Christ. Staying true to Jesus and His ways sometimes places the believer in the crosshairs of evil. God promises believers who suffer persecution and mistreatment because of their faith will be blessed with great reward in heaven (Matt. 5:10-12 Luke 6:22-23).

**Do not fear them or be intimidated** (v. 14) is a reference to Isaiah 8:12, in which the prophet encouraged the people of the Southern Kingdom of Judah not to fear the Northern Kingdom of Samaria and the nation of Aram who were threatening them. God promised both those kingdoms would be conquered by the Assyrians but Judah would be safe. Isaiah encouraged, "You are to regard only the Lord of Armies as holy. Only he should be feared" (Isa. 8:13).

**Regard Christ the Lord as holy** (v. 15). Peter's readers faced enemies also, but instead of focusing on and fearing their persecutors they were to *regard Christ the Lord as holy*. To regard Jesus as *Christ* is to acknowledge that He is the Messiah sent from God to save people from their sin. To regard Him as the *Lord* who is *holy* is to acknowledge Him as the supreme authority in one's life. As Jesus advised, "Don't fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). He then went on to say we can trust God, for He cares so much about us that He knows how many hairs we have on our heads (vv. 29-31).

**Give a defense** (v. 15). Christians who experience persecution should have a ready *defense* for their faith. The Greek term for *defense* was associated with the legal courts and was used in the New Testament for formal defenses before religious and governmental authorities (Acts 22:1; 25:16; Phil. 1:7; 2 Tim. 4:16). Believers should be prepared to give such a defense in any and all situations (**at any time**) and to any and all people (**anyone who asks you**).

**The hope that is in you** (v. 15). Peter began his letter by speaking of the "living hope" that God has given to believers (1 Pet. 1:3). *Hope* is a primary characteristic of the Christian life (Eph. 2:12; 1 Cor. 13:13; Titus 2:13). This hope refers to the future aspect of salvation in the age to come, a sure and certain hope which those without Christ do not have. While persecution can make life difficult, it cannot harm the eternal life that awaits believers (Matt. 6:19-21; 1 Pet. 1:3-9), and because of this Christians can live in joy, hope, and love even when being persecuted and suffering.

## **1 Peter 3:16-17**

**Connection to the Point.** A life of integrity maintains conduct that withstands any scrutiny or criticism.

**Gentleness** (v. 16). Even when Christians defend their faith before their persecutors, they are to do so with *gentleness*. Also sometimes translated as "meekness," the Greek word describes someone who has a true understanding of himself, who does not have an overly-developed sense of self-importance. The word carries the ideas of humility, courtesy, and considerateness. Gentleness was a primary characteristic of Jesus (2 Cor. 10:1). Paul told Titus to respond to everyone with gentleness (Titus 3:2). He also listed gentleness as a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:23) and urged believers to clothe themselves with gentleness (Col. 3:12). Responding with gentleness to one's persecutors does not come naturally, but through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

**Reverence** (v. 16). This Greek term can also be translated “fear.” In 1 Peter it is usually used in reference to God; it describes a reverential awe that believers should have toward God (1 Pet. 1:17; 2:17; 3:2). Proverbs teaches that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but fools despise wisdom and instruction (Prov. 1:7). As believers respond with a ready defense of the gospel, they do so fearing God, not those who persecute them (1 Pet. 3:14).

**A clear conscience** (v. 16). Since believers fear God, their concern should be keeping a *clear conscience* before God. A clear conscience requires integrity. Believers must not only proclaim the gospel; they must live out their faith in their daily lives both in public and in private. Furthermore, the presentation of the gospel must be done in such a way that if the hearer takes offense, he or she does so because of the gospel message itself, not because of something related to the presenter of the gospel. Living with a clear conscience is possible for Christians because the Spirit of God lives in us, and He convicts about sin, righteousness, and judgment, and enables us to make choices and decisions in accordance with the will and ways of God.

**Disparage your good conduct** (v. 16). Shockingly, Peter stated that unbelievers will mistreat Christians because of their *good conduct*. Since they cannot find any fault with Christians who are truly living out their faith in Christ, they will find fault with their good conduct and use those accusations to persecute believers. The Greek term for *conduct* was one Peter used to emphasize the believer’s lifestyle, the kind of conduct that is pleasing to God (1 Pet. 1:15; 3:1-2; 2 Pet. 3:11). He also used the term in regards to the empty and depraved behavior of those without Christ (1 Pet. 1:18; 2 Pet. 2:7).

**Put to shame** (v. 16). This phrase is interpreted a few ways. First, some believe that the persecutors of believers will be ashamed in this life by recognizing that they have unjustly accused the people of God of wrongdoing. Others suggest that this shame will come on judgment day at the end of this age. Both perspectives may be true. This shame can lead to either new life in Christ or condemnation for one’s sins depending on what a person chooses to do when confronted with the gospel. Some will experience shame when they see the conduct of believers and will turn to Christ. Others will reject the witness faithful Christians present; one day they will stand before God as guilty for having persecuted Jesus’s church.

**God’s will** (v. 17). Peter acknowledged that suffering for doing good, particularly in the service of Christ, is sometimes the will of God. Jesus said that in this world suffering is to be expected by believers (John 16:33). The Lord said that the servant is not greater than the Master, and Christians should expect to be persecuted as He was (15:20). But those who experience this suffering are blessed because the kingdom of God is theirs and their reward is great in heaven (Matt. 5:10-12). Jesus also encouraged His disciples to take heart because He has overcome the world (John 16:33). Despite these believers’ circumstances of being persecuted, Christ has won the victory over the world and the ruler of this world, and believers will share in that victory (John 12:31; 1 John 2:13-14; 4:4; 5:4-5).

**Doing evil** (v. 17). While suffering is an inevitable part of living in a fallen world, some specifically suffer for doing evil, and others for doing good. Peter said it was better to suffer for doing good than doing evil. He encouraged Christians to live with integrity.

1. Thomas R. Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 170.