

# GOD WITH US

## Part 11: LATER LETTERS

### Message 8 – 1 Peter

#### Testimony through Trials

#### 1 Peter 1-3

#### Introduction

Peter – what an unlikely leader for the early Christian church. He was a hard-working fisherman from Galilee when Jesus met him and invited him to be part of His core discipleship team. He felt completely unworthy (Luke 5:8-11), nevertheless, Jesus called Peter to follow Him. He rose to become the key leader among the 12 disciples of Jesus. He was a courageous man of action and faith, until the night that Jesus was betrayed, ‘the power of darkness’, Satan’s time of attack on Peter. Under great temptation leading to incredible fear and weakness, Peter ultimately denied that he even knew his Savior and Lord Jesus (Mark 14:66-72). After Jesus’ resurrection, He restored Peter and reaffirmed his calling (John 21:15-22). Peter later preached in Jerusalem during Pentecost to the Jews gathered from around the Roman empire (Acts 2:14-41), initiating the formation and growth of the early Christian church. He is highlighted in Acts 10 & 11 as the key figure opening the door for the gospel to go out from Jewish believers to the Gentile world, beginning with the conversion of a Cornelius, a captain in the Roman army. Jewish authorities marveled over how Peter could have arisen to such prominence and power, given the fact that he was “*uneducated and untrained*” in the typical Jewish educational system (Acts 4:13). Peter is testimony to the fact that *God can do extraordinary things with very ordinary people, when we place our lives in His hands to be used for His purposes.*

Peter was called to mainly proclaim the gospel to the Jews (Gal. 2:7). He wrote only 2 letters; but he also played a key role in the formation of the Gospel of Mark. Tradition tells us that Mark, who served as Peter’s assistant for many years, kept careful notes on Peter’s sermons as he preached in Rome. These sermons, outlining the key parts of the story of Jesus, became the substance of “The Gospel of Mark.” During those ministry years in Rome, there was a mixed audience that included Greeks and Romans, indicated by the way that Mark’s Gospel presented the ministry of Jesus- action based, without O.T. references, and with no birth of Jesus narrative.

The first epistle of Peter was written to Christians who were scattered

throughout the five provinces of Asia (see 1:1,2). These believers were enduring serious persecution; thus, the major purpose of the letter was to encourage them to trust God through their suffering and to make it their goal to proclaim to their world the reality of their faith in Christ even as they suffered. The theme of the letter can be stated: *Trials can become your testimony if you suffer well.*

### **Salutation: 1:1,2**

***“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure” (1:1,2).***

Note the trinitarian formulation in this salutation. All three persons of the godhead are involved in the work of salvation. Note also the linking of divine sovereignty (chosen by God) with human responsibility (to obey Jesus Christ). The recipients were Gentile and Jewish believers who were aliens or strangers having been displaced, or scattered around the Roman Empire (in the region of modern-day Turkey). The emphasis on suffering in the letter makes it clear that they were being persecuted for their faith in Christ.

### **Eternal Inheritance; Earthly Trials: 1:3-9**

Writing to people who were suffering, Peter begins by assuring them of the eternal inheritance that awaits them beyond the troubles of this world.

***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1:3-5).***

Those who are suffering in this life can be encouraged. When a person believes in Jesus Christ, we are *“born again to a living HOPE”* because of *“His great mercy.”* This “hope” is both a living present reality in daily circumstances, but is also a “hope” placed in a future eternal, secure inheritance. The heavenly inheritance is described with four modifiers all denoting security and permanence: 1) imperishable, 2) undefiled, 3) unfading, and 4) reserved in heaven.

Not only is the inheritance secure; but the inheritor is “*protected by the power of God*” until the day that inheritance is ultimately received. What a comfort for those suffering in this life to know that their reward is secure in heaven . . . and that God will bring them safely through every earthly trial to their ultimate heavenly home to receive their inheritance.

*Much like the book of Hebrews, 1Peter encourages us to cultivate an eternal perspective on our earthly circumstances. The best way to do this is to “let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you” (Colossians 3:16), for it is in God’s Word that we find heaven’s perspective on things. Take a book like 1Peter, read it every day for a month, and watch how it changes your perspective on the things of this world. It’s like tuning your heart and mind to a different channel – a channel where God’s commentary is constantly being unfolded for us.*

The reality of the earthly situation quickly comes into view as Peter acknowledges their trials.

***“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls” (1:6-9).***

“*In this you greatly rejoice*” refers to the previous passage that describes such a great salvation and future hope (1:3-5). Indeed, the believers had much to greatly rejoice about “*even though now...*” they were experiencing distress and grief while going through “*various trials.*” Peter wants them to know that they should not be distraught or feel abandoned by God. On the contrary, there is divine purpose for the suffering of God’s people. Their faith (more precious than gold), was being “*proven*” or *refined* by the fire of testing. In that day, refiners would melt gold so that in liquified form the impurities (dross) would rise to the surface and the refiner could skim it away, resulting in more pure gold. So it is with faith. God will allow certain “*fiery trials*” (4:12) to come to the lives of His children in order to purify their faith. This is very much like the message of Hebrews 12 where the writer encouraged suffering believers to see God’s hand of loving “*discipline*” behind their trials, bringing about *the peaceful fruit of*

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*righteousness* in their lives. Peter commends them for having great faith, even though they had never seen Jesus Christ. They loved Him, believed in Him and greatly rejoiced in Him.

*Are you going through a trial right now? It may not be because you are being “persecuted” as these believers were; nonetheless, trials come in “various” forms. How might God be using this trial to refine your faith and your character? What dross might He be skimming away from your heart? Ancient refiners would look to see when they could clearly see their own reflection on the surface of the molten gold. When they could, they knew the refining of the gold was complete. What aspect of God’s character is He trying to reveal more clearly in the reflection of your life?*

### **The Prophets Foretold of this Great Salvation: 1:10-12**

Peter gives a great description of how Old Testament prophecy was given and how the prophets spoke *beyond their own understanding*.

***“As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – things into which angels long to look” (1:10-12).***

Peter reminds the believers that they are enjoying the “*salvation*” in real-time, that the prophets only understood as a future experience. The Spirit of God would reveal things to the prophets – specifically here, concerning the coming of Jesus, His sufferings and exaltation. They would write them down as prophecies; but they had no idea as to the specific fulfillment of the prophecies that the Spirit was giving through them. Thus, they would study their own prophecies, after having written them under the inspiration of the Spirit, seeking to know Who or What the Spirit was predicting. All they were told was that the fulfillment would come in a later generation, not their own. Prophecy was supernatural, even for the prophets themselves. Note how Peter explains in his later letter how the inspiration of the prophets worked:

***“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2Peter 1:20,21).***

## **Admonitions to Pursue Holiness, Love and Growth: 1:13 – 2:3**

Unlike many of Paul's letters, which are organized in two clear parts – doctrine and duty – Peter's letter flows back and forth between these ideas. Here we come to the first section of admonition as to how we should live in this world, as we await the return of Christ.

**- Maintain a sober spirit and pursue holy behavior.** Several times in this letter, Peter will admonish believers not to fall back into old patters of worldly, sinful living (1:13-16; 2:11,12; 4:1-4), rather, to seek to honor God by pursuing a life of sanctification and growth. As in the book of Hebrews, there must have been a temptation to run away from trials back into a life of worldly pleasure and security.

*“Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1:13-16).*

God our Father always calls His children to become more and more like Him. He created us “in His image” in the first place (Genesis 1:26,27). That divine image was marred through sin; but through the redemptive work of Christ (His death for our sin, and ongoing work), God is restoring His image within each of us. Our responsibility is to be “obedient children” who choose to not go back into former behaviors done in ignorance. Rather, with the Holy Spirit dwelling within, we can choose to pursue “holy” behavior that reflects His holiness.

**- Live in a way that honors the price of your redemption.**

Peter echoes many thoughts found in Paul's letters. The cost of our redemption (the precious blood of Christ) should evoke from us the desire to respond to God's love by honoring Him with our lives (see Paul's parallel thought in 1Cor.6:19,20).

*“If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last*

***times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” (1:17-21).***

God is an “impartial judge” who will judge each of us, and yet as believers we get to call Him “Father.” We should live with a reverential fear of God, knowing that our salvation was costly to His Son.

Notice that Peter wants to combat false teachings about Jesus by emphasizing that He did not begin His existence when He was born into a human family. *“He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times...”* Ie: He is eternal.

The Old Testament law required the worshiper to bring a visibly “unblemished” (without defect) lamb as a sacrifice for sin. When people tried to bring their defective sheep for sacrifice, they were severely reprovved by God (see Malachi 1:6-10). Only a “perfect” offering could properly depict the perfect Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

*The love of God, demonstrated to us through the cross of Christ, should forever be our prime motivation for honoring Him with our lives. How often do you think about Christ’s sacrifice for you? Does the cross of Christ motivate you to live your life for Him? We are approaching another Holy Week, with “Good Friday” and “Easter Sunday” as the culmination. Take some time to ponder deeply the price that Jesus paid to remove your sins and to bring you back to God. How can you show Him reverential fear?*

**- Love one another sincerely.**

Becoming a believer should profoundly change the way we love one another. Notice the way that Peter describes salvation here (*purified your souls . . . you have been born again*), and how he places *fervent love for one another* in between these two descriptions of salvation.

***“Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, ‘All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever.’ And this is the word which was preached to you” (1:22-25).***

Jesus said: *“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34,35; 15:12,17).* As the apostle John put

it in his first epistle, love for God is *demonstrated* or *made evident* by the way we love one another (1John. 4:7-11).

### **- Long for more ‘spiritual milk.’**

Peter referred to the “*living and enduring Word of God*” above in relation to spiritual rebirth. Now, he emphasizes the ongoing importance of God’s Word in the spiritual growth process.

***“Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord” (2:1-3).***

Believers never outgrow the need for the pure milk of God’s Word. When we continue to feed on God’s Word, we continue to grow in respect to our salvation. On the other hand, when we stop feeding on the pure milk of God’s Word, our growth as His children is hindered.

*How strong and regular is your intake of God’s “spiritual milk?” Our spiritual growth will be directly related to our intake of God’s Word. What can you do to increase and deepen your intake of God’s Word? Is there a Bible Study group you can join? Is there a particular book of the Bible you can devote yourself to for a month? Can you follow along more closely with the Bible series by studying the commentary notes that began in Genesis? Find a way to increase your intake of God’s Word and watch your spiritual growth take off!*

### **The Chosen Race: 2:4-10**

Peter used a series of O.T. passages to explain the role of Jesus and each believer in building God’s new “spiritual house” (eg. a spiritual temple in place of the physical temple). Jesus is the stone that was rejected by the builders; but Who has become the “*chief corner stone*” in the building (references from Isaiah 8:14; 28:16 and Psalm 118:22). Old buildings still have an actual huge stone in one corner of the building, often with words engraved on it. It was the foundation of the building’s key stone that was essential to the correct structure of the building. Then the other stones could be laid. In a figurative use of this imagery, Christ represents the main cornerstone of the church, and each believer is a “living stone” placed into this new “spiritual house” of God. All believers from all of time are “living stones” of a universal “spiritual house” – the “family of God.”

***“And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living***

***stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in Scripture: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.’ This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone,’ and, ‘a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense’; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.***

The “builders” who rejected “the stone” (Christ), disobeyed God’s word and rejected His promised Messiah, therefore they crucified Him. They stumbled over Him, as He was an immovable rock. *“Unbelievers are not individually predestined to disobey God, but it is a prearranged principle that those who do disobey will stumble (i.e. spiritually fall)”* (Craig L. Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos*, p.450).

A key verse for understanding the role of Israel in the Old Testament is Exodus 19:5,6 where God called Israel to be His special nation, a kingdom of priests who would represent Him to the world through their behavior. Now, Peter uses that same idea to refer to the Church, the people of God in the New Testament.

***“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy”*** (2:9,10).

What is the purpose of the Church? Very simply, to display and proclaim the excellencies of the character of God to a watching world. God is always looking for people who want to *know Him and to make Him known.* God uses people to reach people. This has always been His method.

*How is God using you to display His character to those in your sphere of influence? God places believers in all sorts of places that need a clear display of His character. Your workplace, school, market, neighborhood, gym . . . these are all “mission fields” where God wants to reveal His character to people through you. Ask God to make you more aware of the fact that you are called to proclaim His excellencies to your spheres of influence. Ask Him how you might do this more effectively this coming week.*



## Suffering well in Difficult Situations: 2:11 – 3:7

The heart of this letter centers around suffering well – keeping one’s hope fixed on God in the midst of earthly trials. The key issue is that the believer’s greatest testimony for Christ may come while *suffering well in difficult situations*. A string of examples follows that all fit under this broad theme.

### - Responding to slanderous attacks.

***“Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation” (2:11,12).***

Verse 12 reads very much like Matthew 5:16 where Jesus told His disciples: *“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”* Peter’s message is focused in a particular way: *Let your light shine before your persecutors in such a way that as they see your response to suffering, they might turn in repentance to God and ultimately glorify Him when Christ returns.*

### - Responding to unjust governing authorities.

Even in the context of persecution, believers are commanded to submit to the authorities and to honor them. The over-arching theme of this letter comes out clearly here: the behavior of believers *in the face of persecution*, can become their greatest witness: *“by doing what is right you may silence the ignorance of foolish people.”*

***“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish people. Act as free people, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king” (2:13-17).***

Note the strong connections with Paul’s teaching concerning the believer’s responsibility toward governing authorities (Romans 13). The early Christian Church found the balance between holding firmly to their convictions while maintaining an *“honoring”* stance toward the very authorities that were perpetuating the persecution. When necessary, they could obey God and disobey civil authorities *in a way*

that still showed they honored and respected kings and governors.

This is an important issue to discuss today, as it seems that many people, calling themselves 'Christians,' display dishonoring and disrespectful attitudes toward governing authorities. (Remember, Nero the Emperor was persecuting Christians, so it was in that context they were admonished to submit). What can you do to promote a 'respectful' and 'honoring' demeanor toward governing authorities, even if/when you strongly disagree with the views and policies of those authorities? How can you encourage those in your friendship circles to "honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king" (1Pet.2:17)?

### - Servants responding to difficult masters.

The way that Peter discussed servant-master relationships fits precisely within the wider theme of seeing *unjust treatment* (trials) as an opportunity to *display the excellencies of God's character*. This explains why, unlike Paul, Peter gives no attention to the duty of masters; but only to the servants of oppressive masters.

***"Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God" (2:18-20).***

It is easy to show respect toward a nice teacher, a kind boss, a friendly government officer, etc. But Christians are called to show respect toward 'authorities' that are not easy to submit to. Is there a leader in your life that is somewhat difficult for everyone to respect and honor? How might God use you to display Jesus by honoring a difficult leader in way that is counter-culture?

### - Christ showed us how to respond in the midst of suffering.

The suffering and death of Jesus is discussed by Peter not only as an atoning sacrifice for human sin, but, as *an example of how to suffer well, turning our trials into our testimony*. The emphasis falls on HOW Jesus behaved while suffering under unjust treatment.

***"For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who***

*committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls” (2:21-25).*

Peter’s central message here is that Jesus showed us how to suffer well. He has left us an example to follow in His steps.

- He did not sin or speak deceitfully.
- He did not repay those who reviled Him with reviling speech.
- He did not threaten those responsible for His suffering.
- He kept entrusting Himself to His Father, the righteous Judge of all.

This, says Peter, is how believers are called to endure persecution and hardship in this world. Only in this way can persecuted believers “*silence the ignorance of foolish people*” (2:15). Note: This is the only place in the New Testament that makes multiple references to the ‘suffering servant’ passage of Isaiah 53.

#### **- Wives responding to difficult husbands.**

On first reading, we might wonder why Peter did not give equal space to how husbands should love their wives (as Paul did in similar passages such as Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3). Keeping in mind the overall emphasis of 1Peter (how the believer’s response to hardship can become a testimony of faith), we see his intention. He is addressing in particular women who suffering in marriages to difficult (*disobedient to the Word*) husbands. In other words, the person bringing hardship to the believer is, in this case, the husband. By their quiet and godly response, these women might “*win their husbands without a word.*”

*“In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Your adornment must not be merely external – braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without*

***being frightened by any fear” (3:1-6).***

*Note: We will discuss the ‘wives’ example in-depth in the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the 1Peter commentary.*

While unbelieving husbands were in view above (3:1), believing husbands are given one strong admonition as to how to love and honor their wives.

***“You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered” (3:7).***

Literally, “live with your wives according to knowledge” (of their unique personality and needs). The idea of the woman being “weaker” has been interpreted in two different ways. Some understand this to mean *physically* weaker, but a reference to physical weakness does not make much sense contextually, or further Peter’s argument in any useful way. Others detect a reference to the woman’s *heightened relational and emotional sensitivity*. The woman is more “tender” than the man, and more easily wounded by harshness. In the context of trials brought on by harsh husbands (3:1), this idea makes much more sense. *Husband, live with your wife according to knowledge of her specific personality and needs. Treat her kindly knowing that she wounds easily when you are harsh. And grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life. If you don’t, God will not hear your prayers!*

### **A Summary of how believers are to love one another: 3:8-12**

Peter has focused on how believers respond to those who are making their lives difficult. Here, he returns to a them initiated at 1:22, namely, how believers are *to live in harmony with one another in the family of God*. He quotes from Psalm 34 to support his main idea: If you want God’s blessing on your life, make sure you are seeking to walk in His ways, especially showing humility toward one another.

***“To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind-hearted and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. For, ‘The one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. He must turn away from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.’”***

### **Be willing to suffer for doing what is right: 3:13-17**

Peter returns to the theme of suffering. Several times he mentions suffering “*for what is good,*” “*for the sake of righteousness,*” “*for doing what is right,*” rather than “*for doing what is wrong.*” He has mentioned this before (2:19,20). There is no testimony for Christ when we suffer for doing what is wrong. Yet, when we do what is right and suffer unjustly, “*we are blessed.*”

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

Believers can stand confidently in the face of suffering and persecution because we have a HOPE that carries us through the difficult storms of life. It is only because of this “living hope” (1:3,13,21; 3:5,15) that we can shine the light of God’s love to those who try to intimidate and shame us for our behavior. Verse 15 reads literally: “*Do not fear their fear!*”

It is common for Christians to use 1Peter 3:15 as support for the idea of Christian “apologetics” – i.e., developing arguments to defend the Christian faith against opposing ideas. It is true that the Greek word *apologia* (*defense*) is used here; but the context has nothing to do with debates against competing ideologies. The context is that of suffering unjustly and experiencing harsh treatment. In the context of suffering, the Christian is to be ready to give an *explanation* as to why he/she is suffering in such a dignified, non-hostile manner. With gentleness and reverence (in the face of harsh, irreverent treatment), the believer is to explain his/her hope and confidence in Christ.

How does a Christian have a gentle and respectful demeanor in the face of ill-treatment without being a complete doormat? This is the challenge. There is place for speaking truth to others in a Christ-like demeanor when appropriate. Then there is guidance in the Book of Proverbs about not answering or debating with a “fool”, lest you become like them in your attitudes, words, behavior. For further study on “the fool” in Proverbs, do a search on line using any search engine, or Bible concordance. In the case of certain authorities, you may not have the ‘right’ to say anything, but God certainly hears your prayers for wisdom. Read Romans 12:14-19 - these verses clarify Peter’s challenge to us.

**A final thought:** Ignatius was a Christian leader in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. The way he wrote about the Christian’s response to persecution serves as a fine commentary on Peter’s first epistle. Ignatius counseled the Ephesians to *“allow them [their persecutors] to be instructed by you, at least by your deeds. In response to their anger, be gentle; in response to their boasts, be humble; in response to their slander, offer prayers; in response to their errors, be steadfast in the faith; in response to their cruelty, be civilized; do not be eager to imitate them.”* Making Jesus known, in the face of persecution, *“is not a matter of persuasive rhetoric; rather, Christianity is greatest when it is hated by the world”* (Letter to the Romans 3.3).

### Discussion Questions

1. What have you learned from 1 Peter about suffering and persecution?
2. How have you seen your own faith “purified” by trials (1:6-9)?
3. How does the example of Jesus, in suffering, speak to you (2:21-25)?
4. Is God giving you a current opportunity to turn a great trial into a great testimony of your hope in Christ?