

Called to Blessing to Inherit Blessing

1 Peter 3:8-18

Intro

Throughout the letter, Peter repeatedly wrestles with the question, What is the Christian response to reviling and slander and other forms of evil? What is the Christian response to suffering? Peter continues to answer this, looking to encourage Christians as the genuineness of their faith is more and more refined (1:7).

You Were Called To This

The main point of this particular passage is that Christians are *called* to live in the way that Peter describes. This is evidenced by a pattern set up in the previous sections. In each, Peter gives instructions and grounds them in God's call for His people ("this is the will of God" – 2:15; "for to this you were called" – 2:21; "likewise" to wives – 3:1; "likewise" to husbands – 3:7). Peter brings it all together ("finally") in 3:8. He describes again, but more broadly, what the Christian life or attitude is like, emphasizing that God's people have been *called* to live this way. This calling is not dependent on how Christians are treated. Other people's sin does not excuse a Christian from living according to his calling.

Compare the things Peter lists in 3:8 with 2:1. Peter says to put off malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and evil speaking—attitudes and ways of speaking that are sinful and bring division, even between closest friends. These are often sins committed in retribution to protect oneself, to make oneself look respectable. In contrast, Peter lists another five things that describe the way Christians should be. He again grounds this in the fact that they have been called to this (3:9). Christians are to be single-minded, compassionate, loving as brothers, tenderhearted, and lowly-minded for three reasons; three reasons to not return evil for evil but to bless.

Inherit Blessing

Peter assumes that people will revile you. The Christian responds to this by blessing, anticipating that he will inherit blessing. This is the first reason Peter gives for living this way. This is not, however, a claim to have earned this blessing. Something that is inherited is not earned. In fact, understanding that this blessing is only a gift of God, a gift from the Father to His children, enables you to bless more freely. You have been given much and will be given more. Therefore, give lavishly instead of lashing out.

Peter quotes from Ps. 34 to confirm his point. David wrote this Psalm when God had delivered him from his enemy Abimelech (or Achish – 1 Sam. 21:10-15; Ps. 34). David, on the lam from Saul, found himself driven before his second worst enemy. David feigned madness, and Abimelech, in God's providence, drove him away instead of executing him. And David, still fleeing the wrath of Saul, writes this Psalm. David was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22) and knew what it meant to seek peace and pursue it, to do good in return for evil (1 Sam. 24, 1 Sam. 26, 2 Sam. 1). So Peter quotes from this particular Psalm to further his point of what it means to be a Christian.

Shame the Revilers

Although he assumes a normal course of events when you live well, Peter also acknowledges that sometimes Christians suffer for righteousness' sake. So in this context,

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Peter says Christians should bless the revilers way that the revilers may be put to shame. When Christians live out their faith, the world around them notices. Peter calls on Christians to be ready (having a reason, meekness, fear, and a good conscience) to give a defense when they are questioned about the hope that is in them, no matter what the circumstance is.

A central piece to these verses is the idea of fear. In v. 14-15, Peter quotes from and alludes to Is. 8:12-13. This comes in the context of Isaiah's warning to Ahaz, King of Judah, about trusting in and fearing the king of Assyria rather than God. Throughout the Bible, fear and worship are tightly linked. You worship and obey whomever you fear. In the story of Ahaz (2 Kings 16, 2 Chron. 28), Judah was threatened by Israel and Syria. Instead of trusting in God and turning to Him, Ahaz paid tribute from the treasures of the temple to the king of Assyria in a plea for help, because he feared the power of men. He also worshipped other gods because he thought they were stronger than the true God. But the Lord says not to fear the threats of men. Instead, "The Lord of hosts, Him you shall hallow; let Him be your fear." David similarly writes, "Come you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord" (Ps. 34:11).

Peter shows that Christians ought to dole out shame to those who mock them, not by reviling in return, but by blessing and preaching the gospel. This is because those who revile and threaten fear false gods. If they are brought to shame, they are ripe to be brought to fear God. Notice too that people threaten with things they think should frighten. But a Christian has no need to fear their threats, because we fear the true God. And this fear is not crippling, but rather invigorating. We fear God, not because He is harsh and evil, but because He is so holy and so good. He is the kind of God and Father who enables people to fear Him by becoming like them and dying for them.

Because of Christ

Instead of alluding to other Old Testament stories, for his final reason Peter sets Jesus up as an explicit example for us to imitate. We should bless instead of returning evil for evil because this is what Jesus did when He went to the cross. Notice what Peter highlights particularly this time. Jesus, the just, suffered for the unjust to bring us to God. Jesus suffered so that those who reviled Him would be put to shame. That's all of us. Each of us, left to ourselves, would revile Christ. We would slander Him. But, He died for us, and He uses that shame and guilt of our sin, our recognition that we are separated from God, to draw us to Himself. And in doing so, He brings us to God.

Not only is Jesus the example for us, He is the means by which we accomplish this. It is only the blood of Christ that makes us righteous so that the eyes of the Lord look on us favorably as His sons and daughters. It is only by our baptism into His death and into His life that we can claim before God a clean conscience. So why does Peter encourage Christians over and over in this letter to bless those that curse them and spitefully use them? Why should Christians bless when they suffer? The answer is ultimately because Jesus died for you and set this pattern for you, you get to imitate Him.