

## How Shall We Live?

### Meditation on 1 Peter 3:13-17 — The Need for Apologetics

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How shall we live? This question has been asked by believers throughout the ages in one form or another since Old Testament times. The first time that this question was asked in this format can be found in Ezekiel 33:10: “Now as for you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus you have spoken, saying, ‘Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive [that is, live]?’”<sup>1</sup>

In more recent years the late, Francis A. Schaeffer asked the question, “*How Should We Then Live?*”<sup>2</sup> And the question was asked again by Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey in their book *How Now Shall We Live?*<sup>3</sup> The need for apologetics is at the heart of this question. How are believers to live their lives so that those around them can see the difference that Christ has made in their lives?

I shall pose this question neither as Schaeffer did nor as Colson and Pearcey did for a distinct, yet crucial reason. How shall we live is stated in this manner because there is a

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<sup>1</sup> *New American Standard Bible* (LaHabra, CA: Lockman Foundation, 1995 update). All Scripture quotations are from the NASB, 1995 update, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1999).

distinct way Christians are to live their lives day in and day out from the point of their conversion all the way to their ultimate glorification. It is not merely, how shall we *then* live, because posing the question in this way appears to imply a conditional state that one may choose not to live according to God's design for the Christian. Posing the question as Colson and Pearcey did suggests that believers can ignore how they live until they make the decision to live their lives differently.

There are, in fact, numerous passages of Scripture that answer the question at hand. But the passage of Scripture to which I want to draw attention is 1 Peter 3:13-17. In order to understand the selected passage, it is crucial to have an understanding of its context. The theme and purpose of 1 Peter can be found in 5:12. Peter wanted to encourage his readers to stand firm in the grace of God in the face of suffering and persecution. Furthermore, Peter desired his readers to live "triumphantly in the midst of hostility without abandoning hope, becoming bitter, losing faith in Christ, or forgetting his second coming."<sup>4</sup> The following is an outline for the book of 1 Peter:

#### Opening (1:1-2)

- I. Called to Salvation as Exiles: Suffering Christians Should Remember Their Great Salvation (1:3-2:10)
  - A. The Certainty of Their Salvation (1:3-12)
  - B. The Consequences of Their Salvation (1:13-2:10)
- II. Living as Aliens to Bring Glory to God in a Hostile World: Suffering Christians Should Remember Their Example Before Men (2:11-4:6)

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<sup>4</sup>John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Peter* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2004), 10.

- A. Living Honorably Before Unbelievers (2:11-3:7)
- B. Living Honorably Before Believers (3:8-12)
- C. Living Honorable in the Midst of Suffering (3:13-4:6)
- III. Persevering in Suffering: Suffering Christians Should Remember Their Lord Will Return—Coming to Grips with Christian Suffering (4:7-5:11)
  - A. The Responsibilities of Christian Living (4:7-11)
  - B. The Reality of Christian Suffering (4:12-19)
  - C. The Requirements of Christian Leadership (5:1-4)
  - D. The Realization of Christian Victory (5:5-11)
- Conclusion (5:12-14)<sup>5</sup>

From the outline one will notice that in 2:11-3:12, the Apostle Peter describes the attitudes and actions that should characterize God’s children toward both unbelievers and believers. Then in 1 Peter 3:13-4:6, Peter elaborates on how God’s children should live in an evil and hostile world in the face of persecution and suffering.

I would like to focus specifically on 1 Peter 3:13-17. There are three primary points that need to be made about this particular passage, which I am quoting in full below:

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

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<sup>5</sup>This particular outline of 1 Peter is an adaptation of three different outlines that can be found in the following sources: Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1990); MacArthur, *1 Peter*; and Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2, Peter, Jude* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003).

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 (1 Peter 3:13-17 NASB).

The points are: First, know that you are blessed (3:13-14a). Second, trust in Christ (3:14b-15a). And finally, be ready to give an account (3:15b-17).

#### KNOW THAT YOU ARE BLESSED (1 Peter 3:13-14a)

Common sense seems to tell individuals that, if they obey the law(s), they will be protected from punishment. However, this is not always the case. Peter is not telling his readers that if they do *right in the eyes of humans*, they would escape from unfair and unjust treatment. Later on in this letter (3:20), Peter will make this point: Believers can in fact do right and can still expect that they may suffer ill treatment.

The phrase *even if you should suffer* is worded in such a way in the original language that Peter is thinking of an event that could be considered highly unlikely to happen, but still possible. Peter wanted God's people to be prepared for the possibility of persecution; and furthermore, Peter wanted to tell believers how they should react if they find themselves in the midst of suffering and persecution.<sup>6</sup>

How shall Christians live when in the midst of suffering? What follows is the answer to this question.

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<sup>6</sup>See 1 Peter 4:12-15 and Matthew 5:11. In 1 Peter 4:12-15, Peter warns believers more directly of the forthcoming suffering and persecution that they will face in the future.

### TRUST IN CHRIST (3:14b-15a)

In 3:14b, Peter alludes to Isaiah 8:12-13. He is counseling God's children not to be afraid of the persecution. Rather than fearing their enemies, believers are told to trust in Christ as their sovereign Lord, who is in absolute control of all things. Furthermore, Peter is recalling Christ's words: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both the soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

Peter tells God's children in 3:15a to replace fear with faith and reverence. When Christians acknowledge Christ as their Lord and Savior, they recognize his holiness and sovereignty, and they are able to rest and find refuge in him. Thus, the believers' hearts would be filled completely with Christ, leaving no room in their hearts for fear. Furthermore, when Christians set apart Christ as Lord, they acknowledge that he is in control of all events and that all powers and authorities ultimately must answer to him. Christ is the sovereign King of Kings and Lord of Lords.<sup>7</sup>

### BE READY TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT (3:15b-17)

When believers have Christ set apart in their hearts, the courage Christ gives them ought to make them constantly ready to testify about him. Christians are to live out the hope that is in them in such a manner that others can see it. Christians are to live lives distinct from the unbelieving world. This is the only way that unbelievers can see that there is something different about Christians. If believers live their lives as the world lives, how is the lost world going to see the hope that Christians have in them?

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<sup>7</sup>Grant Osborne, series editor, *Life Application Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Peter and Jude* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1995), 96.

Christians are commanded always to be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks for an account of their hope. In other words, every Christian should be able to clearly explain his reasons for being a Christian. The believer's response should be both *reasonable* and rational.

*What does a reasonable and rational response mean?* The believer's explanation for why he is a Christian needs to be presented in a logical and coherent manner. Christianity is both a logical and coherent worldview. As followers of Christ, Christians are called to be different from the world. This means, not only living a lifestyle that is different from the world, but also *thinking* differently than the world. Hence, Christians need to develop a distinctly Christian philosophy or worldview. Christians are told that they are to take every thought captive, and the only proper way Christians can be obedient to this command is to have a distinctly Christian philosophy.

The mind of the unbeliever is distinctly different from the mind of the believer. The mind of the unbeliever is at enmity with Christ. Furthermore, the unbeliever's mind is foolish and deceived (Romans 1:2ff). In Colossians 1:21, the apostle Paul describes the unbeliever as being "alienated and hostile in mind." Thus, the unbeliever is not capable of upholding God's greatest commandment, which is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). Thus, the unbeliever despises both the wisdom and instruction of God (Proverbs 1:7; Romans 3:18). Hence, the unbeliever is incapable of realizing any of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are found in Christ (Colossians 2:3).

The philosophy of this world is not only deceptive, but it is also hopeless. The Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 4:17-18 that unbelievers walk "in the futility of their mind,

being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart.”

The wisdom of God is nothing like the wisdom of this world. The apostle Paul makes this point clear in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31. Thus, the question comes up: since the wisdom of God is nothing like the wisdom of this world, can Christians use philosophy to aid them in articulating their reasonable and rational response to those who ask for an account? Depending on to whom this question is addressed, the answer can be no or yes.

There are two primary passages of Scripture to which believers sometimes appeal to support the idea that Christians should abandon all use of philosophy, all attempts to form a Christian philosophy, or even a Christian philosophical outlook. However, people often distort the original meaning and purpose of these texts. Thus, they distort the relevance of the texts for the modern-day believer.

The first text that is often cited and distorted is 1 Corinthians 1-2. In these two chapters, the Apostle Paul argues against the wisdom of this world and that he did not visit the church at Corinth with persuasive words of wisdom. As J. P. Moreland notes, “some conclude from this that human reasoning and argument are futile, especially when applied to evangelism.”<sup>8</sup> There are two primary problems with the interpretation that Moreland criticizes. First, if this passage were to be understood in this particular manner, it would contradict Paul’s own method of apologetics and reasoning as found in the book of Acts (e.g., Acts 14:14-17; 17:22-31), as well as his philosophical appeal to the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. In all of these instances, Paul is clearly making use of rational and philosophical argumentation. Second,

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<sup>8</sup>J. P. Moreland, *Love the Lord Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1997), 58.

the primary purpose of this particular section of Scripture is to argue against the *prideful* use of philosophy, i.e., autonomous reasoning, and not against the use of philosophy.

The second passage that is often cited by those opposing the use of philosophy is Colossians 2:8. Here Paul writes “see to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ” (NASB). This passage has been used to support the argument that Christians are to avoid secular studies, especially those of philosophy. But when one reads this verse in context, one will notice that Paul is warning believers against a distorting type of philosophy, a philosophy that is empty and deceptive. When one sees this verse in its full context (all of Colossians), one will see that Paul is warning “the church not to form and base doctrinal views according to a philosophical system hostile to orthodoxy.”<sup>9</sup> In fact, by studying philosophy, one can learn how to avoid empty and deceptive philosophies because the individual will recognize the logical errors and fallacies in arguments.

The primary distinction between Christian philosophy and the philosophy of the world is found in the foundation for epistemology. The foundation for Christian philosophy is founded upon the knowledge of Christ. Christ, himself, is the only source of truth and knowledge. John 14:6 states that Christ is “the way, the truth, and the light.” Thus, all knowledge begins with Christ, and Christ is the standard of true philosophy.

Furthermore, Christians cannot be naive in their reasons for being a Christian. Part of the responsibility of Christians is to know how to respond clearly and comprehensively to those who raise questions or criticisms against Christianity. In order for the Christian to be able to do

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<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 59.

this task effectively, the believer must be able to critique other worldviews and philosophies.

And studying philosophy is the best way a believer can prepare himself or herself to know how to raise objections to other worldviews to show the inconsistencies within them. Apart from faith in Christ and recognizing Christ as the source of truth, all other philosophies are flawed.

*In what manner shall Christians respond when questioned about the hope they have?*

1 Peter 3:8 tells believers to be sympathetic, brotherly, kind hearted, and humble in spirit. 3:9 tells Christians that they are not to return evil for evil. In 3:15c, Peter tells believers that they are to respond with gentleness and reverence. In 1 Peter 3:16, he goes on to tell Christians to stay humble; therefore, they should not be prideful with their responses. Their conscience should be filled with God's desires.

*How can believers follow Peter's advice to keep a clear conscience?* First, Christians can treasure their faith in Christ more than anything else and do what they know is right. Second, believers can avoid willful disobedience. Third, if Christians do disobey, they should stay in consistent communication with God, repenting and asking for forgiveness.

*Why is there all this concern about right living and clear conscience?* The reason for this concern is because believers live in a hostile world. Christians should not give their accusers ammunition to bring more charges against them by breaking the law(s) or acting and speaking in an ungodly manner.

If Christians are to suffer, it should never be for wrong doing (3:17). Why would it be better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil? Because, Christ suffered unjustly so that people might be saved, so believers ought to patiently endure unjust suffering because such an attitude is a powerful witness that could lead unbelievers to Christ (3:18).

How shall we live? Christians are to live lives distinctly different from the world. Christians are to be ready at all times to give an account for their faith in Christ. The response that Christians give should be both reasonable and rational. Peter's words in 1 Peter 3:15 regarding *be ready to give a defense* is not for only some Christians. *All* believers are to be ready to give a defense. All Christians are called to be apologetists.

*Soli Deo Gloria.*

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