

## Lesson 18: Securities Against a Hostile World

**1 Peter 3:13-17, “Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.”**

It's coming. I don't think that was a flare for the dramatic, I think we all see how rapidly our culture is changing before our eyes. It always my goal to attempt to be a few months ahead of myself in my writings, so I'll bet that the temperature of society has risen against Christ even more than the day I wrote this. The culture all around is seemingly barreling downhill without a driver, crashing and banging all over and bouncing off of everything. The demonic influence on our society today is in full effect, so much that I wonder if we'd make Sodom and Gomorrah blush. Like Romans 1:18, our society has suppressed the reality of God, and the effect of that wickedness has been the tossing out of all logic and wisdom. Our society can no longer define basic terms like 'good' and 'evil', 'man' or 'woman'. We have devolved to a record-low level of chaos and disorder. Now that our society has studied the periodic table of elements long enough, they've apparently been able to conclude that God (who is spirit) is not real. Now that society has a solid grasp on science (the systematic study of the physical world through observation, and the testing of theories against evidence obtained) they are able to conclude with perfect certainty that miracles are fairy tales. A miracle, which by nature is God's suspension of the physical laws that He created, is now disproven as untrue because we can't scientifically re-create a miracle in a laboratory. Years ago, it was considered a scientific argument, a logical argument, to say that every effect had a cause. But now, if anyone would dare assume that the cause of creation is a Creator, their reputation and career are ruined. The point that I'm trying to get at is that we're living in a world that is deeply divided, but it's far more than a political battle of right verses left. We're living in a world that is dominated by God-hating people. Now that society has 'proven' to itself that God is dead, all order and logic is tossed aside as nothing more than archaic, racist, oppressive language. What's left now is a world that is tail spinning in to imminent disaster, and the people who's faces are on the wall as public enemy number one are the followers of Him.

Throughout world history, Christians have faced much physical persecution. Thankfully, we have not faced much to any of that here in the West, but I'm not convinced that it won't be here soon. The temperature is rising. It's coming. The tactic of Satan in the last decade has been to attach hateful labels to Christians. The demonic forces of today work to subtly remind our culture God is not real, were nothing more than a much of sack of cells that have evolved to this point after millions of years. Demonic influence has convinced many that Christianity is laughable, and disgusting. Adherents to Christ are considered as racist, homophobic, oppressive to women's rights, and flat-earthers. The tactic is to breed hatred at even the thought of Christ. As a teacher, I must remain careful to teach the Word and not my opinion, but if I could share my opinion, I believe if the world carries on another decade or two it will become very dangerous to be a Christian. I fear what laws will be passed when this godless next generation grows up into power. The teenage generation today is the first in the West to have seemingly no knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our next generation needs to be evangelised to the same degree that a Missionary would desire to find an unreached people halfway around the world.

Now that I have attempted to set the table regarding the hostile world that at least I observe everyday, let's turn from my thoughts to God's Word and learn how we find security while we navigate through a world that is increasingly more hostile to Christ. Verse 13 of our text says, **"Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?"**

This is a rhetorical question, because harm of all sorts typically does not fall upon people for doing good. Peter has just spoken about seeing 'good days', and for Christian to be 'doing good'. We've spent the last lesson articulating what living and loving the good life really is, so I think we get what Peter is talking about when he writes about being zealous for what is good. 'Good' is a life that is characterized by the fruit of the Spirit, of which 'goodness' is one of those fruits. Galatians 5:22-24, **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."** Goodness is a person who seeks to put on the Spirit of Christ, and mortify the old flesh. As we think about every attribute of the fruit of the Spirit, we could spend one Sunday considering each one, we see a person who lives for others and not themselves.

All across scripture we are implored to do good. Galatians 6:9-10, **"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."** God sees that our generosity is a part of what it means to be zealous for what is good, 2 Corinthians 9:6-8, **"The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work."** Do you remember that your salvation had nothing to do with your good works? The root of your salvation has nothing to do with your goodness today, your goodness today is the fruit of your salvation. Ephesians 2:8-10, **"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."** What does Paul pray for the Colossians? That they grow in the knowledge of the Lord, which grows up into doing good, Colossians 1:9-10, **"And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."** Notice how selfless goodness is in 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15, **"And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone."** Riches have a way of taking our eyes off of the Lord, and causing us to find our comfort and security in our bank account, or our ability to provide for ourselves. Paul has a word to the rich in 1 Timothy 6:17-19, **"As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life."** We could go on and on finding verses that command us to pursue goodness in our walk with the Lord. A Christian life that void of goodness is a person who has deceived themselves that they're following Christ. When people see the humility, the selflessness, the generosity, the kindness, the self-disciplined

lifestyle of serving others first, they are disarmed. Does this mean that harm never comes to those who do good? Actually yes, that's where we're headed in this lesson, but for the most part, our goodness will be a winsome characteristic to the most hardened opposers of Jesus Christ.

Peter goes even further than doing good, he mentions being zealous for doing good. It's one thing to affirm something as good, it's better to love something that's good, it's next-level to be zealous for what is good. In the sports world we call them fans, short for fanatics. The definition of a fanatic is "a person filled with excessive and single-minded zeal". The fan clears their schedule to make sure they're watching the game. The fan knows the team inside and out. The fan loves the team during the good and the bad. The fan defends the team when other fans 'trash talk'. The fan wears the apparel. Nothing annoys the fan more than the person who enjoys their team from the fringe, "*Hey, you're not a fan. You don't do [insert any of the previous things I've just mentioned].*" Maybe you're passionate about cooking. I love food. I know, that's shocking you. I love Mediterranean cuisine. My face lights up when I get the opportunity to express how much I love using and tasting those spices. Every bite of Mediterranean cuisine is like a party in my mouth! I love and enjoy it so much that I'm propelled to share it with others! Maybe it's gardening for you, or woodworking, whatever it is you have a passion for something in your heart that can help you relate to the zeal Peter is after! Don't just love good, LOVE good! Be intentional about loving good, be enthusiastic about good, chase after goodness like you can't get enough goodness in your life. There is an extremist quality about being zealous for good. Peter had a friend who shared his name (Simon) who was a member of 'The Zealots'. Simon, the one trained under the order of the Zealots, was trained to do whatever is necessary in order to bring about the freedom of the Jews, whether that be stealing, or assassinating someone, or even putting yourself in death's way. Simon (later called Peter) knew all too well how passionately Simon the Zealot trained and disciplined his body in order to execute at the highest level. Peter understood that this was the level of intensity and zeal that the Christian was to put into what is good.

This zeal for good will produce much delight both in the heart of the believer, as well as spilling over into the lives of many who imitate, but this zeal for good will also bring about the persecution of those hardened against Jesus Christ. Peter goes on in verse 14, **"But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled."** Jesus guaranteed His followers that they will be hated for His sake. Matthew 10:24-25, **"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household."** Jesus, the One who did nothing but good His entire life, the One who did nothing with even a taint of evil, was murdered because the world was repulsed by the good that they saw in Him. Matthew 27:22-23, **"Pilate said to them, 'Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?' They all said, 'Let him be crucified!' And he said, 'Why? What evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Let him be crucified!'"** Peter is careful then to warn these believers that it is quite possible that they will suffer like Christ did for righteousness sake, and that even if they did, it would bring about a blessing to them.

Many in that early church era, including Peter himself, did suffer at the cost of their own lives for following Christ. Peter was among the group in Acts 5:40-42, **"And when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and**

preaching that the Christ is Jesus.” The first martyr for Christ is Stephen, recorded in Acts 7:54-60, “Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” There was the suffering of believers by the man who would later go on to write two-thirds of the New Testament, Acts 8:1-4, “And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.” James lost his life, and Peter was imprisoned (and later crucified according to Church History) in Acts 12:1-5, “About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.” There was the brutal mistreating of Paul and Silas recorded for us in Acts 16:19-24, “But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, “These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.” There is the account in the very next chapter of Paul and Silas in the house of Jason in Acts 17:1-9, “Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.” And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.” Hear Paul’s speaking about his former life to King Agrippa in Acts 26:1-11, “So Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.” Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense: “I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going

to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. **"My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities."**

This was the warm welcome that following Christ received in this world! As I read those texts, I see people flocking to Christ in droves because are promised wealth, healing, a fixed marriage, and obedient children! In reality, we read of people being called by Christ to follow Him to their death many times, and the rules and reality have not changed for us today. By God's providence, we have not been born into a society that threatens our physical life for following Christ, but we will certainly suffer when we unashamedly follow Christ with all our heart. That suffering Peter says in verse 14 will bring a blessing from God. Sometime next year we will get to this verse, but in 1 Peter 5:10, Peter describes what some of that blessing looks like, **"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you."** James, who as we just read was executed for following Christ, wrote about the blessings within suffering at the beginning of his epistles in James 1:2-4, **"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."** Paul saw the unending work of Christ in His heart while he suffered, he wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, **"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."** The Lord Jesus promised John (and the rest of us) blessing in regards to the end of his (and our) suffering in Revelation 2:10-11, **"Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death."** This blessing for suffering is promised by the Lord Jesus Christ to every believer in Matthew 5:10-12, **"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."**

Back to our text in verse 14, directly after reminding us of the blessing for being persecuted for our allegiance and obedience to Christ, Peter commands us to **"Have no fear of them"** (our persecutors) **"nor be troubled."** I must admit, this is a verse that I struggle with! When I create scenarios in my mind where physical persecution is upon my life, or my families life, I get scared. But yet here we are

commanded once again not be intimidated by those who would persecute us. Consider Psalm 118:6-7, **“The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? The LORD is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.”** Listen carefully to the words of our Lord in Matthew 10:26-33, **“So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”** Can we face this in our own strength, thankfully no! I’m so glad that when (or if) that day will come, that I will stand in the Lord’s strength against that adversity. We’re to serve the Lord courageously!

Peter continues in our text in verse 15, **“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy.”** To be ‘holy’ is to be set apart from all else. In respect to our God, this means that He is categorically unlike everything else in creation. Therefore, when we consider who we will bow the knee to in submission, it cannot be both the Lord and something else. When we listen to instruct to follow, it cannot be both a word from Him and someone else. We must fear only God, and not mere foolish men. God alone must sit on the throne and be adored with no rival in our hearts. He is worthy of our complete attention. This honoring of Christ is internal first and will bear fruit in external worship. This is the heart attitude of worship that will be in full-effect, and on full-display, at the moment of our persecution.

Next in verse 15 we read, **“Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”** One of the elements of Christ’s attitude through His suffering was His love and concern for those who were hurting Him. How easy is it to get angry with those who hurt us unjustly? How easy is it to wish that they would get what’s coming to them? How easy is it to use our mouth to hurl insults at that time? And yet what is our persecutors greatest need? They need Christ! The closest that the Gospel message may ever come to an angry member of the mob may very well be the person they are persecuting. In the last two millennia, no doubt there have been countless lives who have been called to Christ through the testimony of those that are suffering. No doubt, there are more stories like that which never made print, but God’s is nevertheless glorified in that. We’re commanded to be ready to be able to defend ourselves verbally in regards to our hope in Christ when we’re asked about it. This is something that we’re ‘always’ to be ready to do. Many think that this defense is suited best for Pastors and Teachers and Deacons, and certainly they may be better equipped to defend themselves than others, but this defense is commanded to every Christian, for them to be ready at any time. If a Christian has rightly heard and understood the gospel, they are able to articulate their hope and share that hope with someone else. The depth and breadth of that defense will vary from believer to believer, but I would dare to say that a person who could not basically articulate their hope in Christ might very well be a person who hasn’t understood the gospel yet.

On top of our basic ability to be able to make a defense of the hope that it is us, is the attitude that the defense is to be done with. First, we are to defend ourselves with gentleness. Gentleness is a word that people misunderstand sometimes, as they think about it as weakness. To be gentle is not to be wimpy. Quite the opposite of being weak, to be gentle is to be meek. Meekness is power under control.

Meekness is having the strength or opportunity to do one thing but choosing to do another. The other aspect of our attitude while defending the faith is to do it with respectfulness. Often times these days, when I see a debate between two politicians, things turn disrespectful quickly. It seems that slander and mockery are the weapons of choice these days to win the argument. These tactics ultimately prove to shame the slanderer. Proverbs 15:1 tells us that, **“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”** When we’re engaging with someone who is perhaps hostile towards Christ, what is our goal with them? It should be honour Christ in our soft, biblical explanation of the gospel, and a quiet prayer to the Lord to give them a heart of flesh. We can only accomplish this by gently respecting the person who is hearing our words. Colossians 4:5-6, **“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”** 2 Timothy 2:24-26, **“And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.”**

Finally, let’s look at verse 16 from our text, **“Having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”** Every Christian must maintain a good conscience before the Lord, and all men. A clear conscience allows us to be free from the burden of guilt and shame as we face certain hostility and criticism from the world. A conscience that is stained with sin and is therefore impure will be unable to deal properly with the stress that will come from persecution. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1:12, **“For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you.”** Paul also said in Acts 24:16, **“So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.”** When a believer keeps a good conscience before God and man, and faces slander and reviling, they can withstand and deflect whatever abusive, insulting speech comes their way. 1 Corinthians 4:10-13.

When people unjustly mistreat Christians who have a good conscience, they will be put to shame Peter writes. While we pray for those who mistreat us to repent, we recognize that there is an intended purpose for our suffering. Romans 8:28 reminds us that God works all things together for our good and His glory. Perhaps our suffering might be the very things that shames the insulter and the Spirit draws them. Regardless, our suffering always works for our good. Thomas Watson wrote,

*“Afflictions work for good, as they make way for glory. Not that they merit glory, but they prepare for it. As ploughing prepares the earth for a crop, so afflictions prepare and make us ready for glory. The painter lays his gold upon dark colours, so God first lays the dark colours of affliction, and then he lays the golden colour of glory. The vessel is first seasoned before wine is poured into it: the vessels of mercy are first seasoned with affliction, and then the wine of glory is poured in. Thus we see afflictions are not prejudicial, but beneficial, to the saints.”*