Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Securities Against a Hostile World
Scripture: 1 Peter 3:13-17
Code: 60-35

Will you open your Bible to 1 Peter chapter 3? Our text for tonight is verses 13 through 16, 1 Peter 3:13 through 16. Let me read these verses to you as we come to a new passage in our study. "And 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 may 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."

The title of this particular paragraph we could make "The Christian's Securities in a Hostile World...The Christian's Securities in a Hostile World."
Now just a little bit of background so we understand what it is that Peter is saying here. Remember now the beloved Apostle Peter has been giving some clear, some crucial, essential instructions to the believers about living in a hostile world. They, in fact, to whom he wrote this letter were undergoing persecution and great difficulty. They were under heavy trials of being rejected by the society they were in. So severely rejected that they were experiencing on some occasions hostile persecution.
As he writes to them he wants to give them a perspective on this persecution and how to deal with it. It has really taken him all this time, up until chapter 3 verse 13, to get to his main theme. In fact, in some sense everything preliminary to this thirteenth verse of chapter 3 is somewhat preparatory, or introductory. He began, you'll remember, by identifying Christians as the chosen of God, redeemed by Jesus Christ and then set apart to holy living in the midst of an unholy society. In fact, that is the theme from chapter 1:1 through chapter 2 verse 10. That whole section basically identifies believers. They start out in chapter 1 verse 1 as the chosen. By the time you come to chapter 2 and verse 10, he is saying...verse 9 rather...he is saying you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. So he has been through chapter 1 and chapter 2 verse 9 and 10 identifying the believer as the chosen of God, redeemed by Jesus Christ, set apart to holy living in the midst of an unholy society for the purpose of reaching that society with the saving gospel.

Then starting in chapter 2 and verse 11, he begins to discuss the relationships that Christians must have in that society. He identifies Christians in verse 11 as aliens and strangers. We are foreigners. We are pilgrims. We are, if you will, other worldly. We are only temporary in this world, we are not the

permanent residents or permanent citizens here. And so we have the very difficult task of being in the world but not of the world, of being the chosen of God, redeemed by Jesus Christ, set apart for holy living with the purpose of evangelizing our society and realizing at the same time that we don't really belong in this society. We have then the very difficult task of reaching a threatening world with the gospel of saving grace. We are to so live, says chapter 2 verse 12, that because of our living people might come to salvation and thus glorify God in the day of visitation. The day when they face the Lord will be the day they glorify the Lord because they have been redeemed through the instrumentality of the preaching of the gospel by faithful Christians.

So in chapter 2 verse 13, the Apostle begins then to describe all the human relationships that are essential for us as we attempt to reach this world for Christ. He talks about our relationship to government. He talks about our relationship to authority. He talks about our relationship to our employer. In chapter 3 verse 1 he talks about our relationship to our marital partner, husband to wife, wife to husband. And all the way through that whole section, everything is evangelistic...how we are to live as citizens under the government with an evangelistic goal in mind, how we are to live as employees under an employer with evangelistic purpose in mind, and how we are to live as a Christian married to an unbeliever with an evangelistic purpose in mind. Then coming down to verses 8 to 12 he talks about the general attitude with which we live in the world which touches everyone that we meet.

So as I said, up until now he has really been sort of laying a foundation, this is who you are and here is how you are to act in the midst of a hostile society. Now he is going to say, given that you live this way in a hostile society, here are your securities when that society comes against you. Here is the purpose reached, to arm the elect with the right attitude as they face the hostile world. How we are to trust in the power of righteousness, to triumph over hostility and to triumph over suffering. He wants us to have in spite of the fact that we are strangers and aliens, in spite of the fact that we are treated with hostility and persecution, he wants us to have cause for confident joy rather than alarm or anxiety.

Now in Peter's time this, of course, was different in some ways than it is in our time. There was direct hostility and some direct persecution against the people of God. There is still that in some parts of the world, though in our own nation it is not as overt and aggressive as it might be in some other places, at least not officially. I believe there is a mounting hostility toward Christianity.

In fact, there is an escalating hostility toward Christianity among the general populous. You can see it in a number of ways. I was handed this little catalog, it's one of those kind of catalogs that you get in the mail...if you ever get one of them, pretty soon you get all of them. It's called "Casual Living USA," it's a catalog of distinctive gifts and it has bird feeders, and cat litter and little computers and puzzles and little barometers and coffee cups and all that kind of stuff that you expect in here, frames for your baby pictures, bookends, dog houses. And then in the middle of it is a most interesting new game that is introduced. It is offered for a price of $25 and the name of the game is "Fleece The Flock, The TV Evangelist Game." It is called a "signs of the times board game." You get to play one of the TV evangelists. Everybody in the game is a TV evangelist who prefers new limos to the Old Testament, it

says. You struggle to amass a fortune while you're gripped by intrigue, strategy pressures and subterfuge that keep everyone in suspense. Two to eight players, the game box includes $400 million, devil cards, angel cards and God's will cards, 30 TV stations, 90 tokens for power assets, theme parks, corporate jets, etc. This is the new TV evangelist game...Fleece The Flock.
Tongue in cheek, yes. But betraying an underlying hostility to the charlatanism of Christianity, obviously. And in a society where Christianity continues to discredit itself on large scale, and a society that has a flourishing secularlism, a flourishing materialism, a flourishing humanism, a society that is bent on fornication, a society that has made homosexuality nothing but an alternate life style, a society that is drowning in pornography, a society that is deep into man solving his own problems in whatever way he chooses to feel comfortable about himself, in that society you have an emerging hostility toward the definitive character of Christianity. And I believe that as we live out our lives in days ahead, we may sense more and more of this hostility if not on an official governmental level, on an unofficial personal level, to be sure.
This passage then does speak to us. It speaks to all of us who live a godly life in the midst of an ungodly culture, as to how we are to defend ourselves against the threats of that hostile world. How can we silence the critics? How can we do what chapter 2 verse 12 said, have such behavior that those who would slander us would have to slander us for something good because they can't find anything evil? How can we so live that we can silence our critics? That we can be secure in this hostile environment?
Well Peter's going to give us a handful of principles here. And I like to call them the securities of the believer in a hostile world. They are what we have to lean on to secure us, to minimize the threat, to minimize the hostility. They are our defenses against those who would attack us.
Number one...number one, we'll call a "passion for goodness...a passion for goodness." Now remember, Peter has already identified who we are. He has already identified how we are to live in a hostile world...in general we are to live evangelistically. And now he gets very specific about what our securities are as we confront this hostile world. Security number one is a passion for goodness, verse 13...very basic statement. "And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?" Now, beloved, there is the first line of defense that we have. It is very difficult, Peter is saying, it is very unusual for some people, for most people, to mistreat those who are zealous for good. Even a hostile world is slow to hurt people who do good, who are benefactors of society, who are gracious, unselfish, kind, merciful, thoughtful, loving, caring...very difficult. The world doesn't have any problem at all attacking with great hostility the charlatans and the frauds who steal from the widows and the orphans, who make themselves rich at the expense of other people. But the world is not so eager to come against those who are doing good. And I think what Peter has in mind here is very general...a good life, a beneficent life, the kind of life that is marked by generosity, unselfishness, kindness, thoughtfulness toward others. That's hard to harm. It has a way of stopping their hand.
So, Peter begins by insisting then that one of our securities in the midst of a hostile environment is a passionate zeal for what is good. And if that's the character of your life, who is there to harm you or to do you evil, literally? It's a rhetorical question...who is there to harm you?...the implied answer is no

one, or very few. It says, "Who is there to harm you if you prove," the verb really translates, "if you become...if you become zealots for what is good?" In other words, if that is your character, you are a zealot for what is good.

Now what is this word "zealot," zelotes mean? Well it is a person with a passion. It is a person with a great ardor for some cause. If you study the New Testament background, you know that during the New Testament time there were a group of people called Zealots. They were fanatical patriots in Israel. And they pledged to liberate Israel from foreign rule at the cost of their own lives, if need be. In other words, they were so committed to the liberation of Israel from foreign power that they would literally murder, steal, lie, cheat, or even give up their own lives. That's how devoted they were. There was one of them among the Twelve whose name was Simon the Zealot. So they were a political radical party who were willing to lay their life on the line. The Zealots in particular began at the time of the Maccabees which was between the Old and the New Testament. They resorted to violence. They resorted to assassination, absolutely anything they could do to express their hatred of pagan foreigners.

Apparently they become...they became, I should say, a relatively significant force in Palestine. In Acts 21:38 it mentions "Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a riot and led the four thousand men of the assassins out into the wilderness." That may well be a reference to the Zealots. And if so, there were at least in that reference as many as four thousand of them. They were men prepared to take their lives and lay them on the line, sacrificing ease, comfort, worldly goods in the ardor of love for their nation.

So, Peter says, "You be a zealot, only you be a zealot for what is good. You have such a passion for goodness, for kindness, for tenderness, for mercy, for love, for philanthropy that the world will have a great difficulty persecuting you." Sir John Sealy once said, "No heart is pure that is not passionate." And Peter is saying you should be passionate for what is good and that produces a purity of life that is very difficult to persecute, even the world has trouble doing that. As I said, it's easy for them to persecute those who do evil, difficult to persecute those who do good.

What is Peter saying? Be in love with goodness. When it becomes your delight, when it becomes your joy, when it becomes your goal, when the wrong things lose their fascination, when the wrong things lose their power to attract and you become consumed with doing what is good, the world will find it difficult to persecute you even though the world is hostile.

Now that's just a general principle. And Peter is not going to leave us there. That's just the first security he wants to bring up. But it also must be noted quickly that in verse 14 he says, "But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you're blessed." And the implication there is that this is not a gilt-edged guaranteed promise that if you do good you won't be persecuted, it simply makes it all the more difficult to do. We are to have a passion for doing what is good. Jesus had that passion. Jesus did good and only good. He is our model. And yet Jesus Himself also ultimately was killed by a hostile world.

But the point that Peter wants us to get here is that our lives are to be lived in a manner that is opposite scandal. We're never to be scandalized. We are to live lives that are impeccable. He's not

guarantying that we will not suffer, he is simply saying it's very difficult for the world to act that way toward us if our lives are good. They have no real grounds for the persecution. They have no real grounds for the attack. And that tends to stay their hand a bit. So we are to live lives that are zealous for what is good...zealous for what is honorable. That's our first security.

Look at our second one. Verse 14 which I just read a moment ago gives it to us. The second security we have is "a pliability in suffering." Not only a passion for what is good, but a pliability in suffering. In spite of the general truth of verse 13, there will be times when those who do good suffer. But, he says, even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you're blessed. The little phrase "but even if" could be translated "per chance" or "contrary to what is expected," this by the way is in the Greek a construction attached to a verb in the optative which simply means it is subjective possibility without a definite time. In other words, there's no certainty of fulfillment but it could happen. And that's what he's saying. But even if it per chance should happen that you suffer for the sake of righteousness, you're blessed.

It's a good thing Peter brings that up because some of the people to whom he wrote may well have been suffering for doing good. It is also true, beloved, and you hate to say it, but it is also true that many Christians are suffering at the hands of the world...the problem is they're suffering because of a failure to do what is good and so the world feels a greater justification and therefore a greater freedom for their hostility. So...but Peter says if some of you per chance should suffer for the sake of righteousness...that means upright godly behavior...don't be surprised and don't be fearful, you are blessed.

Look at chapter 4 for a moment, verse 12. And we find an almost similar section here which again reminds us that this is a major theme of his letter. First Peter 4:12, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you." In other words, don't be surprised when it comes, "It comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you..." in other words, some thing that should never occur, I mean, don't be shocked if it does happen, "But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exaltation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer or thief or evil doer or a troublesome meddler, but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed but in that name let him glorify God."

And there again Peter says basically the same thing...you will suffer perhaps for doing good, accept that. The Spirit of glory and of God will rest on you. God will have a purpose in it all should it happen...it may happen. In fact, if you go back into chapter 2 and verse 21, you might even consider it a privilege. Christ also suffered, it says, leaving you an example. He committed no sin. There was no deceit found in His mouth. And while being reviled, He didn't revile in return...while suffering He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously. In other words, there's a sense in which you can identify with the very sufferings of Christ. You can know what Paul says in Philippians 3 is the fellowship of His sufferings.

So, first point, we are secure if we have a passion for goodness. Second point, we must also on occasion have a pliability in suffering, should it come. In other words, we have to bend with it, we have to accept it, we have to acknowledge that God is bringing it to pass, or allowing it for our testing, as chapter 4 verse 12 says, in order to perfect us.

There will be points at which our society will not tolerate even a good life. They will not tolerate a righteous man or a righteous woman. The very presence of holy virtue will irritate them to the point that they will have to act aggressively against you. But, says Peter, when we suffer for what is right, we are blessed. Literally it says, even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, blessed...blessed. Almost like an exclamation.

Now what does "blessed" mean? It's not so much the idea of happy, not so much the idea of joyful as it is the idea of privileged...okay?..privileged, or honored. Do you remember where the text says of Mary, "Blessed art thou among women?" It didn't necessarily mean "happy." In fact, her heart was pierced with many sorrows. But it meant privileged and it can mean that. It meant honored. It meant that she was the object of divine favor and divine grace and divine goodness and special dispensation from God was granted to her to do a special task and to enjoy special goodness at the hand of God. And that's exactly what it means here. Even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you're privileged, you are honored. Why? Because you can join, as it were, in the sufferings of Christ, you can fellowship in His sufferings, as Philippians 3:10 mentions.

Notice for a moment Matthew chapter 5 because it's perhaps from this teaching of our Lord that Peter drew his understanding of this particular thought. In Matthew 5:10, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven, blessed are you when men cast insults at you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of me. Rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great." There it is. Why are you privileged and why are you honored? For the more you suffer the greater the glory, the greater the reward.

So, your first line of defense against a hostile world is a zeal for goodness, a passion for what is good. The second one is that when it does come against you, the hostility of the world, you're pliable in suffering. You defend yourself by simply accepting the suffering as within the purposes of God which shall cause you to be made a privileged individual to so suffer and thus enjoy the eternal blessedness that God sets aside for those who have specially suffered. And I won't take the time tonight, but I believe the great great rewards of glory will be proportionately given out to believers on the basis of their suffering. God will honor those who suffer.

So you're blessed. Then Peter quotes from an Old Testament passage, do you see it there in verse 14? "And do not fear their intimidation and do not be troubled." That comes out of Isaiah 8:12 and 13. Let me read you what Isaiah 8:12 and 13 says. "You are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy and He shall be your fear and He shall be your dread." You are not to fear what they fear.

Now in that particular portion, the setting of the Isaiah quotation is significant. Ahaz, king of Judah, faced a crisis because of an impending invasion by the Assyrian army. The kings of Israel and Syria wanted Ahaz to join them in an alliance against the Assyrians but Ahaz refused. So because he

refused, Israel and Syria threatened to invade Judah. Behind the scenes then Ahaz made an alliance with Assyria. And the prophet Isaiah warned him against ungodly alliances and urged him to trust God alone for deliverance and he says to him, "Sanctify the Lord of hosts Himself and let Him be your fear and let Him be your dread and fear not their fear." In other words, don't you--king of Judah--be afraid of the Assyrians like the Syrians and the people of Israel are, the northern kingdom. Don't fear their fear, fear the Lord and set the Lord apart, sanctify Him. That's behind the scenes in Isaiah. And here Peter is quoting that and essentially saying, "Do not fear their fear," or as it's translated in the NAS, "Do not fear their intimidation." It could mean the fear that they're being made...the fear that they're being made to fear. In other words, don't fear like they are fearing, like others are fearing. Or don't fear the intimidation of those who would make you fear. Either way its meaning is don't fear, don't be afraid. And then he says, "Don't be troubled." Don't be shaken, don't be disturbed.

Now this is a very simple verse with simple understanding. He says this, "Should persecution come against you for the sake of righteousness, you are honored, you are privileged and God will reward you in eternity. So don't be afraid and don't be troubled. Face it with courage. That's a pliability in suffering. No reason for a believer to think any other way. John Bunyan, you know, when he was in Bedford Jail, he was put in prison because of the hostility of his society. They didn't want him to preach so they locked him in prison so he couldn't have the public place of preaching. And this is what he wrote, among many things, of course, that he wrote there. He wrote these words, "This prison very sweet to me hath been since I came here and so would also hanging be if Thou didst then appear." He considered it a privilege to suffer. And perhaps even to die because it would bring him to his Lord.

And so, we need Christians who have a pliability in suffering. What does that mean? To accept it as a source of blessing and not compromise with the world, not back track, not try to eliminate it by changing your theology. You know, Martin Luther stood before those who would condemn him, the hostile and the religious world, and he said, "I can't recant, I cannot...I cannot." And many Christians have stood their ground and lost their life, as you know. I think many more Christians have caved in to hostility through the years. But we want to be Christians who are courageous and bold and righteous and holy and zealous for good. And if we are persecuted, we will rejoice in the special glory God bestows upon us, we will rest in the Spirit of glory and in our God and count it joy to suffer for the one who suffered for us.

Now this also means that you can't have your mind and your heart set on earthly things. If you're preoccupied with possessions and pleasures and ease and comfort and popularity, then you're going to be really be threatened. But if your focus is right and you understand God has honored you highly by the suffering and will give you a greater weight of glory in the future, then you can count it all joy when you fall into various trials, as James said.

So, the world comes against the Christian. His first security is a passion for goodness which makes it difficult for the world to do anything to us. But in the event they do, the second line of defense is a pliability in suffering because even though we might suffer at their hands, they can never touch our true treasure, they can never touch our relationship to God and the fact that we suffer will grant to us

the Spirit of glory and of God which will rest upon us and a greater weight of glory in eternity yet to come.

And now a third, a third security in a hostile world, let's call it "a place for Christ." A passion for goodness, a pliability in suffering and a place for Christ, I love this, this too is taken from Isaiah 8:13, as I read a moment ago, "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts..." And stop right there. Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. In Isaiah the word "God" is used, rather than Christ. And here the Spirit of God replaces the word God with the word Christ. But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. It is the Lord that you must regard as holy. It is the Lord that you must give deference to. Now what does it mean? It means that no matter what comes against you, no matter what attacks you, you affirm in your heart that Christ is Lord. And we're right back to what we talked about this morning, you affirming the sovereignty of the Lord. You are affirming...the only one I really have to fear, the only one I really have to dread is the Lord. It does not bother me what men may do to me. It does bother me what God may do to me. That's the intent of Isaiah 8:12 and 13 and that's the intent of Peter here as well. To sanctify means to venerate. It means to adore. It means to worship. It means by implication to exalt, to magnify, to give the primary place to. You are recognizing the holy sovereign majesty of Christ. You are saying He is the object of my love, He is the object of my loyalty. He is the one to whom I am committed. He is the object of my awe, He is the object of my reverence. He is the object of my worship. I recognize His perfection. I magnify His glory. I exalt His greatness. I honor the living Christ as my Lord and therefore I submit myself to Him and this is in His plan. And I will not fear, I will accept what He has brought. I will please Him with loyal submission. That's the idea. That's your third line of defense.

If they do come against you with hostility, even though you're doing good, and you have to have a pliability in suffering, at the heart of that pliability is a place for Christ. And that place is the priority place. You affirm that I will venerate, I will adore, I will worship, I will exalt Christ as Lord. I recognize that I must give to Him loyal, confident, submissive obedience...for this hostility against me from an ungodly world must be within His will or it would not be happening.

Marvelous to live life that way. It's like adorning the doctrine of God, as Paul said to Titus. This is the Christian who at his deepest point, the deepest part of his being is totally committed to the great reality that Jesus Christ is Lord and I will honor Him as Lord even in my sufferings. He is Lord over me, He is Lord even in my difficulty. Loyal, confident submission will give you courage, boldness, fortitude in the face of a hostile society. It will secure you and you'll feel that security.

Then says Peter there is yet another security. Verse 15, "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." Let's call number four "a preparedness to answer...a preparedness to answer."

Verse 15 simply says that when we are attacked by a hostile world we are to be able to make a defense. Now it might seem at first as you look at this particular passage that this is a formal defense. When he says "always being ready to make a defense," you take the word defense, apologia, from which we get an apology, or an apologetic, a defense of something. You might assume that this is a formal defense in a court somewhere. And by the way, it is so used in 2 Timothy 4:16, Paul speaks

about his formal defense in a courtroom situation. Also in Acts 25:16. But you have the same word, apologia, used in Philippians 1:16 apparently in an informal sense, just being able to give a defense to anyone who asks you, not just a judge or a magistrate or a governor or somebody formally sitting in judgment over you.

Furthermore the word "always" indicates that it's not just while you're on some official trial basis, but always, in all situations you are to be ready to give a defense not just to a judge or a magistrate but to everyone who asks you. So I take it this is very general here. Formal in a court at a trial, or informal, you are to make a defense, give a speech of defense. And what is it about? It's a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you. What is that? Very simply that's the Christian faith. The hope that is in you is the Christian faith. It's just another way to identify the Christian faith. In other words, you are to be able to give a rational explanation and defense of why you are a Christian. That's it. The Christian faith or the Christian hope, synonymous really. Peter has been talking about our hope. Chapter 1 he says, "We have been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ," and there that living hope is tantamount to our living faith or our living Christian life. Peter loves the word "hope," by the way. He uses it again in chapter 1 verse 21. He talks about the fact that our faith and hope are in God. If we had the time we could dig deeply into this concept of Christian hope being a definition of our Christian faith. But suffice it to say that that is indeed what it is. And if you want any background on that, go back to the notes or the tape in the first chapter when we discussed a living hope and you will find there that that living hope is a perpetual quality of life that is the same as eternal life or the Christian life or the life of faith.

So, he's simply saying be able to defend your Christianity, be able to tell people why you believe what you believe. Understand why you believe what you believe and then be able to articulate it. And then he adds in verse 15, "Yet with gentleness and reverence." And there is to be a tenderness and a graciousness in our spirit. The word "gentleness" is actually the word for meekness or humility, power under control is one way that we think about that word. And then the word perseverance, I think it says here, or in some Bibles it says that, here it says reverence, properly so, is actually the word for fear. It's the word phobou from which we get phobias. In other words, reverence, a healthy reverence for God, a healthy reverence for truth and even a healthy reverence for the person to whom you speak, a graciousness. Second Timothy 2 it says we're not to strive, we're not to be argumentative as we present truth.

So, here is another line of defense, a very basic one, a security for us. And that is that we can properly, carefully, thoughtfully, reasonably, biblically give everyone who asks us a clear reason for why we are a Christian. That's part of our security. You say, "In what sense?" I'll tell you in what sense. If you can't do that rationally and you can't understand it fully and clearly and articulate it, and you get into hostility, persecution and an attack against you, guess who's going to crumble? You are. Because if you can't articulate it to be understood by someone else, you may have difficulty reminding yourself of enough information to convince yourself you're truly a Christian. And you can fall into doubt. If you don't have the helmet of the hope of salvation, those blows of the enemy can be quite devastating.

So, to be effective standing against a hostile world we are to have a passion for goodness, a pliability in suffering, we are to have a place for Christ, the priority place, setting Him apart and in loyalty submitting to His perfect holy will in the midst of this suffering. And we are to have a preparedness to answer, not only by knowledge but by courage. We are to be eager and willing to give to every man who asks us a reason for the hope that is in us and to do it with sweet gracious gentle humility and a sense of reverence for the God, for the truth and for even the person to whom we speak. That's how we face hostility.

A fifth principle, we also are to have "a pure conscience...a pure conscience," verse 16. "And keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame." And keep a good conscience. The word "keep" means to maintain, it's to have literally, to maintain or to possess a good conscience. What does that mean? That means that your conscience is not accusing you. Your conscience is a mechanism which either accuses you or excuses you. Your conscience is a device that God has planted within you to act as a source of conviction or affirmation. If you have a good conscience, it will be telling you that all is well. If you have an evil conscience, it will be reminding you that all is not well because there is sin in your life. And what Peter is saying is live with a clear conscience, a conscience that doesn't condemn you so that when you face criticism, when you face hostility, when you face persecution you don't feel any guilt. You see, if you're living a sinful life, if you're not zealous for goodness and if you're not loyal to Jesus Christ and if you're like one of these people who has misrepresented Christ and you're living a life that slanders Christ, or bring reproach on Christ, and persecution comes against your Christianity, you're going to feel a very heavy weight of guilt because it's really what you deserve. Then you have no defense against it. But if your conscience is clear, then you are not anxious, you are not troubled. People always say to me, "You know, you get a lot of criticism." That's true. "And you get a lot of attacks against you." That's true. And they say, "Well how do you respond to it." And I say, "My first response is always the same, I look into my heart to see if the criticism is valid. And if I look into my heart and I can say I have a clear conscience, then I have no anxiety because there is nothing there convicting me and it brings me no pain, it brings me no trouble because it cannot produce any guilt. If on the other hand I am accused of doing something and I am somehow persecuted for...by someone and I look in my heart and say yes, yes that is a valid accusation, then the guilt wells up within me and I have no security against that criticism." So, I must maintain a clear conscience because a defiled conscience cannot be at ease, a defiled conscience cannot withstand the onslaught of hostility. We have to keep our conscience clean.

And how does that happen? The conscience simply probes at us about what it knows to be true of us. If the conscience knows that we are in sin, it will pick at us. If the conscience knows that we are living in obedience, it will affirm us. It's that little voice inside, you know, of which Paul spoke so often and so frequently would say, "My conscience is clear, my conscience is clear, I am void of offense." It's that little voice that says your life is right or that says your life is wrong. And should hostility come and persecution come and you know your life is right and you know you're faithful and you've set apart Christ in your life as Lord and you're following in loyal submission to Him and you're pursuing what is

good and you're pursuing holiness to glorify Him, no matter what hostility comes there is peace and you have a defense in the midst of a hostile world. So he says, "If your conscience is clear, then in the thing in which you are slandered you'll have no guilt and those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame because it will be a false accusation." That's the idea. It's the same as he said in 2:12, when they slander you, make sure they slander you for what is good.

By the way, that word "slandered," interesting Greek word, katalaleo. It is an onomatopoetic word, that is it sounds like its meaning. A katalaleo, blah-blah-blah-blah-blah, we've seen it at other times, it's a word that speaks about verbal abuse, verbal slander. The word "revile" means to threaten, to abuse, to insult, to mistreat. And he says, "Should it happen if you have a clear conscience you can say fine, the shame is on them, not on me. They should be ashamed for they are falsely accusing." You see, what makes the world feel so self-righteous and so right in condemning Christianity is to come against someone who has so scandalized the Christian faith. The world loves that. They absolutely love to do that because that makes them feel righteous, because there is truly a scandal there. And when they find that, they will press that to the inth degree because it makes them feel self-righteous and gives them just cause to condemn a Christian, one who claims to be a Christian. On the other hand, Peter says you ought to live in such a way that when anybody does that they should be ashamed of themselves, not you.

So, what are our defenses against the world's hostility? A passion for goodness which makes it difficult for them to slander us at all. Should they, we have a pliability in suffering, we accept it as the Lord's will and then there's a place for Christ, we give Him the priority place. And in the middle of that suffering and hostility in loving loyalty to Him, we continue in our obedience and our faithfulness to Him. And then we have a preparedness to answer when we have to face the questioners, we can give everyone who asks us a clear-cut reason about why we are Christians. And then we maintain a pure conscience. In other words, we keep our life right and by the Spirit of God we stay obedient to the Word of God so that we have a pure conscience and when we are slandered we do not feel ashamed but they feel ashamed because it is unjustified.

I want to give you one last point. Verse 17, we must also have a perspective on options...a perspective on options. Verse 17, "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." Those are the two options you have, folks. You better get a perspective on your options. Option number one is you can suffer for doing what is right, if God wills it. And you can be blessed in that suffering and eternally rewarded. Option number two is you can suffer for what is wrong, take your choice. The bottom line is, God wills both. He wills that if you do what is right, you suffer in order that you might be strengthened and that He might be glorified. And He wills that if you do wrong, you suffer because that's His chastening. Take your choice. You get a perspective on options, don't you?

So, we know how to face a hostile world. The model for this is none other than Christ and He becomes our consideration as we come back to this text in two weeks. Let's bow together in prayer. Father, it's been good tonight to just spend these moments in Your Word and sometimes we feel like we're hearing an echo from Paul in Philippians as he too was teaching his people how to live in a

hostile world and experience joy and experience blessing. Father, we thank You for that which we have learned from Peter, those things that secure us against the threats of this hostile world. Father, help us to be able to implement them in our own lives as we faithfully submit ourselves to Your Word and Your Spirit and this we ask for the glory of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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