

1 Peter, Teacher's Guide

Week 7: Responding to Opposition with Hope

1Peter 3:8–22

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

First Peter 3:8–22 is one of the richest and most demanding passages in the letter, moving from practical instructions on how the church treats one another and answers opposition all the way to the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ, and to the meaning of baptism. What is doctrinally at stake here is significant: the marks of a true Christian community, the ethic of blessing instead of retaliation, the call to ready and gentle witness, the substitutionary suffering of Christ to bring us to God, and, at the climax, the role of baptism in salvation. The teacher should be ready to handle the difficult phrase about the spirits in prison, but should give the heaviest attention to verse 21, where Peter says baptism “now saves you,” a verse that speaks with unusual clarity to the place of baptism in God’s plan of salvation.

This passage is also intensely formational. Peter is teaching believers under pressure how to respond to opposition: not with fear or retaliation, but with blessing, a good conscience, a guarded tongue, and a hope so evident that outsiders ask about it. The teacher’s task is to help students see that their conduct under opposition is itself a witness, to prepare them to give a gentle and confident reason for their hope, and to anchor their courage in the finished work and present reign of Christ. The aim is disciples who do not crumble or lash out under pressure, but who honor Christ as Lord in their hearts.

Keep both targets in view. Students should leave with a clear grasp of what Christ accomplished and what baptism means in God’s plan, and with a concrete resolve about how they will treat those who oppose them and how ready they are to speak of their hope. The disciple we are forming is someone who, secure in Christ’s saving work and reign, can bless enemies, guard their tongue, and witness with gentle confidence.

Question 1

Student Question:

Peter describes the marks of a healthy church: “unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind” (v. 8). Why are these qualities essential to the life of God’s people, and what do they reveal about the kind of community Christ is building?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter opens with five qualities that mark a healthy congregation: unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Taken together they describe a community

shaped by the character of Christ. This is not a list of optional virtues but the relational fabric that holds the body of Christ together.

Walk through them briefly. Unity of mind is shared conviction and purpose, not uniformity of personality, but oneness in Christ and His truth. Sympathy is the capacity to feel with others, to rejoice and weep alongside them. Brotherly love is the family affection of those born again into one household. A tender heart is compassion that is moved and ready to help. And a humble mind is the lowliness that does not grasp for status, the very mind of Christ (Philippians 2:3–5).

Show why these qualities are essential. A church can have sound doctrine and busy programs and still be cold, divided, and proud. Peter insists that the inner life of the community matters. These qualities are what make the church a place where the wounded are welcomed, where conflict is healed rather than nursed, and where outsiders sense something genuinely different. They also prepare the church to face opposition together; a divided, proud congregation cannot stand under pressure.

Help students grow in faith by examining their own contribution to the community's health. Each of these qualities is something the individual member brings or withholds. Ask where each student most needs to grow, in unity, sympathy, love, tenderness, or humility, so that the doctrine becomes a personal call rather than an abstract ideal.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The five marks of a healthy congregation as the character of Christ in community
- Unity of mind as shared conviction in Christ, not mere uniformity
- The humble mind as the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:3–5)
- The inner life of the community as essential, not optional
- Each member's responsibility for the health of the body

Discussion Prompts

- Why are these relational qualities essential and not just nice additions?
- Which of the five does our congregation most need to grow in?
- Which one do you personally most need to bring rather than withhold?

Question 2

Student Question:

Peter commands, "Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless" (v. 9). Think of someone who has wronged or insulted you. What would it actually look like to bless that person rather than retaliate or withdraw? What is holding you back?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter states the Christian ethic of response to wrong in the sharpest terms: do not repay evil for evil or insult for insult, “but on the contrary, bless.” This is not mere non-retaliation, the absence of revenge; it is the active return of good, even blessing, for evil. It is the way of Jesus, who from the cross prayed for those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34), and the teaching of Paul, who said to bless those who persecute and never to curse them (Romans 12:14).

Help students feel why this is so hard. Every instinct cries out to even the score, to defend our honor, to make the offender feel what we felt. Blessing an enemy can feel like weakness or even like letting evil win. Peter’s answer is that we bless because we ourselves were called to inherit a blessing; having received undeserved grace, we extend undeserved grace. We break the chain of retaliation rather than passing it on.

Move toward the concrete. Blessing is not a vague feeling; it takes shape in specific acts: praying genuinely for the person, speaking well of them, doing them a kindness, refusing to slander them, seeking their good. Invite students to name a specific person who has wronged them and one concrete way they could bless rather than retaliate or withdraw, then to ask what is really holding them back. This is where the passage becomes growth in Christlikeness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Blessing enemies as the active return of good for evil, not mere non-retaliation
- The example of Christ and the teaching of Paul (Luke 23:34; Romans 12:14)
- Blessing flowing from the blessing we ourselves received
- Breaking the chain of retaliation rather than passing it on
- Blessing expressed in concrete acts: prayer, kind words, kindness

Discussion Prompts

- Why is blessing those who wrong us so contrary to our instincts?
- What concrete act of blessing could you offer someone who has wronged you?
- What is really holding you back from blessing rather than retaliating?

Question 3

Student Question:

Peter quotes Psalm 34 to ground his teaching: the Lord’s eyes are on the righteous and His ears open to their prayer, but His face is against those who do evil (vv. 10–12). How does this Psalm shape the way we speak, seek peace, and trust God when we are wronged?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter supports his command by quoting Psalm 34, a Psalm he clearly loves and has already drawn on earlier in the letter. The Psalm ties the good life to guarded speech and active peacemaking: keep your tongue from evil, turn from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it.

Draw out the motive the Psalm supplies: “the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” God sees, God hears, and God will deal with evildoers. This is the same truth that anchored Christ’s composure in chapter 2: because God is watching and just, we can entrust ourselves to Him rather than retaliate. The watching eyes of the Lord are a comfort to the wronged and a warning to the wrongdoer.

Show how this shapes our conduct. Because God hears the prayers of the righteous, we can take our grievances to Him rather than into our own hands. Because His face is against evildoers, we do not need to be their judge. This frees us to do the active, peaceable things the Psalm commands: guarding our speech, turning from evil, doing good, and pursuing peace, even with difficult people.

Help students grow in faith by trusting the God who sees. Much of our retaliation springs from a secret fear that if we do not defend ourselves, no one will. The Psalm answers that fear: the eyes of the Lord are on you. Resting in that truth makes guarded speech and active peacemaking possible.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Psalm 34 linking the good life to guarded speech and peacemaking
- God who sees the righteous and hears their prayer as our security
- God’s face against evildoers, freeing us from being their judge
- Taking grievances to God in prayer rather than into our own hands
- Trust in the watching God as the root of peaceable conduct

Discussion Prompts

- How does knowing God sees and hears change the way we respond to being wronged?
- What does it mean that the Lord’s face is against those who do evil?
- How does trusting God free you to seek peace rather than revenge?

Question 4

Student Question:

Peter says, “Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit” (v. 10). The tongue is where retaliation usually shows up first. Where does your speech most need taming right now, in gossip, sarcasm, complaining, deceit, or harsh words? What would guarding your tongue look like this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter, quoting the Psalm, puts the tongue first: “keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.” This is fitting, because when we are wronged, retaliation almost always shows

up first in our speech, in the cutting reply, the complaint to others, the slanted retelling of the story, the deceit that protects our image.

Help students see how central the tongue is to the whole Christian life. James says that anyone who can control the tongue is able to control the whole body (James 3:2). Our words reveal and shape our hearts. A guarded tongue is not mere politeness; it is a frontline discipline of holiness, especially under pressure.

Move toward honest self-examination and a concrete step. Invite students to name where their speech most needs taming: gossip, sarcasm, chronic complaining, exaggeration, harsh words at home, deceit that shades the truth in their favor. Then encourage one specific practice this week, a pause before replying, a refusal to pass on a piece of gossip, an honest correction of something said falsely, a deliberate word of blessing where a cutting word would be easy. Growth in Christ is often measured in the words we do not say.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The tongue as the first place retaliation appears
- Control of the tongue as central to the whole Christian life (James 3:2)
- Guarded speech as a frontline discipline of holiness
- Concrete practices for taming the tongue under pressure

Discussion Prompts

- Where does your speech most need taming right now?
- Why does retaliation so often show up first in our words?
- What is one concrete way you could guard your tongue this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Peter says, “Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy,” and then be ready to give a reason for your hope (vv. 14–15). How does honoring Christ as Lord in our hearts free us from fear, and what is the connection between settling Christ’s lordship within and being ready to witness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter addresses fear directly: “Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy.” The antidote to the fear of hostile people is the enthroning of Christ as Lord in the heart. When Christ is truly Lord within, the threats of others lose their power to control us.

Explain the logic. Fear of people grows when we treat their approval or hostility as the most important thing. When we honor Christ as Lord in our hearts, He becomes the one whose opinion matters most, the one we ultimately answer to and trust. This does not make opposition pleasant, but it dethrones it. We can face hostility without being ruled by it, because a greater Lord holds our lives.

Connect this inner lordship to readiness for witness. Peter moves directly from honoring Christ as Lord to being “prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” The two are linked: a heart settled on Christ’s lordship is freed from fear and freed for witness. People who are not afraid of opposition, and whose hope is visible, naturally provoke the question, and are ready to answer it. The word translated defense is the source of our word apologetic; it means a reasoned account, not an aggressive argument.

Help students grow in faith by locating the root of their own fears. Where the fear of people silences or paralyzes us, the remedy is not to manufacture courage but to enthrone Christ more fully as Lord in the heart. Settling His lordship within is the foundation both for courage under opposition and for readiness to speak of our hope.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honoring Christ as Lord in the heart as the antidote to the fear of people
- The fear of people rooted in valuing their approval or hostility too highly
- Christ’s inner lordship dethroning opposition without removing it
- The link between settled lordship and readiness for witness
- “Defense” as a reasoned account of hope, not an aggressive argument

Discussion Prompts

- How does honoring Christ as Lord in your heart free you from the fear of people?
- Why are courage under opposition and readiness to witness connected?
- Where does the fear of people most silence or paralyze you?

Question 6

Student Question:

Peter calls us to give our defense “with gentleness and respect,” keeping a good conscience (vv. 15–16). When you talk about your faith, or defend it, is your tone gentle and respectful, or does it sometimes become defensive, superior, or combative? What would gentleness cost you in a specific conversation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter does not only tell us to be ready to give a reason for our hope; he tells us how: “with gentleness and respect,” keeping “a good conscience.” The manner of our witness matters as much as the content. A true answer delivered with contempt is a failed witness.

Help students examine their tone. It is easy, especially when our faith is challenged, to become defensive, superior, sarcastic, or combative, to treat the conversation as a battle to be won rather than a person to be loved. Peter calls for gentleness, a strength under control, and respect, a genuine honoring of the other person even in disagreement. We are commending a Savior, not scoring points.

Connect gentleness to the good conscience Peter mentions. When we answer with integrity and kindness, our conduct backs up our words, and even those who slander us are put to shame. When we answer harshly, we may win the exchange but lose the person and dishonor Christ. The watching world judges the gospel partly by the spirit of those who proclaim it.

Move toward a concrete commitment. Invite students to think of a specific person or recurring conversation, perhaps a skeptical relative or coworker, and to consider what gentleness and respect would actually cost them there: patience, the surrender of the last word, humility about what they do not know, kindness toward someone who is dismissive. This is real growth in Christlikeness, and it makes witness winsome rather than off-putting.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The manner of witness (gentleness and respect) as essential, not optional
- The temptation to be defensive, superior, or combative when challenged
- Gentleness as strength under control; respect as honoring the person
- A good conscience and consistent conduct backing up our words
- Commending a Savior rather than winning an argument

Discussion Prompts

- Is your tone, when defending your faith, gentle and respectful or combative?
- Why can a true answer given harshly still be a failed witness?
- What would gentleness and respect cost you in a specific conversation?

Question 7

Student Question:

Peter writes, “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit” (v. 18). What does this verse teach about the purpose and the uniqueness of Christ’s suffering, and what does it mean that He suffered to “bring us to God”?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter grounds the whole call to suffer for doing good in the suffering of Christ: “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.” In a single verse Peter compresses the heart of the gospel.

Draw out the key phrases. “Once for sins” underscores the finality and sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice; unlike the repeated Old Testament sacrifices, His death was offered once for all (Hebrews 9:26–28). “The righteous for the unrighteous” is the language of substitution: the only truly righteous one died in the place of the unrighteous, the innocent for the guilty. This is the same atonement theology Peter taught in chapter 2, now stated even more pointedly.

Focus on the purpose: “that he might bring us to God.” This is the goal of the whole gospel. Sin had separated us from God (Isaiah 59:2); Christ’s death removes that separation and brings us near. The word pictures being granted access, ushered into the presence of God. Salvation is not merely escape from punishment; it is restored nearness to God Himself, the relationship we were made for.

Note the movement from death to life: “put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.” The cross was not the end. Christ was raised, and Peter will go on to show Him exalted at God’s right hand, reigning over all. The suffering that brings us to God is vindicated and crowned by resurrection and exaltation. Helping students rest in this finished, sufficient, once-for-all work of Christ is the doctrinal foundation for everything else in the passage, and grows their confidence under opposition.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ’s suffering “once for sins” as final and sufficient (Hebrews 9:26–28)
- Substitution: the righteous suffering for the unrighteous
- The purpose of the cross to bring us to God, overcoming separation (Isaiah 59:2)
- Salvation as restored nearness to God, not merely escape from punishment
- Death followed by resurrection and exaltation, vindicating Christ’s work

Discussion Prompts

- What do the phrases “once for sins” and “the righteous for the unrighteous” teach us?
- What does it mean that Christ suffered to “bring us to God”?
- How does Christ’s resurrection and exaltation strengthen us under opposition?

Question 8

Student Question:

Peter says Christ suffered “to bring us to God” (v. 18). The whole point of the gospel is restored nearness to God. Honestly, how near to God do you actually live day to day? What keeps you at a distance from the God Christ died to bring you to, and what step would close that gap?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes the purpose clause of verse 18, “to bring us to God,” and presses it into the student’s actual experience. The whole point of the cross was restored nearness to God; this question asks how near each student actually lives.

Help students reflect honestly. It is possible to be forgiven and yet to live at a distance, keeping God at the edges of life, praying rarely, treating Him as a Sunday acquaintance rather than a daily Father. Christ paid an immense price to bring us near; to then live far off is to neglect the very thing He died to secure.

Identify common distances. What keeps believers at arm’s length from God varies: unconfessed sin that breeds avoidance, busyness that crowds out communion, a functional self-sufficiency that only turns to God in crisis, or simply neglected habits of prayer and the word. Naming the specific barrier is the first step to removing it.

Move toward one concrete step that closes the gap. It might be a renewed daily time with God, the confession of a sin that has been creating distance, a return to honest prayer, or carving out unhurried time in His presence. The aim is to actually enjoy the nearness Christ purchased. This is the formational heart of the verse: not just to believe that Christ brings us to God, but to live near to the God we have been brought to.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The goal of the gospel as nearness to God, to be enjoyed, not neglected
- The possibility of being forgiven yet living at a distance
- Common barriers to nearness: sin, busyness, self-sufficiency, neglect
- Concrete steps to close the gap and enjoy God’s presence

Discussion Prompts

- How near to God do you actually live day to day?
- What most keeps you at a distance from the God Christ died to bring you to?
- What one step would help you draw nearer this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Peter says that the salvation of Noah’s family through water “corresponds to” baptism, “which now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (vv. 20–21). What does this teach about the meaning and place of baptism in salvation, and how do we understand Peter’s plain statement that baptism “now saves you”?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal climax of the lesson, and one of the clearest statements in the New Testament on the place of baptism in salvation. Peter has mentioned Noah and his family, eight people “brought safely through water,” and then says: “Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you.” The teacher should handle this verse with confidence and clarity, because it says plainly what the New Testament teaches consistently.

Start with the plain statement. Peter says baptism “now saves you.” He does not say baptism is a mere symbol of a salvation already received; he says it saves. This matches the rest of the New Testament: on the day of Pentecost, when convicted hearers asked what to do, Peter answered, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). Baptism is where one is buried with Christ and raised to new life (Romans 6:3–4; Colossians 2:11–13), clothed with Christ (Galatians 3:27), and where sins are washed away (Acts 22:16). Baptism “now saves you” because it is the appointed moment when, by faith, a penitent believer is united with the saving death and resurrection of Christ.

Now guard against two misunderstandings, using Peter’s own qualifications. First, baptism is “not as a removal of dirt from the body.” It is not a mere bath, and it is not a magic ritual that works automatically apart from faith. Its power is not in the water. Second, Peter says it saves “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” The saving power belongs entirely to Christ’s death and resurrection; baptism saves because it is the divinely appointed point at which the believer, in faith, lays hold of what Christ accomplished. Baptism is not a human work that earns salvation; it is an act of faith in which we submit to God and receive His grace.

Explain the phrase “an appeal to God for a good conscience.” In baptism the penitent believer appeals to God, pledging themselves to Him and asking for the cleansed conscience that comes through forgiveness. It is the response of a heart that has heard the gospel, believed in Jesus as Lord and Christ, repented of sin, and now confesses Him and is buried with Him in baptism. From that point the person walks in newness of life, and discipleship continues as a lifelong walk of faithfulness.

Help students grow in faith by holding grace and obedience together. Salvation is entirely by God’s grace through the blood of Christ; baptism is not a meritorious work but the God-appointed way we respond in faith and receive that grace. For the believer, this verse is not a cause for anxiety but for assurance: God has told us plainly where He joins us to Christ. The teacher can use this passage to clarify the gospel itself, that we are saved by grace through a faith that obeys, expressed in repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ, followed by faithful living.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Baptism “now saves you” as Peter’s plain statement (1 Peter 3:21)

- Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and union with Christ (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4; Colossians 2:11–13; Galatians 3:27; Acts 22:16)
- Baptism not a mere symbol, nor a magical ritual apart from faith
- The saving power belonging to Christ’s death and resurrection, not the water
- Baptism as an appeal to God for a good conscience, the response of faith
- The whole plan of salvation: hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, baptism, then faithful living
- Grace and obedient faith held together, giving assurance rather than anxiety

Discussion Prompts

- How do we understand Peter’s plain statement that baptism “now saves you”?
- How do Peter’s qualifications guard against viewing baptism as a magic ritual or a meritorious work?
- How does baptism fit within the whole plan of salvation taught in the New Testament?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over the whole passage. Peter calls us to a tender, united church life, to bless rather than retaliate, to witness with gentle confidence, and to rest in Christ who suffered to bring us to God and now reigns over all. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from 1 Peter 3:8–22 you most need to carry into this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers a very full passage. Peter has called the church to tender, humble unity (v. 8), to bless rather than retaliate (v. 9), to guard speech and seek peace (vv. 10–12), to witness with fearless, gentle confidence (vv. 14–16), and has anchored it all in Christ who suffered to bring us to God, saves us in baptism, and now reigns at God’s right hand (vv. 18–22). The question asks each student to name one specific way Christ is forming them through these verses.

Resist generalities. Walk students back through the movement of the passage: the church quality they need to grow in, the enemy they need to bless, the speech they need to guard, the fear that silences them, the gentleness their witness lacks, the distance from God they need to close, the assurance their own baptism into Christ should give. Invite each person to name the single point that lands most directly on their life.

Close by anchoring courage in Christ’s reign. Peter ends with Christ exalted, with angels and authorities subject to Him. Whatever opposition students face, they serve a risen, reigning Lord. Encourage each person to carry one truth from this passage into the week, to return to it, and to act on it, responding to opposition not with fear or retaliation but with the hope that is in them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Responding to opposition with blessing, courage, and gentle witness
- Assurance grounded in Christ's saving work and present reign
- The whole plan of salvation as a settled foundation for hope
- Self-examination leading to one concrete step

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this passage lands most directly on your life right now?
- What one concrete step can you take before we meet again?
- How can this group support and pray for you in that specific step?