

1 Peter 2:11–17 (NIV)

¹¹Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹²Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

¹³Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ¹⁵For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. ¹⁶Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. ¹⁷Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

1 Corinthians 14:20-33 (CEB)

²⁰Brothers and sisters, don't be like children in the way you think. Well, be babies when it comes to evil, but be adults in your thinking. ²¹In the Law it is written: *I will speak to this people with foreign languages and foreigners' lips, but they will not even listen to me this way, says the Lord.* ²²So then, tongues are a sign for those who don't believe, not for those who believe. But prophecy is a sign for believers, not for those who don't believe. ²³So suppose that the whole church is meeting and everyone is speaking in tongues. If people come in who are outsiders or unbelievers, won't they say that you are out of your minds? ²⁴But if everyone is prophesying when an unbeliever or outsider comes in, they are tested by all and called to account by all. ²⁵The secrets of their hearts are brought to light. When that happens, they will fall on their faces and worship God, proclaiming out loud that truly God is among you!

²⁶What is the outcome of this, brothers and sisters? When you meet together, each one has a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. All these things must be done to build up the church. ²⁷If some speak in a tongue, then let two or at most three speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. ²⁸However, if there is no interpreter, then they should keep quiet in the meeting. They should speak privately to themselves and to God. ²⁹In the case of prophets, let two or three speak and have the rest evaluate what is said. ³⁰And if some revelation comes to someone else who is sitting down, the first one should be quiet. ³¹You can all prophesy one at a time so that everyone can learn and be encouraged. ³²The spirits of prophets are under the control of the prophets. ³³God isn't a God of disorder but of peace.

Is the light of Christ in you so bright that you shimmer?

"Live such good lives among the pagans that . . . they may see your good deeds and glorify God when he comes . . .," Peter writes, as he urges the persecuted believers to remember that their entire lives are to be glorious, shimmering witnesses to God's goodness and grace. Sure, Peter knows that these believers, the "exiles," were being slandered and shunned, but he called them to live good, honorable, virtuous lives, even if it meant that the pagans would realize that the Christians had lived the right sort of lives only when Christ returns. What a powerful and realistic perspective. Think about it for a moment. Peter wants the believers to lead others toward glorifying God, not in their present lives, but so the pagans will see the truth when Christ returns and, thus, I presume, find salvation. David Bartlett writes:

While there is a kind of missionary appeal here, the hope that the Gentiles will be impressed by the honorable behavior of the Christians, hope is still eschatological hope. There is no easy assumption that faithful behavior will win admiration in this world; rather, at history's end, when God comes to visit, the

outsiders will behold the good deeds of the faithful. Then, at last, at *the* last, they will glorify God. This is the judgment toward which the epistle already pointed in 1:17, reminding the readers that God is both Father and impartial judge.

It is God whom the Gentiles will glorify, however, not the Christians themselves. The verse keeps the same balance as that of the Sermon on the Mount: “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matt 5:16 NRSV). The good deeds of believers do not redound to the glory of believers; they redound to the glory of God.

Psychologically as well as theologically it is striking that the epistle here at least resists the temptation to assume that the day of visitation will mean wrath and destruction for those who have acted destructively and wrathfully against Christians. Instead, the hope is that those who have not understood the good conduct of the faithful in the everyday world will at the final transformation also be transformed—from unbelief to faith (contrast Revelation 18).¹

Read again the last paragraph above. What is God’s hope? That all would turn to him, for he loved the world so much he gave his Son (John 3:16). So of course, even if it is only at the end that the pagans turn to him, that is far better than never. I had never paid enough attention to this bit from Peter – but it deserves some serious reflection.

But what are “good lives?”

In the succeeding paragraphs of 1 Peter, the apostle puts shape around the call to live a good life (“honorable” in the NRSV). Not surprisingly, Peter’s tune is from the same sheet music as Paul, who had much to say to the early Christians about the lives they were to lead in Christ. A good way to understand Paul’s advice and instruction is to read it through a lens that has four parts:

1. Do what builds up the body of Christ.
2. Do what is a good witness to Jesus.
3. Avoid what tears down the body of Christ.
4. Avoid what is a bad witness to Jesus.

I came across this simple interpretation aid years ago (though I can’t remember where!). It has stood the test of time. Why does Paul want all public speaking in tongues to be interpreted (see 1 Corinthians 14)? Here’s why. How can the practice build up the body (the church) if no one besides the tongues speaker knows what is being said? Similarly, why does Paul want the believers to be orderly and controlled when they gather to worship (also 1 Corinthians 14)? Because the chaos will make the believers look crazy to outsiders. How could that be a good witness to our Lord? To follow Peter, how could the pagans be expected to think well of the Christians if they seemed crazy and worse?

Clearly, Paul also emphasizes our part in building thriving Christian communities, for then, and only then, can we truly carry out Jesus’ mandate to offer Christ to the world, to feed the hungry, and to house the poor. Either we do this together, Paul would say, or we are not going to do it at all.

Perhaps “witness” means to you sitting down with someone to tell them about Jesus. Perhaps it is knocking on a few doors. Or being a bit kinder to the slow grocery clerk. Or even serving meals down at the Salvation Army or helping out in our food pantry.

In truth, all this and more is encompassed by the simple word “witnessing.” It is everything that we say and do in relationship with others, even if our “relationship” is nothing more than a fleeting encounter. There is no moment when we are not to be a shimmering disciple of Christ.

¹ Bartlett L. David, *New Interpreter’s Bible*, 1994–2004, 12, 274.

We must always be aware of how we seem to others. That doesn't mean that we will always do or say what pleases everyone. That doesn't mean we will back off from proclaiming the Good News. But it does mean that we must constantly strive to be

"Seek Peace and Pursue It"
(Psalm 34:14 and 1 Peter 3:11)

Peace so often eludes us. We find ourselves to be anxious and uncertain, unsure of where to turn next or how to go about finding the life we seek. The ancient Jews understood that the peace we seek can be found only in our relationship with God. They had a word for this: *shalom*. It cannot be translated with a single word. *Shalom* is prosperity, health, peace, wellness, completeness, safety, harmony, satisfaction, fulfillment, unity, victory, restoration.

Though we usually think of peace in the sense of our own inner peace, *shalom* for the ancient Jews was often a relational word, nearly synonymous with justice. It was about two persons living in an equitable, often covenantal, relationship. Thus, in the Old Testament, *shalom* can come when a payment is made or an obligation is met, for equity is restored between the two parties. Payment of the tithe, what was to be returned to God, was crucial to maintaining the Israelites' covenantal relationship with YHWH.

Simply put, *shalom* is the restoration of wholeness. It is well-being and is bound up with our relationship with God. Only when we love God and love neighbor, which is the heart of that relationship and which is grounded in action, can we find the peace we seek and that God desires for us.

But we cannot expect to find this peace so long as we hold back any portion of ourselves or our life, as if what matters is *only* our time or *only* our talents or *only* our money. And it won't come if we give from the leftovers, rather than from the first fruits of our lives and work. The wholeness that is *shalom* is just that, encompassing all that we are and have, holding nothing back.

Christ-like with all people at all times. We must surprise them with our kindness, our compassion, our understanding, our joy, and our contentment. Surely, in our increasingly angry world, Christ's offer of genuine peace would be gratefully received.

In 1 Peter 3, the apostle quotes Psalm 134, as he calls the believers to "seek peace and pursue it" (1 Peter 3:11).

The peace we seek won't come by accident; we won't stumble onto it or discover it thrust upon us. Rather, Peter reminds us that the pursuit of peace takes seriousness and discipline. Indeed, Peter calls the Christians to disciplined lives three times in this short letter (1:13; 4:7; 5:8). Now, this isn't about leading stern, joyless lives. But it is about seriousness of purpose and the application of our time, talents, gifts, and services to the work of God's kingdom.

Grabbing an occasional bit of Bible reading when we have a spare moment or two won't get us where we want to go. The same goes for haphazard prayers and for worshipping when it is convenient. And it is just as true when it comes to our money. Giving out of our leftovers is never going to help us to grow in our faith or to find the peace we seek. Rather, growing to maturity in our Christian life takes disciplined prayer, regular Bible reading, rain-or-shine worshipping, loving service, sacrificial giving, and so on.

Good stewards, serving one another

In 4:10, Peter urges the Christians to be good stewards of God's grace, serving each other with whatever gifts God has given them, understanding that their ability to serve at all comes from God's strength, not their own.

Our life at St. Andrew is to be just this – mutually encouraging, serving, and caring. We are to represent the life of God to each other. Pheme Perkins writes, "Passages like this one remind Christians today that faith requires community. Believers should be active members of local churches that are gathered for prayer, for mutual support, for celebration. They are also reminded that

local churches should be places in which all members of the church share the particular gifts that God has given them.”²

St. Andrew is just such a church. God has blessed us with many gifts and we return those gifts to God, using them to serve not only each other, but neighbors and strangers all over the world. But sometimes we need to be reminded that because we work from God’s strength, not our own, serving one another becomes an act of worship, the path to peace., and the means by which a shimmering disciple of our Lord.

Daily Bible Readings

These readings are usually a sample of related passages. During this series, try reading 1 Peter in its entirety each week, followed by a psalm on Saturday.

Monday, 1 Peter 1 A living hope

Tuesday, 1 Peter 2 A chosen people, called to serve

Wednesday, 1 Peter 3 Living as exiles, part 1

Thursday, 1 Peter 4 Living as exiles, part 2

Friday, 1 Peter 5 Tending God’s flock

Saturday, Psalm 34 Praise for deliverance from trouble

Scott Engle’s Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

A study of the book of Revelation

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

A study of Paul’s letter to the Romans

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week’s lesson stands on its own. This is very “drop-in.” Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Both classes are now recorded and are available each week in my new podcast at scottengle.podbean.com. They are also available on Apple podcasts. Search by my name, “Scott Engle.”

Scott’s 11:00 Sunday Class in Smith Worship Center

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Current series: *Questions to All Your Answers*

Video of each week’s class is posted here: vimeo.com/groups/scottsbiblestudy

²From her commentary on 1 & 2 Peter, James, and Jude in the *Interpretation* series.