

1 Peter 3:8-12

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. For, "The one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. He must turn away from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

Last week we talked about the list of adjectives which will describe our lives when we live in a submitted relationship with the Lord. As we have learned, the Spirit causes us to be submissive. However this submission is realized when we put aside all fleshly lusts of self-pity and self-love and the design point (Jesus' life in and through ours) is realized in our lives. In this manner of living, we will be described as like-minded (we will be sharing the thoughts of Christ); sympathetic (we will be sharing the feelings of one another); brotherly (we will have a firm affection for one another in love); kindhearted or tender (will describe the nature of our affection for one another); and humble (considering others more important than ourselves) will define our relationships.

As the Spirit has been talking to us about living as aliens and strangers, it sometimes seems as if we have to give up so much. In reality, all we are giving up is that which is already dead and dying. But I want you to consider how much life

we get in return. The depth, connection, intimacy, security, care, and tenderness in our relationships can be so satisfying and fulfilling. Such relationships are largely unheard of. So few people have tapped into living at this level of abandon; but it is available when you let die all that is attached to this dying world. Jesus never demands anything that He does not replace with something far better and far more satisfying. We need to keep this in mind as we are advancing forward taking the territory that Jesus has given us.

As we continue with this summary, we move away from the adjectives that describe us and once again get to issues of our responsibility. Not returning or giving evil for evil or insult for insult. Interestingly, “evil” is an adjective whereas “insult” is a noun; it’s a thing. And I believe that is because an insult is very tangible and pretty much commonly understood; but “evil” can be applied to many things, even compliments and acts of charity can be masks for works of evil. The issue of evil goes to the source of the action and not necessarily the action itself. In other words, what we would commonly describe as good may in fact be evil depending upon its place of origin.

Evil stands in opposition to that which is good, both “*kalos*” and “*agathos*;” hence, it denotes what is useless, incapable, bad, and inherently depraved. It is also antithetic to “*chrestos*,” or that which is kind, gracious, and of service; hence, “evil” also denotes that which is destructive, overbearing, rude, and takes for takings sake. But again, all of this deals with the fruit of evil, how it plays out in relationships; the real issue is what is evil? We can see its effect, but how do we determine what is or is not evil if we have to be sure that we are not giving it?

Evil is a hard thing to definitively define for a couple of reasons: 1) The notion

of evil tends to be culturally determined and always seems to be defined by its actions. There are a handful of globally accepted constructs of evil, but most people have classified “good” and “evil” based on very practical behaviors that are deemed to be either productive and healthy for their society or extremely detrimental. As an example of the relative notion of evil, in Japan, they consider it evil, wrong, and dishonorable to lie other Japanese. Yet it is entirely ok to lie to non-Japanese people since, as they say, “does anyone feel bad about lying to their dog?” In an Islamic based society, you can be considered evil and worthy of dying just by being a Christian. Although there are vast cultural differences and opinions as to what is evil, each culture has a fairly well-established set of rules and expectations around what is considered to be “good” and “evil,” but since it is all relative we cannot look to man to give us a solid definition of evil.

2) Most people are convinced that when it is all said and done they are predominately “good” people. This goodness ethic goes all the way back to the original sin and is at the heartbeat of why people are not naturally convinced of their need for God. They think they can be good like God. In fact, they spend their whole life trying to get others to believe they are good. Yet, when they fail to prove out their goodness, they are drowned in shame which produces all sorts of ugly and evil things in a person’s life. And the cycle goes on and on.

But regardless of what people believe about themselves and their world, we have to remember that the Holy Spirit is speaking and His view of what is “good” and “evil” is far different than our own. And since the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead, I think His perspective dominates and should be the basis for how we decide what is “good” and “evil.” The Spirit, all throughout the Word

of God, speaks quite clearly as to what is good and what is evil, we just have to be willing to accept His opinion and exchange it for ours. And please keep in mind, the Spirit's opinion goes to how we, as aliens and strangers, live in this world that is passing away and soon will be gone. It is not behavior based but source based.

For our answer, let's go back to some of the things we have learned. We know that in **Matthew 19:17**, **Luke 18:19**, and **Mark 10:18** Jesus made it clear that only God is truly good—no other. **1 Samuel 2:2** makes it clear that there is no one holy except for the Lord. And **Psalms 145:7-9** says that the Lord alone is filled with abundant goodness, righteousness, graciousness, mercy, and lovingkindness. In stark contrast, **Romans 3:10-12** says quite succinctly: No one is righteous, not even one, all have turned aside from God, and there is no one who does good—not even one. Therefore, despite the goodness that man is convinced dwells within his soul, and notwithstanding all his striving to be good and to be validated for his goodness, he simply does not have the capacity to be anything but mercenary and self-seeking through and through. He is quite unlike God.

Only God stands out as the one who is holy (**1 Peter 1:15**) and the one who is good. Which is another way of saying that only God is without evil. God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all (**1 John 1:5**). In Him there is no variation or shifting of shadows (**James 1:17**). **Psalms 5:4** simply says, "No evil dwells in You." And finally, **Psalms 92:15** says that the Lord is upright and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

Therefore if no man is good and only God is good, then this passage about our not giving evil for evil can be seen as a strong mandate for us to live according to the design point: "it is no longer I who lives but Christ lives in me." Since He is the

only one who is not evil or who is good, then our not returning evil for evil can only be fulfilled according to the design point. And this takes us all the way back to the first step of the design point: “I have been crucified with Christ.” In order for us to not be giving evil for evil, we have to have thrown off the fleshly lusts of self-pity and self-love; otherwise, despite what we think, we are giving evil for evil and not God’s goodness for evil. Does that make sense?

And we must never be fooled into thinking there is some middle ground of goodness. There is not. You don’t have to be doing something “bad” in order for it to be evil. The truth is you are either with God or opposed to God (**Luke 11:23**); there is no nice comfortable landing place in the middle where you can rest on your own goodness; you have none! It is a ruse and one of the biggest deceptions of the enemy. In terms of the rules for those who abide in this world, man and earthly authorities determine what is or is not evil and they focus on behavior; but in the kingdom of God only God can make that determination and He focuses on the source. And it is clear, whatever is not of or from God is evil. **Luke 6:43-44**, “For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit.” It is all about the source, which is why even our best acts of goodness can still be unqualifiedly evil.

Think about this in terms of your day-in-and-day-out interactions with your brothers and sisters in the Lord, with those you work with, and basically every relationship you have. There is no middle ground. You are either dealing with people on the basis of evil or goodness; and the determining factor, at any moment, is your submission. You are either submitted to the Spirit of God who

dwells in the **New Creation** or you are submitted to your *Old Sinful Nature*. And over time the fruit of your submission will be obvious.

For most of us, this is not the best of news. We want to be good and want others to love us because we can prove to them that we are good or at least mostly good. But that is simply not the case and we need to let this truth become our truth. The point being is that if Jesus is living in and through you (the design point), then you will not be giving evil for evil or insult for insult. In fact, the design point is the only way this passage can be fulfilled in your life.

Instead of evil and insults, we are to be continually giving a blessing (*present active participle*), for we were called by God (it is in the *passive* and *indicative*, so it is a statement of fact) to inherit a blessing. How many people want a blessing? God is so funny; He knows that we are always wanting and seeking something more. So He offers it; a truly bona-fide blessing; but He also establishes the way for us to receive this blessing—by living out the design point.

I think we need to define blessing so we are not all running off with ideas of new cars, nice houses, paid off debt, and so on (although all of that would definitely be a blessing). Blessing comes from the Greek word “eulogeo”—and it is where we get the idea of eulogy (or “eugoogally”) where someone speaks good, kind, and favorable words over one who has died. It is formed from two words, “eu” or “well” and “logos” or “word;” thus, it is an expression of praise: speaking quite honorably and fondly of another. We were called for this very purpose—to inherit such a blessing. **Ephesians 1:3** says that our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Every good thing that could be spoken over our lives has been spoken—beginning with the fact

that we are the **beloved**—and we are called to live in this inheritance.

The idea here is that if someone is giving us evil and insulting or railing against us, we don't retaliate with hurtful words or accusations back at them; instead, we choose to give them a blessing, a good word, knowing that we will be likewise blessed by God. This is absolutely a benefit of the design point because in our flesh there is no "good-word" to be found. When someone is coming at us with nastiness, everything in our body wants to not only lunge at them with nastiness but we want to tear them apart and ensure that they think twice about ever coming against us ever again. But the interesting thing is that if we fight fire with fire, we get burned; and we were not called to get burned. Thus, God is suggesting that we fight fire with water, with a blessing that puts out the fire. Then for sure we won't get burned for the person who is coming against us will likely have no idea what to do, and the Father will speak some awesome things about us and to us. He will speak words that soothe and comfort our soul; words which encourage and strengthen us.

The Spirit then quotes **Psalm 34:12-16**. For, "The one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. He must turn away from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." If you are constantly desiring life in your now (*present active participle*), as opposed to walking around as the living dead; if you are constantly desiring God's agape love (in this instance, it is a *present active verb* and not a noun—so it speaks of something you desire to experience in your now and to give to others), and to always see or to know

inherently “good” (*agathos*) days (which means that your time on earth can be “good” and filled with things of God), then you must:

1. Keep your tongue from evil. This is actually a command, an *imperative*. You must refrain from letting that which is not of God come from your mouth toward others. By implication of this command, we have to understand the Spirit to be commanding us to live according to the design point. That means we must go for it; we must embrace the crucifixion, and we must dig deep into our souls and remove those fleshly lusts of self-pity and self-love. Do you want good things in your life; then walk in the Spirit of God and God Himself will speak through you that which is good. This command is in the *aorist active* which means that you must be busy about this way of living and it is to define your life from beginning to end. This kind of personal restraint does not happen on its own; it is a result of your letting the Spirit cause you to be submitted to the Lord. With that said, we must never underestimate this truth: when the tongue is not an instrument of the Lord yielded to the Spirit, it is destructive and hell bent on evil; that is its nature.

James 3:1-12

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. So also the tongue is a small part

of the body, and yet it boasts of great things.

See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing.

My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.

No one on their own can tame the tongue which is why the design point is so critical. Jesus must rule in our lives such that He can speak through our bodies. It is His words that are to proceed from our mouths. Once again, this speaks of our desperate need to be so submitted to Jesus otherwise we will be an instrument of destruction and will by definition be defiled. And if you still think there is a middle ground of goodness, the Spirit makes it clear that in our flesh our tongues get their power from hell itself. A person who is not submitted to the Spirit speaks things that come from evil, from the darkness, from the lies and whisperings of the enemy. And please don't ever forget that this passage is written to believers and not unbelievers.

2. Keep your lips from speaking deceit. This is one of those interesting times

where the Lord doubles up. Clearly deceit is evil. We saw this sort of thing before in **1 Peter 2:1** where it says to get rid of all deceit and hypocrisy, where hypocrisy is clearly a form of deceit. We walked away understanding that God wanted to make a big deal about religious hypocrisy; it is something He hates. This is actually communicating the very same thing. In other words, you must avoid flattery and the type of speech—especially in this context that which would be considered religious speak—which seems “good” but actually covers up wicked motives or covers up that which is not from God. Religious deceit is one of the Lord’s number one enemies and this type of falsity is surely one way to not experience the Lord’s blessings and His trinita of life, love, and good days. Imagine what this means for all those in the religion of Christianity who do not even understand the design point but are out there very busy being “good” Christians. Wow, it is sad and tragic.

3. Turn away from evil and do good. Not only is this another command, as “turn away” is an *imperative*, it is also emphatic. You must always deviate, reject, shun, and not engage with others from a place that is not from God; rather, you are commanded (“do” is another *imperative*) to always do that which is “*agathos*” or inherently good; that which comes from the only one who is truly good. Both “turn away” and “do” is in the *arist* tense and *active* voice; thus, shunning evil and doing good is to define your life from beginning to end. And this is not a passive endeavor, but it is active; something at which you should be busy.

This really does not give you any room at all to satisfy your selfishness and the things that you want out of this life. This does not give you room to “take care” of your own desires or to indulge the emotions in your flesh, even for a moment. It says you must live as one who turns away from your flesh. As the Spirit says: “So I

advise you to live according to your new life in the Holy Spirit. Then you won't be doing what your old sinful nature craves...If we are living now by the Holy Spirit let us follow the Holy Spirit's leading in every part of our lives" (**Galatians 5:16, 25**). To embrace the Spirit's way of living we must reject our flesh, turn from it, avoid it, and have nothing to do with it; and we do this by choosing the Spirit—choosing to live from the design point. Choosing the Spirit is a rejection of your flesh. If you don't make this choice, the evil of your flesh will defile your relationships; there is no way around it.

4. Seek peace and pursue it. Both of these verbs, "seek" and "pursue" are in the *aorist active imperative*. They are commands and we are to be busy about it and this is to define our lives, from beginning to end. Let's think about this statement so we are not confused by the religion that dwells in our souls. When we think of "peace" we think of keeping everything nice and "peaceful" without conflict—you know how it goes, "everyone just love one another and get along." The problem is that such an approach usually forces us into deceit. We don't want to be totally honest with someone because that will thrust us into conflict and then there will likely be an absence of peace. Therefore, we hold back from speaking the truth thinking that we must keep the peace at all costs. Well that is a problem since the Spirit keeps telling us that we cannot be deceitful; even if it is for "good" purposes. Deceit is still evil.

The Greek word translated "peace" literally means to be joined—with no separation. For instance, **Romans 5:1** says we have peace with God; literally we have been joined to Him and there is no separation between us. Peace, therefore, speaks of a deep unity in the Spirit. This can only be accomplished however via the design point, for **Ephesians 2:14** says that Jesus is our peace. What separates

us as brothers and sisters in the Lord is that which is evil and deceitful, but that which joins us is good and therefore of God. Thus, we are to seek to be so unified and joined together in Jesus such that no evil stands in between our relationships with one another. And if there is evil in our relationships (anything that is not of God), then you are to turn away from such evil and do good. You are to actively pursue this depth of unity which means, by necessity, there will be conflict. Everything is not going to be peachy keen and roses; there will be no artificial peace. But pursuing peace requires us to prioritize truth and have the courage to speak it and live it. This command is similar to what we read last week in **2 Timothy 2:22** which says, "Pursue faith and love and peace and enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts." Don't forget, this is a command. You are to pursue it confident that Jesus will be the glue between your relationships and He will cause them to stand, to thrive and to prosper.

This is how we can and must pattern our lives; it is the pathway to enjoy life and love and to see good days. These are the blessings that I want God to speak over my life: Steve, for you I grant life, my agape love, and good days. For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. Now I want you to notice what this passage does not say. It does not say that His eyes are toward the Christians and His ears attend to their prayer. No, it does not say that. If that was our reality, then we would not have to be instructed to turn from evil, avoid deceit, and so on. We could just rest in the fact that we raised our hands and accepted Jesus knowing that only those evil people have reason to worry. The truth is however we can be a Christian and be wholly given over to evil. Remember, what is

decisive is not if a person calls Jesus Lord, but if they do the will of His Father (**Matthew 7:21**). In fact, Jesus' family is defined by those who do the will of His Father (**Matthew 12:50**).

The face of the Lord is against those who do evil and evil is in the *present active participle*. So this is not so much addressing what we would call "evil" people, but those who are busy in the now doing evil and continually doing evil. So let's go back to the design point. On-the-one-hand, if it is no longer you who live, but Christ that lives in you, if you have been crucified with Christ, then you will not be doing evil but good, for the only one who is good will be living in and through your body. He will be speaking and doing all that is good. On-the-other-hand, if you are trying to be good, or convinced you are good and are therefore busy at serving God and doing what you think is good, then by definition you are doing evil; that which is not good. This is such a bizarre truth and one that most Christians clearly do not understand. Again, remember this instruction is written to believers and not unbelievers. Don't think for a moment you are exempt.

You might be horrified right now thinking that God is not watching you or listening to your prayers because you are still struggling with the crucifixion part. Well, those are powerful word pictures which are not to be ignored. To some this truth is quite harrowing and to others extremely comforting and assuring knowing that our Lord is for us and not against us. As painful as it may be, the Lord's blessing of life, agape love, and good days is not spoken over the lives of those who are now doing evil; living according to their flesh. And that makes sense because those who do evil, and once again keep in mind this is an instruction that is given to believers, are turned away from Him and they are not really seeking

Him anyway. Rather, they are seeking their own way and their own desires—they just seem to be covering up all of it in religious deceit. So it makes sense. If you turn away from the design point in exchange for religion—and your own goodness—you will be turning away from the face of God and His face will by definition be against you. You have turned and you have moved away from Him.

The fact that His ears are bent toward the prayers of the righteous is actually in line with **1 John 5:14-15** which says that we can know our prayers are heard and will be answered when we pray according to the will of God. But we can only pray according to His will if the Spirit is leading our prayers, for the Spirit is the one who knows the mind of the Lord (**1 Corinthians 2:11**) and therefore knows what to pray. This is why **Ephesians 6:18** tells us to pray at all times in the Spirit. Again, another convincing reason why we must live according to the design point. We need the Spirit for everything—Yes, everything. He is our provision from Jesus.

What do you think is being communicated by the picture that His eyes are toward the righteous. I think it means we can be assured that we are continually under the Lord's guidance, care, and protection. Not one little detail of our lives goes unnoticed (which is why **Psalms 37:23** says, "The steps of the godly are directed by the Lord. He delights in every detail of their lives."). Besides, in **Psalms 34** (which is being quoted here) in the very next verse it says,

Psalms 34:17-19

The Lord hears his people when they call to him for help. He rescues them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those

whose spirits are crushed. The righteous person faces many troubles, but the Lord comes to the rescue each time.

This gives us a very powerful picture of how God relates to the **beloved**; this is the place where I want to dwell. Equally as powerful is this idea that the Lord is against those who do evil. Ouch. That means His blessing of life, agape love, and good days is not spoken over their lives. They are not under His watchful gaze of protection, care, and guidance. Their prayers are not assured of reaching His ears; they might reach up there, but there is not guarantee. This picture of His face being against them does not conjure up an image of peace but of sad, delusional, separation. And most people are so busy trying to be “good” that they do not even know this is their condition.

The sad thing is that Jesus has promised that He would never leave them nor forsake them, and He doesn't. But they are so busy doing their own thing not interested in His way that with their back facing Him, His face is naturally against them. So He waits, He induces, and He loves. To put this in a more tangible picture, it is like a married couple where one of the participants is no longer interested in the other. The other is there, is waiting, is wanting to engage as married people should, but the one person has turned from them and instead given themselves to other lovers. It is sad, tragic, but that is the product of living for the flesh and doing evil.

This is a pretty powerful summation of what it means to let the Spirit cause you to be submitted to the Lord. Again, the only way any of this goodness is realized (blessing, life, love, and good days) is when we hold to the design point. “I have

been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ that lives in me”
(Galatians 2:20).

In closing I do want to say that this whole thing is captured in the Old Testament story of the Israelites taking over the Promised Land. That story depicts both the idea that we are crucified with Christ and that He then lives in and through our lives. They had to first agree to cross over the Jordan and go to war and they had to do it together—in unity. And then they had to mobilize and go to war and it was brutal. But they had to kill every single enemy in the land as they fought, conquered, and advanced taking over more and more territory. Those who completed the task experienced life and peace and great prosperity, but those who did not were haunted their entire history by the presence of evil. And sometimes that evil over took the tribe and even the kingdom.

Let’s not be like those who refused to turn from evil. Let’s fight and keep fighting those fleshly lusts of self-pity and self-love until the Lord’s blessing is pouring down from our lives and we can be one who says: I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me. By the way, if you are in the fight, His eyes are on you. And in that truth you can not only rest but rejoice.

Let’s pray