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NOT REACTING REACTIVELY, BUT BLESSING:
SOCIO-RHETORICAL HERMENEUTICAL STUDIES 1 PETER 3:8-12

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Abstract	This article highlights the attitude towards insults based on 1 Peter 3:9 in the context of the passage 1 Peter 3:8–12. This study is a qualitative library research using a socio-rhetorical hermeneutic approach. The primary data source is the biblical text of 1 Peter 3:8–12, supported by related scriptural references and academic literature. Data were collected through document analysis, focusing on textual and contextual interpretation. The data analysis employed Vernon K. Robbins' socio-rhetorical method, involving five textures: inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, ideological texture, and sacred texture. The results of the study show that the call not to return insult for insult is not only a moral demand, but part of the ethical identity of the Christian community. The values of love, peace, and blessing are presented as an alternative response to social injustice. This study contributes to the understanding of biblical texts and their application in today's social context.
Keywords	Insult, Revilement, Socio-Rhetorical, Christian Ethics.

INTRODUCTION

In the reality of social life, humans are inseparable from each other, meaning that humans cannot live alone, but humans are social creatures (Bushman & Anderson, 2001). Humans need interaction with others to develop, survive, and reach their potential as living beings (Atiqoh & Maunah, 2024). Since childhood, humans begin to learn how to interact with their families, peers, and environment (wahyu Kusuma et al., 2025). This social ability will be needed throughout life because humans live in communities that require the ability to interact and communicate with others. Therefore, social relationships are essential for human well-being because they provide emotional support, information, and practical help (Baron & Richardson, 1994).

However, it seems that human social life is not always framed in harmony. Differences are often the trigger for friction, competition, conflict, and dispute. Many social problems occur in the midst of social life that have an impact on most individuals; one example is swearing. This is a form of verbal abuse that is increasingly prevalent in daily social life (Turmudi, 2021).

Caci maki in the Indonesian Dictionary is defined as dirty or disrespectful words used to swear at someone (Indonesia, 2008). The rapid development of the times makes this phenomenon not only occur in direct interaction, but also extends to the digital realm, especially social media, which has a very fast spread and can be reached by all users. According to research conducted by Kowalski et al., the use of abusive words or swear words can have a negative impact on mental health, damage the quality of social relationships, and even potentially trigger the emergence of aggressive behavior or violent acts (Kowalski et al., 2014). In the context of an increasingly polarized society, swearing is often used as a tool to attack or degrade the dignity of others, both in personal conflicts and in broader social interactions.

In everyday life, many people are faced with the challenge of responding to mistreatment from others. Data from social psychology research suggest that a common reaction to negative treatment is often an impulse to retaliate or defend oneself reactively (Baron & Richardson, 1994). Studies by Bushman and Anderson (2001) also confirm that negative emotions such as anger, resentment, or resentment can influence individuals to respond with aggression or a desire to retaliate. This is in line with findings in a survey by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020), which noted that in situations of emotional distress, the majority of respondents tend to show impulsive reactions to unfair treatment (Association, 2020). Thus, humans naturally have a complexity of negative emotions that can drive reactive actions, especially when they feel that their

self-esteem is threatened or not appreciated. In this context, the reactive approach is often considered a reasonable form of self-defense, although in reality, it can worsen social relationships as well as the inner state of the individual.

Acts of retaliation committed by a person are not always aimed at revenge. In many cases, such behavior can be influenced by habits, personal character, traditions, established patterns of attitude, or social environmental conditions. However, the way a person responds to bad treatment has a direct impact on the quality of human relations and can affect stability and harmony in social life. Instead of retaliating for the unpleasant act, there is another way that can be done besides retaliation, namely by doing good and praying for those who have insulted them. Many organizations seek to teach and guide the attitude of non-retaliation. Moreover, especially the teachings about love and peace, which are often the moral foundation in facing the reality of life, full of challenges and injustice.

When it comes to love, the discussion is very broad. Love is the ability to understand and appreciate the feelings of others. Doing good, compassionate, humble, not retaliating for evil, reproaching with reproach, and blessing those who do evil are also forms of love. In other words, humans must have love to interact with every creature created by God. If love is not possessed by every human being, then what will happen is evil and chaos everywhere. The question is, do humans really love others based on God's love? Many people know what it is to love, but do not do it with a real heart. Many people still often do actions that do not show love, such as retaliating for evil deeds. Another question that needs to be asked is why someone commits verbal violence. Are there certain factors that drive such actions? Some common causes of verbal violence include envy and the influence of a negative social environment.

The Bible, which is the holy book for Christians, contains teachings that can be used as a guide to dealing with social problems that arise in the world today. One example is 1 Peter 3:9, which offers a unique paradigm by advising Christians not to repay insults with insults, but with blessings. The teaching of refraining from retaliating against insults is a great ethical challenge, especially in the context of a society where retaliation is often considered a reasonable response to unfair treatment. However, Peter invites the congregation to respond to crime in a way that is different from the prevailing social norms. Peter's teachings at 1 Peter 3:9 are not just moral advice, but they reflect the values of love, forgiveness, and humility that are at the heart of the Christian faith.

So far, the available literature has focused more on other thematic units in the epistle of 1 Peter. For example, Keir E. Hammer's study on the "rebirth language in 1 Peter" emphasizes the framework of baptism, but does not specifically address the response to insults in 1 Peter (Hammer, 2012). Similarly, research by Sean M. Christensen, which reviews the quotation from Psalm 34 in 1 Peter 3:10-12, does not elaborate in depth on textural analysis (Christensen, 2015), specifically, the socio-rhetorical critical approaches introduced by Vernon K. Robbins, such as innertexture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, ideology texture, and sacred texture (Robbins, 1996) in the context of 1 Peter 3:9.

So far, the available literature has focused more on other thematic units in the epistle of 1 Peter. For example, Keir E. Hammer's (2012) study of *the rebirth language in 1 Peter* emphasizes more on the theological aspects of the baptismal framework, and does not specifically address how responses to insults or verbal abuse are described in the text. Thus, there is a gap in the exploration of the theme of retaliation against insults in the context of the doctrine of love. Another study by Sean M. Christensen (2015) highlights the use of Psalm 34 in 1 Peter 3:10–12, but does not provide an in-depth analysis of verse 3:9 as the main focus, nor has it made systematic use of the socio-rhetorical critique approach. The socio-rhetorical criticism approach introduced by Vernon K. Robbins (1996), such as *inner texture*, *intertexture*, *social and cultural texture*, *ideological texture*, and *sacred texture*, has also not been widely applied to study 1 Peter 3:9 holistically.

Based on this explanation, this study offers a distinction by placing 1 Peter 3:9 as the main focus of the study and examining it thoroughly through Robbins's socio-rhetorical critique approach. Thus, the novelty of this research lies in the incorporation of interdisciplinary textual approaches that have not been widely carried out in previous studies, as well as in the effort to interpret the teachings of love in the context of the response to verbal violence in the midst of today's social life. Thus, this study will examine more deeply the response to the act of swearing as stated in 1 Peter 3:9 in the context of 1 Peter 3:8–12. This study is carried out using the hermeneutic approach of socio-rhetorical criticism, which in this case combines two main approaches: first, Paul Ricoeur's reflective hermeneutics, which emphasizes the understanding of meaning through the dialectic between the text and the context of its reader; second, the socio-rhetorical criticism approach developed by Vernon K. Robbins (1996), which includes five aspects of texture: *inner texture*, *intertexture*, *social and cultural texture*, *ideological texture*, and *sacred texture*.

Ricoeur's hermeneutics provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the text not only as a linguistic object, but as a world open to ethical and existential interpretation, especially in the contemporary context. Meanwhile, Robbins' socio-rhetorical approach provides a comprehensive framework for interpreting ethical messages in biblical texts based on their rhetorical structure and socio-cultural context.

The main focus is on verse 9, as this verse is the climax of the entire passage of 1 Peter 3:8–12. The whole set of thoughts in this passage points to the principle affirmed in verse 9, which is not to repay evil with evil, but rather to bless. Through a deep understanding of Peter's teachings in 1 Peter 3:9 with this approach, it is hoped that the church will be able to develop a more positive response in the face of conflict, as well as encourage the creation of an atmosphere of harmonious and loving fellowship in a society that tends to tolerate acts of revenge.

METHOD

This research is a qualitative research type of *library research* that focuses on the study of biblical texts and academic literature as the main source in analyzing 1 Peter 3:8–12. This type of research was chosen because it aims to explore the theological and ethical meaning of the text in depth through a critical interpretation of written sources.

The approach used is socio-rhetorical hermeneutics, with reference to the thought of Paul Ricoeur as a figure of reflective hermeneutics and Vernon K. Robbins as the developer of the socio-rhetorical method of criticism. Ricoeur's hermeneutics (1976) provides a philosophical framework for understanding texts as a world open to interpretations that involve the relationship between literal, symbolic, and ethical meanings. Meanwhile, Robbins' (1996) socio-rhetorical approach provides a five-texture analysis tool to examine the rhetorical structure and socio-theological context of the text holistically.

Data collection techniques are carried out through the identification and collection of related biblical texts, in particular 1 Peter 3:8–12, as well as relevant academic literature such as commentaries, theological journals, hermeneutics books, and socio-rhetorical studies. This collection process is carried out by utilizing print and digital library sources, including scientific journal databases, theological libraries, and verified online publications. Each source obtained is then critically analyzed to ensure its appropriateness in context, credibility, and relevance to the focus of the research.

The analysis was carried out using five layers of Robbins textures. *Inner texture* examines the rhetorical structure and style of language in texts. *Intertexture* examines the relationship of 1 Peter 3:8–12 to other texts, such as the Psalms or the teachings of Jesus. *Social and cultural texture* explores the social and cultural backgrounds of the readers and authors of the text. *Ideological texture* reveals the worldview and the values that the author wants to affirm. Meanwhile, *sacred texture* examines the theological values and beliefs of faith contained in the text. Through this approach, the research aims to raise the ethical message in 1 Peter 3:9 in its entirety and show its relevance in dealing with the phenomenon of verbal violence in today's society.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The results of this research were obtained through documentation techniques, namely by collecting and studying the biblical text of 1 Peter 3:8–12 along with relevant academic literature, including commentaries, journals, and scientific papers that discuss socio-rhetorical hermeneutics. All data were analyzed using Robbins' five-texture approach to uncover the rhetorical patterns, inter-textual connections, and social, ideological, and theological contexts of the passages. This process allows researchers to identify the key elements that make up the ethical and theological message in the letter of 1 Peter, especially in responding constructively to pressure and injustice.

Early analysis shows that 1 Peter 3:8–12 not only provided moral counsel for the early church but also conveyed a systematic rhetorical strategy in shaping the behavior of the people. The letter authors use a pattern of prohibition and commandment reinforced by theological reason, so that the message to "not reply reactively, but bless" becomes clear and rooted. In a social context full of discrimination and exclusion, this teaching serves as a practical guide as well as an expression of faith identity that defies the norms of revenge in Roman culture. The detailed findings of the analysis are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Rhetorical Patterns and Textures 1 Peter 3:8–12

Analysis Aspect	Key Findings
Social Context	The Christian Church Receives Social Pressure: Discrimination, Slander, Exclusion (1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11)
Retorika	Deliberative dominant; epideictic element in 1 Pet. 3:8–12 (Davids, 2014; Achtemeier & Epp, 1996)
Innertexture	The pattern of prohibitions–commandments–theological reasons; Focus on the words "curse" & "bless" (Williams & Horrell, 2023)

Intertexture	Parallel with Matthew 5:38–44; Romans 12:14; Leviticus 19:18; Proverbs 10:12; 1 Pet. 4:8 (Watson & Callan, 2012)
Social Texture	Roman cultural contrasts: revenge vs blessing; the value of Christian love against Roman honor (Elliott, 2008)
Ideologi	The new identity in Christ: rejecting retribution, choosing love and blessings (Grudem, 2024)
Sacred Texture	Doctrine blesses part of a spiritual relationship with God (Faulhaber, 2007; Keating, 2011a)

The study found that the passage 1 Peter 3:8–12 contains very strong moral and theological teachings, particularly regarding how Christians are taught to respond to pressure, unfair treatment, and even persecution. Verse 9 is at the heart of this passage's message, displaying a sharp contrast between the prohibition against retaliation for evil and the command to bless. This prohibition is not just an interpersonal ethic, but is affirmed on the theological grounds that people are called to receive blessings from God. Thus, a blessing attitude in the midst of injustice is not an optional option, but rather a fundamental call of faith.

Rhetorically, this text shows the dominance of deliberative patterns that serve to encourage the congregation to choose the right action, even though they are suffering. This pattern is reinforced by epideictic elements that emphasize the strengthening of moral values such as love, humility, and the unity of the congregation. The choice of keywords such as *loidorian* (slander) and *eulogountes* (bless) is not only descriptive, but serves as a focal point that underscores the ethical message of this letter: that the expected response is not a destructive emotional reaction, but rather a response that reflects the character of Christ.

Intertextual analysis shows that this teaching has strong roots in the biblical tradition. Connection to texts such as Matthew 5:44 ("Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you") and Leviticus 19:18 ("Thou shalt not demand vengeance... but love thy neighbor as thyself") indicates a continuation of the principle of divine love that consistently resists retribution. Peter, in this case, does not offer a new teaching, but contextualizes the principle in the concrete situation of the receiving church of the letter, which experiences discrimination and social pressure.

Within the framework of first-century Roman culture, these teachings were contrasting and even subversive. Roman culture upheld the concept of *honor* and often considered retribution as a way of maintaining self-dignity. By teaching not to retaliate, but to bless, Peter challenged that paradigm and proposed an alternative ethics rooted in a new identity in Christ. This identity forms a community that judges truth not from social norms, but from God's will, so that acts of love and blessing are understood as radical expressions of faith as well as spiritual resistance to injustice.

Thus, 1 Peter 3:8–12 is not only moral counsel, but also a manifestation of a theological vision that directs people to build a common life based on love, unity, and forgiveness, as a reflection of God's own love.

Discussion

The passage of 1 Peter 3:8–12, especially verse 9, not only conveys a moral message but is central to the rhetoric that articulates the identity of the Christian community in the midst of suffering. The socio-rhetorical hermeneutic approach allows us to read this text not only as ethical instruction but as an ideological discourse that shapes communities through distinctive rhetorical language, symbols, and structures.

Deliberative and epideictic rhetoric function simultaneously in this passage. Deliberative rhetoric appears to be an impulse to make moral decisions in a tangible context: "avenge no evil," "bless," and "seek peace." Meanwhile, the epideictic element plays a role in strengthening the internal values of the congregation, such as unity of heart, brotherly love, and humility (verse 8). Both of these rhetorical styles show that Peter's counsel was both practical and normative—he did not simply exhort the people to do good, but affirmed that good works are a manifestation of who they are in Christ (Achtemeier & Epp, 1996; Davids, 2014).

The inner texture of verse 9 is particularly strong, where the structure of prohibition ("return not evil for evil"), positive commandment ("on the contrary, bless you"), and theological reason ("for this you are called...") form a rhetorical pattern that emphasizes that the Christian response to suffering is not merely a passive reaction, but an active action based on a divine calling. The choice of *loidorian* words (slander) and *eulogountes* (bless) serves as a semantic node that underscores ethical contrasts in response to verbal violence (Williams & Horrell, 2023).

The intertexture of this verse shows a close connection to the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:38–44), as well as Paul's ethics in Romans 12:14 and 1 Thessalonians 5:15. The quotation from Psalm 34 (in verses 10–12) expands the reach of the text into the Jewish tradition of wisdom that emphasizes that living righteously brings God's favor. The principle of love as a binding bond of the church and as a means of peace is also emphasized in Leviticus 19:18 and Proverbs 10:12, which are also implicitly alluded to in 1 Peter 4:8. Watson & Callan (2012) assert that this kind of intertextuality is not just an ornamental quotation, but expands the theological authority of Peter's text by reference to the prior scriptural authority.

The social texture in this passage shows the tension between Christian values and Roman honor culture. Roman culture upheld the *honor-shame system*, in which retribution and maintaining public reputation were the keys to social dignity. Peter, on the other hand, calls for the path of love and forgiveness, which in that context sounds counter-cultural (Elliott, 2008). In a society accustomed to *iustitia privata*—personal vengeance for disgrace (*iniuria*)—Peter's teachings challenged the logic of power and opened up a new possibility: that true power lies not in retribution, but in the blessings given to the enemy (Du Plessis, 2015).

The ideology built by this text affirms that the Christian community has a new identity in Christ that is not subject to the world system. In 1 Peter 3:9, the people are called not to establish dignity through verbal or legal violence, but through an attitude that reflects Christ. The concept of "called to receive blessings" implies that participation in suffering is not an ethical or social failure, but part of a call to inherit the kingdom of God (Grudem, 2024). Thus, the text forms an alternative worldview that rests on love, forgiveness, and eschatological hope, rather than on worldly confession.

The sacred texture of this verse shows that the act of blessing is a form of participation in God's love and character. This radical act of love reflects the relationship of the people with the holy God, as emphasized by Faulhaber (2007). Keating (2011a) adds that values such as sympathy and humility are not only horizontal ethics between members of the congregation, but also vertical manifestations of God's mercy in community life.

Thus, the entire rhetorical structure and texture of the passage of 1 Peter 3:8–12 work in an integrated manner to shape the way Christians think, feel, and act in the face of suffering. The command to "bless" is not just an ethical norm, but part of the spiritual and ideological formation of the Christian community as a new covenant people. In the light of socio-rhetorical hermeneutics, this text is not only a moral instruction but also an expression of a spiritual culture that challenges the world system and forms a Christ-like way of life. This message remains relevant today, as faith communities in various contexts continue to grapple with social pressures, injustice, and the call to remain a light in a dark world.

CONCLUSION

The letter of 1 Peter 3:8–12 provides profound ethical guidance for the Christian congregation in living their daily lives, especially when faced with challenges, persecution, and the dynamics of social interaction. Peter emphasized that the life of believers must be built on unity of thought,

empathy, brotherly love, and humility, in harmony with God's will. In verse 9, it is emphasized that retaliating evil for evil is not the solution that the Christian faith teaches. Rather, the desired response is to do good and bless, even to those who do evil. This prohibition was also a rejection of the dominant values of Roman culture that considered revenge as a form of justice and the maintenance of honor. As a minority group, the Christian community is invited to build a distinct moral identity through a proactive attitude of kindness, despite being under social pressure and discrimination. From the perspective of ideological texture, the standard of truth is not determined by man but by God, so the act of blessing is understood as a form of spiritual resistance to injustice. Meanwhile, in the *sacred texture*, love is placed as a manifestation of a divine calling; blessing is a means of presenting God's power and goodness in social relationships. Finally, the main message of 1 Peter 3:8–12 confirms that the challenges of living in faith do not lead people to imitate social norms that emphasize violence or retribution. Instead, the principles of love, forgiveness, and peace should be the primary guidelines. This doctrine challenges every believer to live the values of Jesus Christ in real life in their daily lives. By living a life of love, humility, and compassion, the church is called to be a reflection of the love of God that they have received. It is not only about building a godly personal life, but also creating a harmonious community, where every member can feel love, support, and a peace that unites.

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