CHAPTER SIX

LIVING IN CHRIST

τὴν ἁγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφὴν

your good behavior in Christ

The moral behavior that Peter declares will be accounted for and judged does not happen in a vacuum or in abstraction. In his discourse, certain living spaces open up via conceptual metaphors that elaborate, blend, and network to create a comprehensive picture. The composite picture is of a place where goodness is possible, where would-be followers of Jesus the Christ can indeed go and do as he taught and did. The moral-ethical implications of Peter’s teachings in this epistle are contested and debated in biblical scholarly circles and among some Christian ethicists, and many of the debates are essentially about the status of metaphors, mappings, and blends, and the implications of the inferences each scenario evokes. From a cognitivist point of view, the metaphors display the ethos of the culture, and the moral discourse of the text is coherent to the extent that the metaphors are coherent. That is, since “the most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture,” paying attention to the specific metaphors by which Peter urges his readers to live should allow us to clarify the values with which he works.¹

This chapter surveys one major metaphor system in 1 Peter, behavior ‘in Christ.’ This metaphor cluster constitutes a certain kind of ‘living space’ wherein moral (or immoral) behavior is displayed and constrained. The aim here is to show some of the ways conceptual metaphor and other mental space-blending functions shape the moral discourse of this epistle. Chapters 7 and 8 will survey four additional ‘living spaces’: in time; in/among the peoples, in the household, and in the body. The hope is that looking at these living-space metaphors will generate nuanced answers to two questions: How are moral issues

¹ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), 22.
defined and addressed in this letter? How can modern, 21st-century Christians engage this early exemplar of Christian moral discourse? In pursuit of answers to those questions, I turn first to Peter’s fundamental framing of ‘good behavior in Christ.’

Good Behavior ‘in Christ’

The moral conceptual content of the discourse comes into focus at 3.16. Here Peter, still speaking of the evidence upon which interim and ultimate moral accounting and judgment takes place, uses the phrase, τὴν ἀγαθωτὴν ἐν Χριστῶ ἀναστροφὴν—'[your] good behavior in Christ’. That is, even though now the Christians are being slandered, ultimately those who are accusing them will be ‘ashamed of their slander’ because the truth that is being enacted in the Christians’ ‘good behavior in Christ’ will be revealed. Interim moral accounting and judgment is being rendered, but by people who lack legitimate moral authority. But when the ultimate accounting takes place, these would-be moral authorities will be exposed as slanderers. The truth enacted in the Christian’s behavior will exonerate them.

But what does ‘good behavior in Christ’ mean, exactly? Is the notion unique to 3.16? The phrase activates a cognitive linguist’s metaphor detection radar because it makes no literal sense. Even at the time this letter was written, Jesus of Nazareth was already dead; Peter’s first readers could not have literally lived with Jesus. Moreover, the preposition here is not μετά (‘according to’, or ‘with’) or σὺν (‘with’), or κατά (‘according to’) but ἐν (‘in’). How does one person—or a group—live ‘in’ another person? Commentators have puzzled over the phrase for centuries, deeming it ambiguous. Funk said it “defies definite interpretation.” Attempts have been made to compare and

2 Given the honor-shame cultural model with which the discourse works, ‘moral, honorable way of life’ or ‘honorable behavior’ may be a better translation of τὴν ἀγαθωτὴν … ἀναστροφὴν than ‘good behavior.’ Peter uses classical, stock Greek moral vocabulary for ‘good’: ἀγαθός.