

## Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE  
EXPOSITION OF  
THE EPISTLE OF  
FIRST PETER

### Courage Under Fire 1 Peter 3:13-17

**1 Peter 3:13-17** *And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, <sup>15</sup> but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; <sup>16</sup> and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. <sup>17</sup> For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.*

In this passage we are in familiar territory. The themes in these verses are touched on elsewhere in Peter's letter. "Christians are not to give offense (v.13; cf. 3:9), we are to hold Christ as Lord (vv. 14-15a; cf. 1:3), we are to give the lie to accusations of evil by living a good life (v. 16; cf. 2:12, 15), and it is better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil (v. 17; cf. 1:6; 2:19-20). There is not much that is new. "What is new in this section is the need for us as Christians to be ready to give a public defense of our faith; a defense to be given with humility and backed up by a consistently righteous life (see Achtemeier, p. 229). Such a defense is tough when the situation is actually threatening.

At this present time (2004) and in this place (USA) we do not face hardship anything like Christians at other times and in other places have experienced. A bit of criticism, rejection, and occasional unfair treatment is about as bad as it gets. However, it would not surprise me if, within my own lifetime, things change. It may not be long before Christians must endure hardship for doing the will of God. I do believe that in the not-so-distant future there will be a higher price to pay for being a Christian. As the culture around us grows more and more hostile, mean, degenerate, materialistic, and ignorant of all things Christian we will be called upon more and more to give account for what we believe and how we live. This will require increasing measures of courage. Here Peter explains where that will come from. He is arguing that “the fear of the Lord conquers every other fear” (Wiersbe, p. 82).

**1 Peter 3:13. And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?** There are several ways one might interpret this verse. **First** there is the “Superman” interpretation. According to this view a good life acts as something of a repellent or an invisible shield that harm cannot penetrate? Kelly responds, “[Peter] is not deluding his correspondents with the idea that, if their conduct is beyond reproach, they will escape abuse, maltreatment, physical injury; he has already conceded the possibility in 2:20” (p. 140).

**Second** there is the “proverb” view. According to this view verse 13 is stating a general truth. Wayne Grudem explains, “It implies that harm is not the *normal* expectation, for usually those who do what is right are rewarded, not punished” (p. 151).

The **third** view is that persecutions cannot reach and harm the soul. Kelly says, “[Peter’s] point is that, whatever disasters strike the man of faith, they cannot ... injure him in the ultimate sense” (p. 140). Verse 13 then echoes **Romans 8**. *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us (8:31)? Who will bring a charge against God’s elect (8:33)?* Persecution cannot jeopardize one’s election, standing with God, or “the divine favor shown us in Christ” (Achtmeier, p. 230). Verse 13 then echoes **Matthew 10**. *“And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (10:28).* Persecutions cannot reach and harm the soul. The fear of the Lord conquers every other fear.

**1 Peter 3:14. But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness.** While Christians may not undergo continuous suffering, we may live in an environment charged with suspicion and hostility; an environment which has erupted and can erupt (like some school in Russia) into violence and persecution at any time. Because this is true some know (and will know) hardship and suffering because you will do what as Christians you must do. Some will know trouble because of your devotion to Christ (see Achtmeier, p. 230-231).

Even so, Peter says, **you are blessed**. We read this and we’re just not sure. There is a certain privilege attached to persecution. “[Peter’s] words contain an echo of Christ’s own promise: *“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me (Matthew 5:10-11).* This is certainly how Peter and the other apostles viewed the hardships they endured. Do you remember the treatment Peter and the apostles received at the hands of the Jewish Council? **Acts 5:40-42** and after calling the

*apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, and then released them. <sup>41</sup> So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. <sup>42</sup> And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*

The question here is in what sense are we blessed? We must acknowledge first that God is the One who brings good out of the worst things life can throw at us. **Genesis 50:20**, [Joseph to his brothers who had treated him so badly] *“And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result.”* Here is just a sampling of the ways in which affliction benefits the believer:

Affliction assures us of and increases our appetite for our heavenly reward (**1 Pet. 1:4; Matt. 5:12**). Affliction assures us that our identification with Christ is a valid one (**Rom. 8:17**; also II Cor. 1:5 and Phil. 3:10). *“Suffering throws life, with its joys and sorrows, into perspective”* (Michael Bentley, *1 Peter*, p. 129). Suffering increases our gratitude for mercies previously taken for granted (**Ps. 116:12-13**). Affliction teaches us what sin is and roots it out (Thomas Watson, *All Things for Good*, p. 27, 29). Through affliction God weakens the grip of the world on our lives that our hearts may cleave more to Him in sincerity (Watson, p. 28, 29). Affliction conforms us to Christ (Watson, p. 28). Affliction inclines us to listen to and learn from God (**Ps. 119:71**). Affliction tests the genuineness of our faith (John Murray, *Behind a Frowning Providence*, p. 14). Affliction acquaints us with God (Murray, p.17; **Phil. 3:10**). God uses affliction to prune us for greater usefulness (Murray, p. 18-20).

Now Peter explains how Christians are to react to affliction imposed on us because of our faith. **And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled.** We are to react with simple courage (see *Pilgrim's Progress*). "Peter quotes here from **Isaiah 8:12** ... In the days when Isaiah said those words the inhabitants of Jerusalem were scared stiff. They had been dreading an invasion from the Assyrians. They had heard about the terrible cruelty these people inflicted upon their captives. And their minds were filled with nothing but dread of their enemies. It was just then that Isaiah received this word from the Lord" (Bentley, p. 130). Intimidation means to frighten someone; to compel them or deter them by threatening them. If threatened with prison, torture, harm to my family, I am not so sure how courageous I would be. But Peter is saying don't be afraid. Is this just some word of comfort like a mother might say to her small child in a thunderstorm? How can he say don't be afraid when, in fact, his readers have every reason to be fearful of bodily harm or material loss? Here's the Biblical answer.

Allow your heart to be gripped by a greater fear. **Psalm 56:3-4** *When I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee. <sup>4</sup> In God, whose word I praise, in God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?* "The way to counter fear is to replace it with a greater fear" (Hillyer, p. 108). "The fear of the Lord conquers every other fear" (Wiersbe, p. 82).

**1 Peter 3:15. But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.** This is the opposite of succumbing to fear. "As the heart is the center of your personality and being, so Christ should be set apart to rule and reign there as your Lord" (Bentley, p. 131). We are to set Him apart in our hearts into a position or status in which Christ's influence of grace is more powerful, stronger, formative than the influence of fear.

Fear is overcome by a consciousness of Christ's comforting presence with you, of His great and magnificent promises to you, of His enduring love for you, and of His tender watch care over you.

Peter now gives one evidence that Christ has been sanctified as Lord in your heart - through being prepared at all times to account for your beliefs and actions as a Christian (see Achtemeier, p. 233). **Always being ready.** We are to be in a "state" of readiness. During the Cold War the Strategic Air Command kept fourteen missile-loaded B-52s in the air at all times ready to strike at anyone who would launch an attack upon our country. America was in a state of readiness. Peter is talking about preparation here.

For what are we to be prepared? Floridians could see satellite images of Hurricane Francis. They knew what to prepare for. Christians are to be prepared **to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you.** To make a defense means to give an answer or explanation (see **Acts 22:1**). It's that simple. There is more to this than "ramping up" so to speak for an evangelism visit on Tuesday evening. As believers we are to be ready at all times and in every place to answer every person who asks us to account for what we, as Christians, believe and for how we, as Christians, live.

How are we to prepare? Three ways. **First**, we must be conscious of our own **guilt** before God and repent of our sins. **Second**, we must personally know the saving **grace** of God in Christ. My friend have you received Jesus as He is offered in the gospel? **Third**, we must live a life of obedience out of **gratitude** for what Christ has done for us. In short, the best preparation is saturation with the gospel.

You see we are to give account for **the hope that is in us**. Dr. Clowney says, “For the Christian faith, a strong offence is the best defense; indeed, it is the only defense. As Christians we defend our faith by proclaiming the gospel, declaring the reality of the resurrection of Jesus in the plan and power of God” (p. 149). Listen to Paul in **Philippians 1: 1:5**, *I thank God ... in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now*; **1:7**, *In my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you are all partakers of grace with me*; **1:12**, *I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel*; **1:16**, *I am appointed for the defense of the gospel*; **1:27**, *Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel*.

Under what circumstances might we be called upon to do this? **First**, it may be that we, like Paul, will have to actually stand before some tribunal and give account for our lives and faith (**Acts 23:6; 24:24-27; 25:6-27; 26:1-32**). **Second**, you may have to give account before ordinary people who publicly or privately challenge, criticize and condemn you and your faith. **Third**, you may have to give account to someone who is simply curious about your faith. **Fourth**, it may be, in the providence of God, that an opportunity opens up for you to share your personal testimony or to present the gospel to someone who is inclined to listen to the claims of Christ.

In each of these situations our manner ought to be consistent. We give account Peter says **with gentleness and reverence**. *How* we communicate is as important as *what* we communicate. Because Jesus was gentle so are we to be. We do not respond with harshness and arrogance anymore than He did. Because Jesus was

reverent so are we to be. The honor of the Father was of supreme importance to Jesus so should it be to us.

**1 Peter 3:16. And keep a good conscience.** The conscience is that internal gauge that informs us if we are answering sin with sin. It is that internal meter that affirms or condemns our behavior (barometer, thermometer). The conscience can be in any number of conditions. People can have a *defiled conscience* (**Titus 1:15**). Men can have a *seared conscience* (**1 Tim. 4:2**). Men can have an *evil conscience* (**Heb. 10:22**). But “a good conscience is one that accuses when we think to do wrong and approves when we do right” (Wiersbe, p. 86). But how is such a conscience to be “kept?” Our conscience is quiet as we maintain consistency between the faith we profess and what we actually practice; as we do all things righteously. Such conduct silences the accusing voice of conscience. Paul said, *I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men* (**Acts 24:16**). I’m going to explain why some of you have an uneasy conscience today. You are attempting to live a hidden life. You hide your faults. You hide your real agenda. You hide your true motives. You hide your true feelings toward others. You hide the bad relationships. You are neither open with nor accountable to God and other men and ... you don’t sleep very well at night.

Why is it important to maintain a good conscience when you are the object of intimidation and slander? There are three reasons I want to point out. **First**, a good conscience governs our response to evil. In other words, a good conscience will tell us if there is anything in the content or manner of our response that will bring reproach upon the gospel of grace. **Second**, a good conscience also bolsters our courage. A good conscience fortifies you with courage because you know

you are right with God and men, so that you need not be afraid. A good conscience gives you peace in your heart; and when you have peace within, you can face battles without. A good conscience removes from us the fear of what others people may know about us, say against us, or do to us. Michaels says, "If you maintain your integrity before Christ your Lord, you have nothing to fear from anyone's questions or accusations" (p. 193). **Third**, putting it in Peter's words, it is important to keep a good conscience **so that in the thing in which you are slandered those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.**

There will always be those who are infuriated by a righteous life. Our Lord said, *"And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed"* (**John 3:19-20**). That infuriation manifests itself in criticism and condemnation of and disgust with the good life of the believer. And so in anger will they slander you. They will accuse you of having done unlawful things that you haven't done. They will call your good reputation into question. They will smear your good character.

"As Christians we are not to provide our opponents justification for such vilification. That does our cause no good at all. Our witness to the hope that animates us is helpful only when it is supported by actions consistent with that hope, actions that may bring about further suffering but that alone have the chance of causing shame to those who ignorantly revile them" (see Achtemeier, p. 238).

**1 Peter 3:17.** For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. The advice given to slaves in 2:20 is extended here to all Christians. Three terms need explanation. “**Better**” is a comparative term according to the divine standard of evaluation. In what respect is such suffering better? In 3:14 Peter has just said, *if you suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed*. I think that’s behind the term “better.” **If God should will it.** “Suffering, while not always and everywhere present, is nevertheless always possible” (Achtmeier, p. 238). Indeed, suffering is ours by the providence of God. “Indeed, in so far as we can discern God’s hand in our afflictions, Christians have a ground for rejoicing (2:14; 4:13)” (Kelly, p. 145). **For doing what is right.** “It is ‘better’ to suffer in this life at the hands of persecutors for doing good, than at God’s hand on the ‘day of visitation’ for doing wrong” (Michaels, p. 192, see also Matt. 10:28).

**Psalm 56:3-4** *When I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee. <sup>4</sup> In God, whose word I praise, in God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?* “The fear of the Lord conquers every other fear” (Wiersbe, p. 82).

## **2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, 18**

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

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EXPOSITION OF  
THE EPISTLE OF  
FIRST PETER

### *Courage Under Fire*

1 Peter 3:13-17 (701)

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Affliction tests the genuineness of our faith  
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