

# Suffering for Doing What Is Right

---

Steve Hereford, Pastor-Teacher

1 Peter / 1 Peter 3:13–17

---

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. We have been looking at 1 Peter for some time now
2. And we have been learning about persecution and the suffering that comes from it
3. Today we're going to learn what to do when you suffering for doing what is right
4. Please take your Bibles and open them to 1 Peter chapter 3 as we look together at vv.13-17
5. Read [1 Peter 3:13-17](#)
6. It is important that we know how to correctly respond to the suffering that comes from persecution
7. How we respond will bring blessing to us and praise to God
8. It will also further the gospel to those who oppose it
9. Peter begins this passage with a question and then proceeds to answer it
10. His answer shows us how important it is to have the right convictions and attitudes to our opponents
11. It also shows us the place of suffering in the will of God
12. Notice the question Peter asks in verse 13
13. He says, "Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?"

## **LESSON**

### **I. Who can harm you? (v.13)**

- a. This is a rhetorical question (implies "no one")
- b. The word "harm" continues the concept of evil (kakos) found in verse 12 (DEH)
  - i. It occurs only here and in the book of Acts
  - ii. It is used of the oppression of the Israelites by the Egyptians (7:6, 19)
  - iii. It is used of antagonism toward the church in 12:1; 18:10

- iv. It is used of the vicious attitudes toward believers (14:2)
- v. Here it refers to any hostile and injurious attitude or activity that promote essential damage
- vi. So to “harm” means “to hurt or to injure” (Louw-Nida)

**Believer’s Bible Commentary G. As a Sufferer in Relation to Persecutors (3:9–4:6)**

During World War II a Christian boy of twelve refused to join a certain movement in Europe. “Don’t you know that we have power to kill you?” they said. “Don’t you know,” he replied quietly, “that I have power to die for Christ!” He had the conviction that no one was able to harm him.

- c. This focuses on God’s sovereignty
  - i. He is in charge of our lives
  - ii. Nothing can happen to us unless He allows it
  - iii. Whatever He allows is always for our good ([Rom.8:28](#))

› So who can harm you?

- d. If you’re doing what is right? (v.13)
  - i. You’re being harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble (v.8)
  - ii. You’re not returning evil for evil or insult for insult (v.9)
  - iii. You’re giving blessing instead of cursing (v.9)
  - iv. You’re keeping your tongue from evil (v.10)
  - v. You’re not speaking deceitfully (v.10)
  - vi. You’re turning away from evil and doing good (v.11)
  - vii. You’re seeking and pursuing peace (v.11)
  - viii. You’re following Christ’s example (2:21-23)
  - ix. If all this is true, it proves you’re “zealous for what is good”
  - x. If it’s not true, it shows you’re being persecuted for unrighteousness ([1 Peter 2:20](#); [4:15](#))

› What does it mean to be “zealous for good?”

- 1. It’s what Peter stated in verses 8-11
  - a. It means you’re freed from the fascination of evil” (DEH)
  - b. It means you’re “eager” (*zēlōtai*, literally “zealots”) of the good (DEH)
  - c. It means you have a “wholeheartedness and singleness of purpose” (DEH)
  - d. It means you are an “enthusiast” for the doing of good (DEH)a

- e. It means you're living a godly life ([2 Tim.3:12](#); [Eph.2:10](#))
- f. Being zealous for good usually brings peace with your enemies ([Prov.16:7](#))
- 2. [Romans 13:3](#) says that government rulers generally punish evil doers not those who are doing good ([Rom.13:3](#))
- 3. But we must remember that our version of good is based on Scripture theirs on selfish ambitions (JM)
- 4. It is unusual for most people, even those hostile to Christianity, to harm believers who prove zealous for what is good (JM)
- 5. On the other hand, the world has little hesitation attacking with great hostility those charlatans and frauds that enrich themselves at the expense of others (JM)
- 6. So who can harm you if you're doing what is right?
  - a. [Romans 8:31](#), "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?"
  - b. [Psalm 56:4](#), "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?"
  - c. [Psalm 118:6](#), "The Lord is for me; I will not fear; What can man do to me?"

› **Second, who can harm you...**

- e. Since God is watching over you?
  - i. He is the supreme Judge ([Rom.8:31](#))
  - ii. His eyes are toward the righteous (v.12)

**1-2 Peter Seeking Peace**

This is not the stare that destroys but the gaze that lifts up. He keeps an eye on the righteous

- i. He hears your prayers (v.12)

**1-2 Peter Seeking Peace**

When children do not want to hear what someone is telling them, they put their hands over their ears. We have almost the same image here. God puts His fingers in His ears when the wicked speak, but He gives an attentive ear to the prayers of His people. James says, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). It avails much because God turns His ear to the prayers of His people.

- i. He loves the one who pursues righteousness ([Prov.15:9](#))
- ii. So being zealous for good indicates they are of God ([3 John 11](#))

· **At this point, Peter addresses what to do if you do suffer for doing good**

· **So in verse 14-17, he gives 5 ways on...**

## II. How to respond to righteous suffering (vv.14-17)

“But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness”

In other words, there is no certainty that suffering will happen, but it might” (JM)

The unrighteous world cannot tolerate righteousness (Lenski)

They could not tolerate Jesus who “went about doing good” ([Acts 10:38](#)) and eventually killed Him ([Acts 2:23](#))

We cannot presume to escape all suffering if our Lord didn’t ([Mat.10:24-25](#), like our master)

“But even if” conveys the idea of “perchance” or “contrary to what is expected” and fits with the verb “should suffer” (paschoite) (JM)

Many Christians in the early church did suffer for the sake of righteousness

Peter’s readers did (1:6-7; 2:20; 4:12-16)

The apostles did ([Acts 5:40-41](#))

Stephen did ([Acts 7:57-60](#))

The early church did ([Acts 8:3-4](#))

James and Peter did ([Acts 12:1-4](#))

Paul and Silas did ([Acts 16:20-24](#))

### > So if or when it happens...

a. Realize you are blessed by God (v.14a)

- i. “You are blessed” (makaroi), “privileged” (WBC) or “honored” (MSB) ([James 1:2-4](#))
- ii. It’s not speaking of effect, that is, happiness or joy” (JM), it’s speaking of privilege and honor
- iii. This reflects what Jesus said in [Matthew 5:10-12](#), “10 “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
- iv. We have the same sense of privilege of sharing in the sufferings of Christ ([Rev.14:13](#))
- v. God sometimes wills that believers suffer for righteousness so they might receive the blessings that come out of such suffering. It is also God’s will that believers endure His beneficial chastisement when they sin (JM) ([2 Cor.12:7-10](#))

Thomas Watson said, “Afflictions work for good, as they make way for glory...Not that they merit glory, but they prepare for it. As ploughing prepares the earth for a crop, so

afflictions prepare and make us [ready] for glory. The painter lays his gold upon dark colours, so God first lays the dark colours of affliction, and then He lays the golden colour of glory. The vessel is first seasoned before wine is poured into it: the vessels of mercy are first seasoned with affliction, and then the wine of glory is poured in. Thus we see afflictions are not prejudicial, but beneficial, to the saints" (All Things for Good [Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986], p. 32).

› Not only are we to realize we are blessed by God but we are...

b. Do not fear or be troubled (v.14b)

“And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled”

i. This is an allusion to [Isaiah 8:12-13](#).

**1 Peter: The MacArthur New Testament Commentary A Willingness to Suffer—For Wrong and for Right**

The historical setting of those verses is significant. With an impending invasion by Assyria, Ahaz king of Judah faced a crisis. The kings of Israel and Syria had sought to make an alliance with him against the Assyrian forces, but Ahaz had refused. Israel and Syria therefore threatened to invade Judah. Meanwhile Ahaz had allied Judah with Assyria, but the prophet Isaiah warned him against such an ungodly alliance and told him not to be afraid. Ahaz and the people of Judah were not to fear Assyria as Syria and Israel did, but rather they were to fear the Lord by trusting in Him.

ii. Do not fear their intimidation or literally their “fear” ([Mat.10:28](#), “fear Him”)

iii. “Do not be troubled” (tarasso, aor.pass.subj.) lit. “shaken or stirred up”

iv. God will strengthen and uphold you

1. God told Israel in [Isa.41:10-14](#), “10 ‘Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.’ 11 “Behold, all those who are angered at you will be shamed and dishonored; Those who contend with you will be as nothing and will perish. 12 “You will seek those who quarrel with you, but will not find them, Those who war with you will be as nothing and non-existent. 13 “For I am the Lord your God, who upholds your right hand, Who says to you, ‘Do not fear, I will help you.’ 14 “Do not fear, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel; I will help you,” declares the Lord, “and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.”

2. God told Jeremiah in [Jer.1:8](#), “Do not be afraid of them, For I am with you to deliver you,” declares the Lord.”

3. God told Ezekiel in [Ezek.3:9](#), “Like emery harder than flint I have made your forehead. Do not be afraid of them or be dismayed before them, though they are a rebellious house.”

4. God told Paul in [Acts 18:9-10](#), “9 And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; 10 for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.””

c. Set apart Christ as Lord in your heart (v.15a)

“But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you”

i. “sanctify” is “Set apart” (hagiasate)

Edmund Clowney says, “When the Lord sanctifies us, he makes us holy (1:2; 2:9); when we sanctify the Lord, we set him apart as the Holy One.” (The Message of 1 Peter, p.146).

1. The verb here does not mean “to purify, make holy,” but “to treat as holy,” “to set apart, enshrine as the object of supreme, absolute reverence, as free from all defilement and possessed of all excellence.” (DEH)

2. He must be set above all other allegiances (DEH)

3. The aorist imperative demands that once for all Christ deliberately be given that position (DEH)

4. Peter is setting forth a moral imperative that holds priority over all other decisions—that foundational choice that begets and controls all subsequent choices (DEH)

ii. “in your hearts” is the central place where Christ is set-apart

Charles Spurgeon wrote, “Have your doctrinal views, and all your knowledge of Christ, packed away in a handy form so that, when people want to know what you believe, you can tell them. If they wish to know why you believe that you are saved, have your answer all ready in a few plain, simple sentences; and in the gentlest and most modest spirit make your confession of faith to the praise and glory of God. Who knows but what such good seed will bring forth an abundant harvest? (Spurgeon Comm).

iii. “being ready” (hetoimoi), “never unprepared, never unwilling, never timid” to respond to those who questioned them (DEH)

iv. “make a defense” (apologian) this is a “reasoning off” by way of removing misconceptions and answering objections ([Acts 22:1](#); [25:16](#)) (DEH)

1. This is being able to “articulate one’s beliefs humbly, thoughtfully, reasonably, and biblically” (JM)

2. This means you understand what you believe and why you’re a believer in Jesus Christ

3. This is “an intellectual defense of the truth claims of Christianity” (Sproul)

d. Be gentle and respectful (v.15b)

“with gentleness and reverence”

Martin Luther said, “If you are examined and questioned of your faith, you should not answer with haughty words, and proceed in the matter with contempt and violence, as if you would tear up a tree by the roots, but with such fear and humility as if you stood before God’s tribunal, and were there to give answer.” (The Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude: Preached and Explained, (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1859), 180–181.

i. Jesus was “gentle and humble in heart” ([Mat.11:29](#))

ii. Paul was also ([2 Cor.10:1](#))

iii. “gentleness” refers to being meek or humble

iv. “reverence” expresses devotion to God, a deep regard for His truth, and even respect for the person listening” (JM)

v. [Colossians 4:6](#), “Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.”

vi. [2 Timothy 2:24-26](#), “24 The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.”

John MacArthur says, “Christians who cannot present a biblically clear explanation of their faith (cf. [1 Thess. 5:19–22](#); [1 John 2:14](#)) will be insecure when strongly challenged by unbelievers (cf. [Eph. 4:14–15](#)). In some cases that insecurity can undermine their assurance of salvation. The world’s attacks can overwhelm those who have not “put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation” ([1 Thess. 5:8](#); cf. [Eph. 6:10–17](#)).

e. Keep a good conscience (vv.16-17)

“16 and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. 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.”

i. “keep” (echontes, pres.act.part.) or “maintain” (DEH)

ii. “good” (agathen) means “a good, morally right in word, deed, and attitude” (DEH)

iii. “good” also implies that the conscience has been cleansed by God (DEH)

iv. What is the conscience?

v. It is a divinely-placed internal mechanism that either accuses or excuses a person, acting as a means of conviction or affirmation (JM) ([Romans 2:14](#))



- vi. The conscience (suneideisis) either “affirms right behavior or condemns sinful behavior” (JM)
- vii. It is not infallible
- viii. It is not the voice of God or the Holy Spirit
- ix. It is not God’s moral law

Colin G. Kruse says, “The conscience is not to be equated with the voice of God or even the moral law, rather it is a human faculty which adjudicates upon human action by the light of the highest standard a person perceives.

Seeing that all of human nature has been affected by sin, both a person’s perception of the standard of action required and the function of the conscience itself (as a constituent part of human nature) are also affected by sin. For this reason conscience can never be accorded the position of ultimate judge of one’s behavior. It is possible that the conscience may excuse one for that which God will not excuse, and conversely it is equally possible that conscience may condemn a person for that which God allows. The final judgment therefore belongs only to God (cf. [1 Cor. 4:2–5](#)). Nevertheless, to reject the voice of conscience is to court spiritual disaster (cf. [1 Tim. 1:19](#)). We cannot reject the voice of conscience with impunity, but we can modify the highest standard to which it relates by gaining for ourselves a greater understanding of the truth. (*The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 70–71)

- x. The conscience functions like a skylight, not a lamp, it does not produce its own light, but merely lets moral light in (JM)
- xi. A clear conscience consists in being able to say that there is no one (God or man) whom I have knowingly offended and not tried to make it right (either by asking forgiveness or restoration or both) (Precept Austin)
- xii. It is important to keep or maintain a pure or good conscience
  1. [1 Timothy 1:5](#), “But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”
  2. [1 Timothy 1:19](#), “keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.”
- xiii. Maintaining a pure conscience will “put to shame” your persecutors when you are “slandered” or “reviled” for your “good behavior in Christ”
- xiv. When you have a life that is free of ongoing and unconfessed sin, lived under the command of the Lord, it will produce a conscience “without offense” and cause your false accusers to feel the “shame” of their own consciences (JM)



> Peter ends in verse 17 where he started in verse 14 after stating his rhetorical question

xv. It is better to suffer for “doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong”

xvi. He already stated that back in 2:20 as that finding “favor with God”

xvii. He states later [in 1 Peter 4:14-16](#), “14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; 16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.”

## **CONCLUSION**

1. Are you suffering for righteousness?
2. If so, do you have a clear conscience in the thing in which they accuse you?
3. Are you giving a defense for the hope that is in you?
4. Are you doing it with gentleness and respect to both God and your opponent?
5. Albert Barnes said, “All things are ordered by the will of God, even all the sufferings and afflictions of the saints; and which is a reason why they ought to be patiently submitted to, and bore: and *better* it is, more honourable and profitable, *that ye suffer for well-doing*; for believing in Christ, professing him and his Gospel, giving a free and open reason for so doing, and for exercising a good conscience, and living godly in Christ Jesus: *than for evil-doing*; as a murderer, a thief, an evil-doer, or a busy-body in other men’s matters.”
6. If you’re here today and you do not know Christ, you can know Him now
7. Jesus is God who became man for the purpose of dying in your place for your sin
8. If you come to Him now confessing Him as Lord and believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, He will save you
9. But you must come to Him believing in His Person and work on the cross for you, trusting in none other but Him
10. Come to Him now as we pray
11. Let’s pray