

# SANCTIFIED IN SUFFERING

1 Peter 3:13-17

## INTRODUCTION

- The unbelievers who belong to this world are characterised by both false bravado and irrational fear
- People tend to fear things they need not fear; yet do not fear things they ought to fear
- Those things that men ought to fear, namely, God and sin, are not to be found in the hearts of unbelievers (Romans 3:18)
- Satan is a master of manipulating the fears of mankind, oppressing his victims' hearts with slavish fears which drive them to depression, despair, death and damnation
- One specific group of people named as inhabiting the lake of fire for eternity are "the fearful" (Revelation 21:8)
- But for those who believe, we have been given another spirit, not of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7; cf. Proverbs 1:33)
- And yet, too often, God's children allow themselves to become afflicted with the very fears that Christ delivered us from
- God has given us hundreds of "fear nots" and "be not afraid's" throughout the Scriptures, to encourage us and deliver us from those ungodly fears
- In our text today, we are both warned against carnal fear (v.14) and encouraged unto godly fear (v.15)

- From 2:11, Peter, having laid the foundation of the believer's identity in Christ, proceeds to exhort the saints to a walk of practical holiness
- With v.12, Peter concluded his instructions in honouring others, particularly of submitting to those authorities God has placed over us in our various stations in life
- Now, from v.13 he moves to the subject of persecution and the proper response to it
- Persecution and suffering are major themes of the epistle, referenced in every chapter (1:6-7; 2:12,19-20; 3:14,16-18; 4:4,12-19; 5:10)

How do we as Christians respond to persecution and suffering in a godly way?

## **I. WE MAY SURMOUNT THEIR HOSTILITY (13)**

A. The Christian is a follower of that which is good

1. Goodness is one of God's communicable attributes
2. "Goodness is that perfection of God whereby he delights in his own works, and is beneficial to them" (Stephen Charnock)
3. God's demonstration of goodness towards man, both good and evil, is to be imitated in his children (Matthew 5:43-45)
4. "Good" is not defined by man's opinions, but by God in the Scriptures (Micah 6:8)
5. Peter here is particularly referring to the good things described in the previous verses (vv.8-11)

## B. Those who follow good are less likely to suffer harm

1. The majority of people, though unbelievers, will respond positively to a believer who treats them with honour, respect, honesty, charity, benevolence, kindness, gratitude, friendliness, etc, and who renders good in return for evil (v.9)
2. Such good behaviour avoids conflict with neighbours, colleagues and civil authorities
3. "When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Proverbs 16:7)
4. David, by rewarding Saul's evil with good, disarmed Saul's anger and brought about peace (1 Samuel 24:16-17)

## C. No one can ultimately harm the believer in Christ

1. It is true that the ungodly can cause great injuries in their persecutions of Christians
2. Yet all this is overseen by the providence of God
3. The worst that the ungodly can do is end the believer's bodily life, promoting him to glory, but he cannot touch his soul (Matthew 10:28)

## **II. WE MAY SUFFER AND YET BE HAPPY (14)**

### A. If ye suffer for righteousness sake

1. Notwithstanding the truth of v.13, there are some people who are so opposed to Christ that they will persecute believers who follow good
2. They hate the godly because a holy life brings conviction to sinners (John 3:19-20)

3. Christ is the supreme example of this
  - a. He did the most good of any man that ever lived (Acts 10:38)
  - b. While most people would not have harmed him, there were some in positions of power who sought to destroy him
4. Joseph and Daniel both lived blameless, exemplary lives, and for this they suffered persecution from their enemies

#### B. Happy are ye

1. Happy (*makarioi*) = “blessed”
2. This corresponds to the eighth and ninth beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:10-12)
3. Even the people of this world are content to suffer some hardship and pain if they believe there will be some reward at the end of it
4. How much more, then, may God’s people who have full assurance of a future reward – not of perishable wealth, but of eternal – patiently, even happily endure the brief sufferings of this life for the eternal glory that awaits? (Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17)

#### C. Fear not

1. Peter quotes Isaiah, who encouraged the people to fear God, rather than the confederacy of Israel and Syria (Isaiah 8:12-13)
2. The ungodly use terror and fear in an effort to silence us, to deny Christ, to conform to their evil ways

3. These fears that they create are often baseless, and will lead us away from God and into harm
4. The fear of man bringeth a snare (Proverbs 29:25)
  - a. It was fear of man that hindered many from confessing Christ openly (John 7:13; 19:38)
  - b. It was fear of man that led Peter to deny Christ (Luke 22:56-61)
  - c. It was fear of man that led Peter to separate from the Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-13)

### **III. WE MUST SANCTIFY OUR HEARTS (15-17)**

- A. Rather than fear filling our hearts, we are to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts
  1. Sanctify (*hagiasate*) is to make holy, set apart, consecrate
  2. This verb is an imperative, a command for us to actively obey – and God never commands us to do something without enabling us by his grace to do it
  3. This sanctification is a purpose and resolve to give God the chief place in our hearts, and particularly our thinking
  4. The familiar text of Proverbs 3:5-6 is a good description of a person who has sanctified the Lord God in their heart
  5. Such a heart sees beyond the wicked oppressors to the sovereign God who rules over them
  6. God permits the ungodly to persecute the godly, and sets the bounds of their persecution

7. The wrath of sinful men is nothing more than an instrument by which God brings glory to himself, and perfects his saints (Psalm 17:13-14; 76:10; cf. Genesis 50:20)
8. The sanctified heart recognises tribulation as the means by which God works patience, faith, maturity and perfection in the believer (Romans 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 1:8-10; Hebrews 5:8)
9. The sanctified believer has certainty that God will vindicate the righteous and punish the wicked (Philippians 1:28; 2 Thessalonians 1:4-7)
  - a. David exemplified this sanctification of God in his heart, even as he was sorely persecuted by his enemies
  - b. Many of the psalms follow a similar pattern of a cry unto God, a complaint unto him, a confession of confidence in God, and a conclusion of praise (e.g. Psalms 3,13,59,69,109,140)

#### B. We must be ready to answer

1. “Answer” (*apologian*) is to give a defence (Philippians 1:17)
2. When we respond to persecution in this way, without fear, with confidence in God, it often opens doors of opportunity to witness Christ to others (Acts 16:30-31)
3. We are to answer not with aggression, but with gentleness and fear
4. Rather than fear our persecutors, we ought to walk in the fear and reverence of God (cf. 1:17)

5. *“Any argument in which the Christian is involved must be carried on in a tone which God can hear with joy. No debates have been so acrimonious as theological debates; no differences have caused such bitterness as religious differences. In any presentation of the Christian case and in any argument for the Christian faith, the accent should be the accent of love.”* (William Barclay)

C. We are to have a good conscience

1. Only with a good conscience may we stand before men without fear
2. Only with a good conscience may we stand before God without fear (1 John 3:21)

D. We are to have a good conversation (16)

1. The best answer to false accusations is a godly life
2. This may shame our enemies for their evil treatment of us, and bring them to repentance (1 Peter 2:12)

E. God’s will in our suffering

1. Instead of *complaining* over the fact, “I didn’t do anything to deserve this”, we should be *rejoicing*
2. Contrary to modern perversions of Christianity, God’s will does not only include prosperity, health and wealth, but suffering, hardship and persecution (1 Peter 4:19)

## CONCLUSION

1. To the outward appearance, Christians in a hostile, antichrist world may seem to be downtrodden victims
2. But the reality is we are “overcomers”, and “more than conquerors” through him that loved us (Romans 8:35-37)

3. Can you say you are free from the fear of man? (Psalm 118:6; 27:1)
4. When God ordains in his providence for you to suffer, are you miserable, or are you happy?
5. When others ask you of your faith, are you ready to answer?
6. Firstly by giving personal testimony of Christ's saving of your own soul?
7. Then by presenting those truths relating to the gospel, and answering common questions and objections
  - ✓ Can you explain the truth of creation in answer to evolution?
  - ✓ Can you describe the nature of sin, its origin, its universality, its condemnation?
  - ✓ Can you defend the deity of Christ and the Trinity?
  - ✓ Can you explain the substitutionary atonement of Christ?
  - ✓ Can you teach what true repentance and faith are?
8. Resolve today, and from every day henceforth, to *sanctify the Lord God in your heart*