

## One Response in Suffering

I Peter 3:13-17

Charles Spurgeon, the prince of preachers, wrote:  
 When storms of sorrow toss my soul;  
 When waves of care around me roll;  
 When comforts sink, when joys shall flee,  
 When hopeless griefs shall gape for me,  
 One word the temptest's rage shall quell—  
 The word, Thy name, Immanuel.

In the preceding verses Peter has taken a stab here and there at the issue of suffering and provided some counsel on how a believer should respond no matter your status in life. Roman culture allowed for certain behaviors within the confines of various relationships. It was acceptable for a master to treat his slaves harshly. A wife could also be mistreated by her husband. Those were normal and tolerable kinds of behavior in a society that had no Biblical code of conduct.

Peter gave instructions on how to live in that kind of society different from what might have been normal kinds of responses when mistreated. The human nature has the tendency to respond in kind or to at least harbor resentment and bitterness or, if possible, to retaliate in some manner. But the Christian has a higher calling and a new nature which should guide how we respond. The Apostle Paul would say that because we are a new creation in Christ, the old way we used to behave has passed and the new has come.

In our text today Peter will now address head on the issue of suffering, providing us with a response not typical in that day. He has just finished a quote from Psalm 34 letting the recipients of his letter know that the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears attentive to their prayers, but that His face is against those who do evil. Peter says in that section before the quote that if they would see good days they should live in harmony, be sympathetic,

love one another, be compassionate and humble.  
 Don't repay evil with evil or insults with insults.

We begin our message in verses 13 and 14 where we see a passion for right conduct.

## I. A PASSION FOR RIGHT CONDUCT – vs. 13-14

### A. A Simple Question – v. 13

Peter begins by asking a very simple question. It's a question that needs no answer because it is a rhetorical question because the answer should be obvious. "Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?"

It might seem like a no brainer to us. Let's pause for a moment and explain what he means by good. There are three Greek words for good. One refers to being kind or pleasant. We might think of a person who seems easy to get along with because they are friendly and gentle. Someone who comes to mind for me is Mr. Rogers of the kids TV show. I think he had a genuine kindness, a gentle spirit.

Another word has to do with being fit or useful. We might speak of a harbor being good or the song selections today were good or that was a good meal. This word can also speak of what is right or praiseworthy.

The third word, according to *the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, "expresses the significance or excellence of a person." The excellence spoken of here refers to a person's conduct or character. The TDNT continues by saying that Paul speaks about the good (agathos) (the word used in our text) we wish to do inwardly which conflicts with the law of the flesh so that we cannot achieve the good (kalos) as in deeds. It is this third word that Peter uses here to refer to our conduct or character being good or living

obediently. It is living Christ-like in character, practicing the fruit of the Spirit or the characteristics of I Corinthians 13 love or the traits of the new nature, being obedient to the commands in the Bible which is our perfect pattern for daily living.

Now in my opinion, the KJV states the intent of Peter a little more clearly than the NIV. Where the NIV uses the phrase “eager to do good”, the KJV says “followers of that which is good.” The word follower can also be translated as imitator. That gives a better sense of conduct as we follow or imitate Christ instead of just doing good deeds as we are instructed in Matthew 5:16. By the way, while good works bring glory to God so does godly character. If you want to be an imitator of Christ, study Him and live like Him.

In coming back to the question at hand then, Peter is saying that it doesn't make any sense that if we are good in character why someone would want to harm us. The word harm in verse 13 plays off the word evil in verse 12. As a general rule, good conduct is not met with being mistreated.

But Peter throws a wet blanket on the moment with the next word. It begins verse 14 – “but”. Yet in this next statement we find a satisfying commendation.

#### B. A Satisfying Commendation – v. 14a

Notice the next statement in our text.

“But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.”

Peter understood suffering. Acts records three occasions when he was imprisoned for preaching the gospel. In Acts 4 he was threatened. In Acts 5 he was beaten. In Acts 12 he was arrested and sitting in prison waiting for his execution the following morning. He is at such peace he is asleep. An angel had to slap him on the side to wake him up and lead him out of jail. He was at peace because he knew what awaited him on the

other side of the hangman's noose or executioner's blade. Heaven is the blessing all those who suffer will receive, even when they are suffering for godly conduct.

Hugh Latimer was known as the most honest man in England. The common people gladly heard him preach God's Word because he spoke in a way that they could understand. They cheered him as he walked to preach at Whitehall, jostling just to touch him, but times changes when Mary Tudor, oldest daughter of Henry VIII, came to the throne. She would be known in time as bloody Mary. Steeped in Catholic superstition and filled with bitter hatred of the Protestant Reformer, she condemned both Latimer and Bishop Ridley to be burned at the stake in Oxford as heretics. As they were bound together, Latimer turned to Bishop Ridley and said “We shall this day, my lord, light such a candle in England as shall never be extinguished.”

Shortly after their execution a poet wrote:  
 Latimer's light shall never go out,  
 However the winds may blow it about,  
 Latimer's light has come to stay  
 'Til the trump of a coming judgment day.

What Peter has to say in verse 13 may be overly optimistic. But even if suffering does come it is only for a while after which the agony of it will be swallowed up in the joy of eternity and endless bliss. They will be privileged to receive eternal glory. It's the same word Jesus uses in the Sermon on the Mount as He delivers the Beatitudes. To be blessed means to be highly privileged.

Peter does not say when you suffer, but if you suffer implying that suffering won't necessarily come, but be prepared for it just in case it does but remember that you are blessed. What Peter says in no way contradicts what Jesus said that those who follow Him will suffer persecution or to what Paul said that those who live godly in Christ Jesus would suffer.

It is possible that to follow Christ will bring suffering.

Just ask Jack Phillips who owns a cake shop who was forced to go against his faith and make a cake for a same sex wedding or lose his business.

Or Barronelle Stutzman who wouldn't provide flowers for a same sex wedding.

Today in countries around the world suffering will cost believers status in the community, their jobs or business, loss of family ties, even their lives. But Peter assures that if or when suffering comes they will be blessed. It is a satisfying commendation to know that any time of suffering will ultimately and finally end when we are blessed with eternal life.

So if suffering does happen to come, even when you are living a godly life, Peter gives a sound command.

### C. A Sound Command – v. 14b

Let's look again at verse 14. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."

It literally reads "do not fear their fear." We can also translate it to read "Don't be intimidated by them."

One author says that believers shouldn't view things the same way an unbeliever might view them. Don't make worldly judgments or be afraid of the enemies of God.

How have you responding in times of difficulty of suffering?

Just a couple weeks ago we were reminded from Psalm 34 that "the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their cry; the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

In the opening verses of that Psalm he calls on those who are afflicted, who are suffering, to join him in

praise. And then he gives some powerful and encouraging words when suffering seems to be unbearable or when God seems absent and silent: "I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to Him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; He saved him out of all his troubles."

He sums it up with a wonderful reminder of God's oversight of the righteous and his condemnation and judgment of the wicked who cause suffering on the righteous.

Psalm 34:17-22

This passage along with so many others encourages us to trust God during times of suffering.

Jesus said that we shouldn't fear the person who can destroy the body, but isn't able to touch the soul. Instead fear the One (God) who is able to destroy both the body and soul in hell. (Matthew 10:28)

Paul reminds us in Romans 8 that there isn't anything that can separate us from God's love. Jesus said that nothing can snatch us from God's grip on us.

In verse 14 Peter once again returns to Isaiah reminding us that the only one we have to fear is God. Many martyrs have died not fearing the physical harm that man can do because they were eternally secure in Christ. Having a proper fear of God should instill in us a passion for right conduct, conduct that leads to a passion for real confidence.

### II. A PASSION FOR REAL CONFIDENCE – v. 15

I am just going to touch on this verse today because I want to spend next week's message on it in greater detail, so we'll just do some highlights.

I'll be honest with you that this is my safe space. I

am most comfortable standing here in the pulpit sharing the gospel. It is out there in the public square where there is more fear and trembling. I stand amazed at people who have the gift of evangelism and have an ease of sharing their faith and coming up with answers to questions skeptics ask as they interact with the gospel message. I wish I had that kind of smarts. I am in awe of Ravi Zaccharias as he travels to college campuses and engages with sometimes a hostile group. He has such a way of disarming those who would try to trap him in some debate and he does it in the way this verse suggests such answers should be given.

To be able to share your faith notice three important keys that must be present in the believer.

#### A. It's A Matter Of Heart

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.”

“Set apart” comes from the Greek word *agiazō* which means to sanctify. This is a call to the believer to commit to Christ, to wholeheartedly follow Him. Jesus said if anyone wanted to follow Him they were to take up their cross. (Luke 9:23)

The great 19<sup>th</sup> century preacher Alexander MacLaren once said “Only he who can say, ‘The Lord is the strength of my life’ can go on to say, ‘Of whom shall I be afraid?’”

John Philips says that when Christ is set apart in the heart the coward is made brave.

If you fear what man can do to you, then Christ is not set apart in your heart, He does not have first place, He is not on the throne. When we have what A. W. Tozer calls a “possessive clinging to things” Christ is not set apart. Other things that now have priority or greater presence in our lives rob us of joy and peace during times of suffering that only Christ was intended to provide.

At creation man's heart was set up to be the throne room of God where only God was worthy to reside. All the good things that God had made were meant to serve man, for him to enjoy. But all that changed when sin entered into the world and man thrust God from the throne of his heart and replaced Him with the very things that were meant only to satisfy not rule and they have become the idols that usurped God. And so there is a call back to God to put Him once more on the throne of his heart where He rightly belongs.

Setting apart Christ is a call back to commitment and obedience, to love and loyalty. It is a matter of the heart. Then it becomes a matter of hope.

#### B. It's A Matter Of Hope

When the heart is right then there is hope. When Christ is first there is no room for fear and we will “always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

The word “answer” comes from the Greek word for apology or apologetics. It does not mean that we have something to be sorry for or apologize about but something that we give a defense for. It was the term used in the courtroom. We are to give a defense for our faith. Jude tells us we are to contend for the faith, stand up for it. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. The hope we have in Jesus Christ who died and rose again on our behalf is worth defending and is the hope we are to share.

Peter is saying that when your conduct is godly, you have something that will spark interest on the part of others who observe your right behavior and they will ask, so be ready with an answer, with a defense. It means that we have a good understanding of Scripture, not that we necessarily have to know everything about the Bible, but that we can give an answer not with an “I think” but with an “I am confident”. It implies that you are a

student of the Bible.

Aiden W. Tozer was born into a poor home western Pennsylvania and knew hardship for as long as he could remember. Forced by his home situation he had to forfeit an education. Hearing a lay preacher at age 17 he trusted Christ. A dingy corner in the basement became his prayer room where he began the practice of waiting on God and in time felt led into the ministry with neither High school nor college training. He became an ardent student of the Word educating himself through years of diligent study and a constant prayer seeking God's mind. When he felt compelled to study the great works of Shakespeare he read them on his knees asking God for clear understanding. He would go on to be recognized by his denomination for his literary skills becoming editor of *The Alliance Witness* and writing many books like *The Pursuit of God*, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, *Delighting in God*, and *Whatever Happened to Worship*.

About him one biographer noted that "with no teacher but the Holy Spirit and good books, A. W. Tozer became a Theologian, a scholar and a master craftsman in the use of the English language.

He stands as a shining example of someone who studied to show himself an approved workman who does not need to be ashamed, who rightly divides the Word of truth. He had learned through study how to give an answer for the hope he had.

Greek scholar says "this attitude calls for an intelligent grasp of the hope and the skill in presenting it."

In Athens every citizen was expected to join in the discussion of state affairs. No wonder Paul had a willing audience willing to discuss with him about the unknown god whom Paul skillfully used to present the gospel.

Can you give an answer for the same hope you have

in Christ?

It is the hope of eternal life through faith in Him.

Paul writes "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." (Romans 1:16)

Peter then instructs us on the kind of attitude we should have when explaining the hope we have. It boils down to a matter of humility.

### C. It's A Matter Of Humility

There are two characteristics that should be displayed when we talk with someone about our hope in Christ.

1. We are to be courteous (gentle)
  2. We are to be considerate (respectful)
- We aren't to be argumentative, pushy, forceful, abrasive, or disrespectful.

We can learn a lot of different methods on how to share about the hope we have in Christ.

The Romans Road

John 3:16

Evangelism Explosion

Lifestyle evangelism

Salt and Light

But they mean nothing if our approach is anything but gentle and respectful. Perhaps the best approach is just to be sincere. Sometimes people will come up with all kinds of excuses or arguments against the Bible, but no one can refute a genuine life changing experience. They can't argue against that. The words of Solomon are fitting here "A soft answer turns away wrath." (Proverbs 15:1)

Humility is essential as you talk with others about the hope we have in Christ. And bear in mind that if they reject the message of hope they are not rejecting you, they are rejecting Christ who is the reason for our hope. But also keep in mind that

some plant and some water, but it is God who brings the increase (I Corinthians 3:7-8). He gives us a passion for real confidence, which then provides a passion for remarkable courage.

### III. A PASSION FOR REMARKABLE

#### COURAGE – vs. 16-17

We note first that godly behavior is acceptable.

#### A. Godly Behavior Is Acceptable – v. 16a

The kind of godly testimony that provides the opportunity to share our faith comes from having a clear conscience.

Shakespeare once said that “conscience makes cowards of us all” meaning that it’s hard to be convincing when we have an accusing conscience.

Paul said in Acts 24:16 that he always strove to maintain a clear conscience before God and man.

Vine’s Expository Dictionary of the New Testament defines the conscience simply as to know with or to know yourself. The conscience is that inner voice that differentiates between what is morally right and wrong. It commends the good and condemns the bad. But when we ignore the conscience and continue to do what is wrong, the conscience can become seared so that it becomes more difficult to discern the wrong and in fact can get to a point where it thinks the wrong we do is actually right.

Colin Kruse writes that “the conscience is not to be equated with the voice of God or even the moral law, rather it is a human faculty which [judges] human action by the light of the highest standard a person perceives.”

Since we are all affected by sin, sin affects our conscience and so how important it is to read God’s Word which provides a guide for our conscience to then be rightly affected to do what is morally right.

God’s Word must be the standard by which the conscience affirms our actions as right or wrong. The less time we spend in God’s Word the more likely our conscience will not direct us on the right path.

Hebrews 10:22 “Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”

When we trust Christ as Savior Paul says there is therefore no condemnation, our conscience is cleansed of guilt of our past but when we sin after salvation confession of sin also cleanses us of guilt. Psalm 32:5 “Then I acknowledged my sin to You and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’ – and You forgave the guilt of my sin.”

Having a clear conscience because of godly behavior is acceptable, but godly behavior is also accusatory.

#### B. Godly Behavior Is Accusatory – v. 16b

The tense of the verse implies that accusations about your godly behavior will come. It may be safe to assume that Noah received more than his fair share of verbal assault for being righteous and building a huge ship as he preached warning that generation to seek God so they wouldn’t be destroyed by a coming flood.

And certainly Jesus was wrongly accused for His good behavior.

Ultimately, as we see in this verse, when your good behavior is slandered, it is your good behavior that will in turn be what makes your accusers ashamed. Their false accusations will turn out to be just that – false. One author states that the “believer’s loving attitude puts the opponent’s bitterness in a bad light.

Don't let the fact of false accusers sway you, continue to live a godly life to disprove them and bring shame on them.

Verse 16 is pointed at those who maliciously slander. Verse 17 tells us that godly behavior may bring assault.

#### C. Godly Behavior May Bring Assault – v. 17

The bottom line from this verse is that as a Christian it is better to suffer for godly behavior than for doing something you shouldn't. Now, that's all I want to say here because I want to conclude with one final point that is brought out in this verse about God's will. This verse encourages us to have a passion for renewed commitment.

#### IV. A PASSION FOR RENEWED COMMITMENT

There are three things from God's Word that are God's will for you.

##### A. It Is God's Will For You To Be Saved – II Peter 3:9

God desires for you to be saved. He wants you to be saved. He patiently waits for you to be saved. It is an unpleasant thought to think about the alternative if God was impatient with us but instead and judged and punished us because of our sin. Think what it would be like if He wasn't merciful and extended to us His grace. No one would be saved. We would all be doomed to an eternity without Christ. So praise God it is His will for you to be saved. But while that is the case and He wants you saved, you can choose to reject His will in that area of your life to your condemnation.

##### B. It Is God's Will For You To Be Sanctified – I Thessalonians 4:3

"It is God's will that you should be sanctified."

God's wants you to be set apart, to be holy, to live godly. Essentially Peter and Paul both say the same thing by telling us to have a good conscience because of godly character. God wants you to mature in your faith and become more like Him in character.

##### C. It May Be God's Will For You When You Suffer – I Peter 3:17

"If it is God's will."

###### 1. It may be God's discipline

Hebrews 12:5-6 "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son."

If you are going through a time of suffering a place to begin is to ask if there is any sin in your life that may be the result of God allowing this so that you can confess it and so restore your relationship with Him so that you have a clear conscience. That's essentially what David prayed in Psalm 139:23-24: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Examine me Lord and keep me devoted to You. Help me have a clear conscience.

If you can't put your finger it may be God's desire for you to suffer.

###### 2. It may be God's desire

Verse 17 states it may be God's will to suffer. That's what happened to Job and certainly to Christ.

I can think of two reasons why it may be God's desire.

###### a. To remove your idols

It may be that something else has taken the place of

God in your heart and He wants to remove that idol. We may think it's not an idol but God does. In his book *The Pursuit of God*, Tozer illustrates this with the life of Abraham. He had waited 25 years for the promise of God to be fulfilled bringing to him an heir. He loved that child as no father ever loved a son because he was the promise of God that through him all the nations of the world would be blessed. So God tested his devotion. Did Abraham love Isaac more than God? Take him to a mountain and slay him. That must have been a long walk and yet while his heart was probably heavy with the command I have to think that with each step closer to the destination it may have gotten easier to trust God so that on the mountain he was ready to sacrifice his only son, the son of promise. Why do I say that?

Romans 4:20-21 "Yet he (Abraham) did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised."

God may allow the suffering to remove any idols in your life so that He can be restored to His rightful place as first in your life.

What are you holding onto that God wants you to trust Him for?

Children

Job

Possessions

A second reason for suffering allowed by God is to resemble God's image

b. To resemble God's image

James 1:2-4 "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and compete, not lacking anything."

The suffering and trials we encounter are the grades of sandpaper God uses to shape us into His likeness, to reflect His image before a world that will slander us, but whose slander will come back on them. Our godly character becomes the Teflon coated pan on which nothing they say sticks. They will be ashamed of their false accusations.

Peter's words are a call to the believer for passionate godly living before an unbelieving world to pique their interest and draw them to Christ. That's the reason for the kind of response we are to give in suffering.

As we come to communion it is a time of introspection to see if we have a clear conscience before God and man. It is a time of confession. If there is something you need to confess to God, now is the time to do so before you take the bread and cup.

If there is something you need to confess to someone else, now is the time to get that taken care of. Matthew 5:24 says if we bring our gift to the altar and remember that someone has something against us we are to leave that gift and go and take care of it before we bring our gift to the Lord.

Taking communion is a public act by which a person says first that I have trusted Christ as my Savior. It then is a private act between you and the Lord that says you are in a right relationship with Him.

If you are here today and have never agreed with God that you are a sinner in need of a Savior and that Christ is the only way to have eternal life by believing in Him, confess that need to God and place your trust in Christ for salvation. You can then partake of communion.