

How To Shine In Suffering

1 Peter 3:13-17

Pastor John Miller

So Peter says, 1 Peter 3:13, “And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? 14 But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy”—the word is “blessed”— are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; 15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear”—or respect and fear—“Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation”—or manner of living—“in Christ.” Now, notice verse 17, “For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.”

As I said, we’ve come in our study of 1 Peter to the main subject of this epistle. Peter is writing to suffering saints. We’ve come to the place where he is dealing with the subject of suffering. We’ve covered that we are to be standing in God’s grace in our salvation, standing in God’s grace in submission, and tonight we begin from here to the end of the epistle to deal with the subject of suffering. This is the main purpose of First Peter’s letter. Peter is writing to help suffering Christians stand in their suffering and persecution.

Before we unpack the text itself, let me ask the question and seek to answer it with a few simple foundational answers as to why do Christians suffer. That’s a great question and very vast, but let me give you some basic ideas. We live in a world that’s sinful and fallen. Whenever you wonder, Why suffering, why sorrow? the answer always goes back to sin. Because of the fall in the Garden of Eden, sin, death, and destruction came into the world. Sometimes, even as believers, we’re perplexed and we wonder, Why would God let a Christian suffer? Why wouldn’t God heal that person? Why did they die of cancer? Why this and why that? Why all this tragedy in the world? We live in a fallen world.

The world will be redeemed one day when the Lord returns; and that happens, by the way, in His Second Coming when Jesus Christ comes back in power, in glory, and majesty to set up His earthly Kingdom for one thousand years. It’s known as the Millennium. That’s what the word “millennium” means, a thousand. So from the Second Coming, for a thousand years, there won’t be this kind of sickness, death, disease, and sorrow in the world. It’s what I would like to say is the reversal of the curse—Christ reverses the curse. In the cross, His death and resurrection, Jesus not only is going to redeem us, but He is going to redeem the earth. At the end of that thousand years, there will be a new heaven and a new earth. That’s what’s called the eternal state. There’s the thousand-year Davidic Kingdom, God promised David that from your seed the Messiah would sit on your throne. That will be the Millennium. At that end of that, there’ll be the new heavens and the new earth where Christ will dwell as well in righteousness.

There is suffering, and as believers, we suffer in this world. We have unredeemed bodies. Though we are saved, our bodies have not been redeemed yet, so we get disease, we get

sickness. God is able to heal, but it's not guaranteed the believer. We live in a fallen world.

Secondly, sometimes we suffer, even as believers, because of our own sin. If we live in disobedience and do sinful things, the Bible actually indicates that God can chasten us and that there were those in the New Testament that were sinning. It's interesting, we're having Communion, one of the problems in Corinth is they were taking the Lord's Supper in a way that was not respectful or worshipful in a way that wasn't really the way the Lord would have them do that, so they were doing it in a manner that wasn't right and God was chastening them and some of them were getting sick and even dying. We can sometimes suffer because of our own sin.

We also suffer because we follow Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." The Bible says, ". . . all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," so you're following a crucified Savior, what would you expect the world to do treating you? As they treated Jesus, they will also treat you. This is the kind of suffering, by the way, because we're following Christ, that Peter is primarily concerned with in this letter. He's not talking about in general, the fallen world or specific believers sinning, he's talking about the fact that we're living righteously. Remember, we're living lives that are becoming, and the world is in opposition to us, thus we get persecution.

I want you to see that as indicated. Look at verse 14 of our text. Notice the phrase, "But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake." Take note of that phrase, ". . . ye suffer for righteousness' sake." You're not suffering for sin's sake, you're suffering for righteousness' sake. You're living godly lives.

Then, jump down in our text to the last verse we cover tonight, verse 17, and notice it says, "For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing." So, we suffer, verse 14, ". . . for righteousness' sake," and then he says we're suffering in ". . . the will of God," and we "suffer for well doing." Then look at 1 Peter 4, which is not our text tonight but it's my favorite section of 1 Peter on the subject of suffering. I can't wait to get there, but in verse 16 he says, "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf." Those are three clear references that we're suffering for righteousness' sake. We're suffering because we are in the will of God serving the Lord. We're suffering because we are righteous and following Jesus Christ.

In our text tonight, I want to point out six characteristics that we need to have to stand strong and shine bright for Jesus when we suffer for His name's sake. I know that sounds like a lot of points, but trust me, I'm not going to tarry too long on any of them. You say, "Yeah, I've heard that before," but six ways the attitudes or responses that we should have when we suffer. It's so beautiful.

The first is—write it down—we need to be zealous, verse 13. Look at verse 13 with me again. He says, "And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" The word "followers" could actually be rendered zealous or have zeal. If you're zealous for what is good,

then you're going to run into opposition and experience persecution.

I want you to notice that this is a rhetorical question. There's a question mark at the end of verse 13, "And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" It expects a "No," answer or "No one," answer. In this rhetorical question he's saying, "Look, if you are seeking the Lord and you're living a godly life and you're following the Lord and living the way you should, you don't have to worry about opposition, you don't have to worry about persecution." It will come, but no one can, in the true sense, really harm you if you're doing that which is good. There's a couple different ways to view this. One way is that if you're doing right, you'll just naturally benefit from that. If you become a Christian, and you start paying your taxes and you don't drive too fast anymore, break the speed limit, and you're nice to people, you're honest and good, and you're hard-working, guess what happens? You're blessed, right? You have a blessed life. In that sense, who's going to harm you? Who's going to harm you if you be followers of that which is good?

I've gotta be careful going there, but remember before you were a Christian and you were doing things that maybe were illegal and every time you went somewhere you're looking in your rearview mirror. Some of you that are laughing know what I'm talking about. The minute a policeman was driving behind you, you freaked out, "Oh, no! What do I have in the car? Maintain. Be careful. Watch out." You were afraid you were going to get pulled over, arrested, or busted? I remember distinctly when I got saved that it's like, "I don't have to worry about police anymore because I'm not doing anything illegal. I'm not breaking the law. This is so cool!"

I remember the first time I was driving and had a police officer behind me. I thought, Hey, all he could find is my Bible in the car, now. This is cool! What's he going to do with that? If you're doing that which is right, you don't have to worry about who can harm you. The answer is no one, "if ye be followers of that which is good," or zealous for good, no one can really harm you.

Jesus put it like this in Matthew 10:28. He says, "And fear not them which kill the body," if you stop right there in this statement, it's pretty bizarre to think about. "Run that by me again, Lord? Did I hear You right?" Don't be afraid of those who can kill the body. It's like, "Okay, all they can do is kill you." But then Jesus explained. He said, "After that, there's no more they can do. I'll tell you who to fear, fear God who can kill both your body and your soul in hell." It's a fear of God that liberates us from the fear of man. It's been said, and I think it's true and will tie into so many verses and points we cover tonight, that if you fear God, you won't have to fear man; and if you fear the Lord, you won't be afraid of man. Jesus said, "Don't be afraid of those who can only kill the body, fear God. He can kill body and soul in hell." Keep pursuing godliness. Keep pursuing the life of goodness serving the Lord.

Here's the second attitude or response we need toward suffering, be fearless. Be zealous and be fearless. Look at verse 14. He says, "But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy"—or blessed—"are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled." You don't have to be afraid, and you don't have to be troubled. It starts with a "But" in verse 14, which is intended to

have a contrast. In verse 13, “And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” But there will be those who persecute you, and when they do, verse 14, and you’re living righteously, you are blessed, you don’t need to be afraid, you don’t need to be terrorized or troubled. So, he says you are blessed.

It’s a blessing to know that we are so identified with Christ in this wicked world that we suffer for His sake. Jesus said in Matthew 5, in His Beatitudes, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.” Now, it’s hard for us to understand this, but we’re actually considered to be blessed when we suffer for righteousness’ sake. That word “blessed” means highly favored or God’s approval. It’s the same word used by Jesus in His opening of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, where He used what are called the Beatitudes, and it could be translated, “Oh, how happy and to be envied or blessed are they.” It’s talking about the approval of heaven. Max Lucado wrote a book years ago on the Beatitudes, and he titled his book, *The Applause of Heaven*. I love that title. You’re living for the applause of heaven, not the applause of man, and you don’t have to be afraid or worried. You are blessed.

In Acts 5:41, when Peter and some of the other apostles were being persecuted for preaching the gospel, and they were actually beat up, they were beat up for preaching the gospel, it says, “And they departed from,”—that beating—“rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.” They were so blessed that they were rejoicing. We also realize that the Spirit of glory and of God will one day rest upon us, so rejoice when you are persecuted because God will use your suffering in three ways: 1) for His glory, it will bring glory to God; 2) it will bless others; and 3) it will bless you. We don’t need to worry and fret about persecution.

Remember Acts 7, when Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was being stoned to death and they looked at Stephen and his face shone like an angel and he was seeing the glory of God. In that crowd was a man named Saul of Tarsus, and the testimony of Stephen’s life, no doubt, had an impact on Paul’s heart so that when he was on his way to Damascus to persecute more Christians, and the Lord intervened in his life, he surrendered to Jesus Christ. God used it for others as well.

If you want to turn there real quick, I want to give you a sneak peek at what we’re going to be talking about our text in a few weeks, but it ties right in with the text we have tonight, 1 Peter 4:12, and I want to look at verses 12-14. Turn to 1 Peter 4, and again, we’ll be going into this verse, but it ties into what we just read. Notice in 1 Peter 4:12, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial”—that fiery trial is their persecution—“which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 13 But rejoice,” we just read 1 Peter 3:14, happy or blessed are you, so now he says, verse 13, “But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. 14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye”—the same Greek word used there, happy or blessed—“for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.” Now, go back to 1 Peter 3:14, so you are blessed or happy, if you are being persecuted for righteousness’ sake.

Notice also, you not only rejoice and know that you're blessed, but in verse 14, two other things: you don't have to be afraid and you don't have to be troubled. When he says, ". . . be not afraid," the word "afraid" we get our word phobia from, and it talks about our fears. You don't have to have these phobias or these fears, Jesus is with you. Then, in verse 14, ". . . neither be troubled." The word "troubled" means shaken. It's interesting that the NASB translates this, "And do not fear their intimidation." The word "troubled" is the same word used by Jesus in John 14 when He said, "Let not your heart be troubled,"—don't let it be afraid—"ye believe in God, believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many mansions"—or abiding places—" . . . I go to prepare a place for you . . . and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." We can rejoice. We don't need to be troubled or shaken. We don't need to be afraid.

I've always loved the story of Acts 12 where Peter, after James has been beheaded, he's arrested, thrown in prison, and most likely was going to be executed the next day for his faith. Do you know what Peter was doing that night in jail? He was sleeping. I have a hard time sleeping, even when I'm going to have a good day tomorrow, but this guy's going to be executed, put to death, and he is sleeping in the midst of his storm. How marvelous. That's when Peter, of course, thought it was a dream of an angel showing up and opening the prison and letting him go free. It turns out it was not a dream, it was actually happening. It's the kind of dreams you have when you're in jail, I guess, that you're being sprung by an angel. Peter was sleeping. Jesus slept in the boat in the midst of the storm on the Sea of Galilee.

Here's the third, be surrendered. This is verse 15. He says, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear," so be surrendered. The phrase there in verse 15, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts," actually is quotation of Isaiah 8:13. I just wanted to give you that reference. Peter is actually drawing from his Old Testament of Isaiah 8:13, which is interesting because there he says, "Sanctify the LORD," in your hearts and uses L-O-R-D, all capital letters, which is Y Ihôvâh, or Yahweh. Why do I point that out? Because in Peter, when he quotes it, it's a reference to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is LORD. This is a clear affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ, and you can go through that without even noticing that, but it's affirming the deity of Jesus Christ. It set Christ apart as LORD in your life.

What does it mean to ". . . sanctify the Lord God in your hearts," or Jesus as Lord in your hearts? It means that you surrender to an obedient life following Christ as Lord, the Lordship of Jesus Christ. There are those that argue you can't be saved unless you acknowledge Jesus as Lord, and I think it's possible to come to Him as Savior without the conscious awareness of all that He is, but when you become a believer, and you discover that He is the Lord, it requires you to surrender your life to His Lordship. We don't make Jesus Lord, He is Lord; but we're not always surrendered in obedience to His Lordship in our lives. You can't just say, "I'm saved. I'm going to heaven. I'm a Christian," but we need to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts, set Him apart as Lord of our lives, and walk in obedience to Him. We need to be obedient to Him.

What he's saying is that when you're persecuted and opposed and you're suffering, make sure that you're surrendered and committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in your life. If He's Lord

of your life, He'll take care of you. When He's the Lord—you are His property, you are His problem—He'll take care of you. He'll watch over you. Set Christ apart as Lord of your life. It's the only way to be zealous and fearless is to be surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus. It's Jesus, Lord of your life. When we say that, that's every area of your life. You can't compartmentalize and say, "Well, He's not Lord of my marriage," or "He's not Lord of my business practices," "He's not Lord of my money," or "He's not Lord of my time." If Jesus is Lord, then He's Lord of every facet, every aspect, of your life. We need to surrender to Him and be zealous to make Him Lord of our lives and Lord of our hearts.

Ask yourself, is Jesus set apart or sanctified in your hearts as Lord? Alexander Maclaren 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.'" When you can say, "The Lord is my strength, and the strength of my heart," then you can go on to say, "Of whom shall I be afraid."

Here's the fourth, if you're taking notes, be ready, verse 15. The first part of the verse is, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts:"—surrender to the Lordship of Christ, and then it says—"and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you"—and do it—"with [respect] and [reverence]." When you are suffering, always be ready to speak up for Jesus. Always be ready to share the gospel of Christ. Always be ready to give a defense of your faith. Use it as an opportunity to preach, to witness, to share, and to share the gospel. If Jesus is Lord, you will want to tell others about Him. Those who are persecuting, need the testimony and the witness of sharing Jesus with them.

The word "answer" is an interesting word. In the Greek, it's the Greek word *apología* where we get our word "apology" from in the sense of a defense. What he's saying is be ready to give everyone an answer or a defense. This is where we get our area of what we call apologetics, which is defending the faith. It's a logical response. We need to be ready when persecuted to explain to people why we believe in Jesus, why we believe in the Word of God, that we believe in God, how we know Jesus rose from the dead, how we know that we are going to heaven, and sharing our testimony. You should be able to cover simple questions like: Does God exist? Is the Bible the Word of God? Who is Jesus? How do you get saved? Why do you follow Jesus Christ? As you grow in the Lord, you should be ready to answer those questions.

I find that sometimes people will tell the ones they witness to, "Talk to my pastor. Call my pastor, he can explain it to you," instead of you getting your own answers, getting ready to give your own response and being able to respond. That's one of the reasons why we've had every year for a Sunday, Frank Turek come as a leading apologist in the nation and share how to defend your faith, how to give to every man an answer—How do we know there's a God? How do we know the Bible's the Word of God? How do we know Christ rose from the dead? How do we know Christianity is true? How do we know the Bible's reliable? You don't have to be a theologian or formally an apologist, but to some degree we all should be ready to give a defense. And if need be, it's as simple as just sharing your testimony, "I know, because Christ has come into my heart and changed my life."

That “hope,” by the way, verse 15, is that hope of heaven. What a blessing it is that we have that hope beyond the grave, that we don’t sorrow as others who have no hope when loved ones in Christ die, that we can share that witness, we can share that testimony. How do we do that? Verse 15, “. . . with meekness and fear.” The word “meekness” means gentleness. It’s not that we want to win an argument. It’s not that we want to reach just their heads, we want to be meek and gentle. We want to listen. “Fear” means respect. When you are witnessing to unbelievers, and you’re seeking to win them to Christ and you’re defending your faith, you do it gently and respectfully. The goal is not just to win an argument, it’s to win a person to the Lord; so be gentle, be respectful.

I think that in personal evangelism sometimes we make the mistake that we don’t listen as much as we should. We just want to share the gospel. We don’t want to listen and find out what is really on people’s hearts and be able to give them an answer for the hope that lies in you.

Here’s the fifth, be right, verse 16. It says, “Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation”—manner of living—“in Christ.” Here’s the point: When you are being persecuted, when you are being opposed, when they’re coming against you, make sure that you are right with God, your conscience is clear. When you suffer, it’s important to have a good or clear conscience. You know, God has given us a conscience, but a conscience is only as good as it’s educated and enlightened by the Word of God. A conscience can become seared. It could become clouded. It can be resisted, so we have to have a conscience that is informed and educated by the light of God’s Word. Our conscience only works properly when it’s enlightened by the truth of the Bible, the Word of God.

Billy Graham once said, “Some people push their conscience around wherever they want it to go like a wheelbarrow, and they don’t seem to have any conscience or convictions because it’s not enlightened or influenced by the Word of God.” We don’t use sundials anymore, but it’s a great illustration. A sundial will only work when the sun is hitting the sundial, right? At midnight, you can’t tell the time on a sundial, there’s no light on it. Some people’s conscience are like a sundial in the darkness—they don’t know what’s going on; they have no sense of right or wrong. We need the light of God’s Word and the Holy Spirit to influence our conscience.

It’s interesting that when Paul many times was brought in trial to the Roman authorities or the Jewish authorities, he would make the statement, “I have lived in all good conscience until this day.” It’s been said, “Conscience makes cowards of us all.” If you’re a Christian, and your conscience is clean, and you know that Christ is Lord, and you’re in the will of God, and you’re trusting the Lord and following the Lord, no one can harm you. You have a clear conscience. You don’t have to freak out. You don’t have to worry about those things.

It also give us peace. It gives us courage, if you’re taking notes, to have a clear conscience. Secondly, it gives us peace. David, when he committed sin with Bathsheba and wrote in Psalm 32, he said that when he was living in sin that God’s hand was heavy upon him, so much that

he described it as, “. . . my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.” When you’re living in sin and your conscience is clouded and you’re not clear, you don’t think you’re right with God, you’re always like, “They know. They’re looking at me. They know.” It does make you a coward. When your conscience is clean, you’re right with God, you don’t have anything to worry, you’re not freaking out and you have the joy of the Lord. That’s why David prayed, “God, restore the joy of my salvation.” It gives you courage, it gives you peace, and a clear conscience removes fear from our hearts. Psalm 118:6, “The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?” I love that. You don’t need to be afraid when you know the Lord is on your side.

Here’s the sixth, be assured. Verse 17, “For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.” If you’re going to suffer, make sure you’re suffering for doing right, not for doing evil. I love this statement. It says, “. . . if the will of God be so.” If you’re suffering, you need to have the assurance, “I am in God’s will.”

Years ago I was with two other pastors, and we were going to be flying from LAX, late on a Sunday night, to Australia to preach there and do a conference. We were in LA, and I’ll make a long story short, we were kidnapped. We came out of a restaurant, and at gunpoint, two individuals forced us back into our car and kidnapped us and began to rob us and take our money, our watches, and whatever we had. I’ll never forget, they were rummaging through my bag and pulled out a Bible, my Bible. They go, “What’s this?” I said, “That’s my Bible. I’m a pastor. I’m on my way to Australia to preach.” Then, I said, “It’s no accident that you kidnapped us. God wants you to know He loves you, He can forgive you, He can change your life, and He can forgive your sins.” The guy had a gun at the back of my head when I was saying this. He said, “You know what? My mom’s a Christian. She’s been telling me that my whole life.” I said, “I told you! It’s no accident that you kidnapped us.” Even in that situation where they were threatening to kill us, I had such a peace, I’m in the will of God.

At the end of our episode with them, they took us to a park and we were in Inglewood, of all places. They lined us up against a fence and cocked their guns like they were going to execute us. I was standing with two other pastor friends and said, “Let’s just pray.” I said, “Lord, we belong to You,” and I remember raising my hands and just, “Lord, we belong to You. We’re Your servants. We’re here in Your will. You’re Lord of our lives. Have Your way.” Then, we heard the car start, and they drove off and left us standing there in the park. But just being able to say, “Lord, our conscience is clear. We’re Your children. Have Your way. We’re in Your will. Whatever You want to have happen here, we’re trusting You.” It brought such great assurance. I believe that it’s very possible, and highly probable, that you can be doing everything right, smack dab in the center of God’s will, and still suffer. So, don’t freak out like, “Oh, there must be sin in my life,” or “I must be out of the will of God,” or “This isn’t God’s will for me.” No. You can be smack dab in the center of God’s will, doing God’s work, God’s way, for God’s glory and suffer.

Paul the apostle suffered. Jesus suffered. The prophets before us suffered. We’re in good company. Jesus actually said, “They persecuted the prophets before you, they will persecute

you. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad.” So you can be in the center of God’s will.

It’s interesting, in verse 18, the very next verse, it says, “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins.” Jesus came and went to the cross, suffered and died, in the will of God. Remember when He prayed in Gethsemane, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.” It was God’s will for Him to go to the cross to suffer and die to have the sin of the world placed upon Him; that God the Father loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son to die in our place. That’s what we’re celebrating in Communion. So, what makes us think that if we’re in the will of God, we’re going to avoid any suffering, pain, or sorrow.

Remember Daniel, when he prayed three times that day there in Babylon, and he was arrested and thrown into the lions’ den. Think about that—thrown into a den of lions—but the Lord came and delivered him and rescued him. Someone said, and I think I have this on the screen (I don’t know if they’re ready to throw it on the screen), they said these words, “The will of God will never take you where the grace of God cannot keep you.” I love that. Wherever we go, whatever goes on, we rest with assurance.

When you suffer for Christ:

1. Keep following zealously that which is good. That’s what I pray for people sometimes when they’re suffering, “Lord, let them not be weary in well doing. Let them know that in due season they will reap, if they faint not.”
2. Remember, you are blessed. You’re highly favored. Blessed are you, the Spirit of God and glory rest upon you.
3. Surrender to the Lordship of Jesus. Many times suffering and persecution leads us to surrender and obedience.
4. Be ready to give an answer. Be ready to explain the reason for the hope that is in you with gentleness and respect.
5. Keep a clear conscience. Keep short accounts with God. First John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Have a clean heart and a clean conscience and clean hands.
6. Rest in God’s loving purpose and plan. You know, in Romans 8, Paul tells us that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Nothing.

So, it’s a win-win situation. When you’re walking in obedience to God, you don’t need to be troubled or afraid or fear. Who can harm you. Amen? Let’s pray.