

Canceled
A Roadmap for Living In Exile
How to Thrive In Persecution
1 Peter 3:13-17

Introduction: As we get in to today's passage some of you may be wondering why this theme of suffering and persecution keeps coming up in First Peter. You need to remember who he was writing this letter to,

"1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia," (1 Peter 1:1)

The point being, the people he is writing to have been canceled because of their faith in Christ. Being canceled brings a certain amount of suffering in and of itself. Not being accepted in your community creates a very difficult life and leads to a snowball of false and derogatory accusations. The steadily growing cynicism and skepticism about Christians in the mid-first century led to a growth in the verbal abuse and disdain for Christians, and most notably, in AD 64, became the opportunity for Nero to falsely accuse Christians of burning down Rome. Nero used this false accusation to justify some of the most barbaric and mass executions of Christians ever committed, and as such, it became a catalyst for the severe persecution of Christians all over the Roman Empire.

It shouldn't be a surprise then, that Peter frequently brings up the subject of thriving in persecution and suffering in his letter. He is trying to equip them to thrive in these brutal environments so that they can, "... offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5), and "... proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). Peter is equipping them to press on towards the upward call in Christ Jesus in the face of a world that was growing in its unjust and even violent efforts to discourage them. Therefore, Peter writes,

"13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil." (1 Peter 3:13-27)

Proposition: In 1 Peter 3:13-17 Peter gives us two foundational elements to equip us to thrive in persecution.

The first foundational element Peter gives us to thrive in persecution is ...

(1) A Foundational Truth – Suffering for Christ is worth it. (3:13-14a, 17)

Note: Peter sandwiches the practical instructions of how to thrive in persecution with the truth that suffering for Christ, and what He's about, is worth it. He does this because the motivational element is vital for the practical element to work. If you aren't convinced suffering for Christ's sake is fundamentally worth it, then there is no way you're going to be interested in the instructions on how!

Peter demonstrates this truth in two ways.

The first way Peter demonstrates that suffering for Christ is worth it is that,

A. Suffering for Christ's sake has a positive purpose. (3:17)

1. **17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil." (3:17)**
2. Doing good has a positive purpose, however, by definition, doing evil has a negative purpose. Evil is necessarily the opposite of good. Its unethical, immoral and of no positive value to those its being done.
3. Therefore, when you go to prison for killing somebody in a drunk driving accident you are suffering for evil. There is nothing worthwhile about killing somebody because you drank too much. When you suffer the mistrust and cancelation of others because of your lying, greed, materialism, divisiveness, untrustworthiness, selfishness, etc., then you are suffering for doing things that do nothing but bring harm, and therefore you can't find anything positive in your suffering!
4. But, when you are suffering for good, that is for Christ's sake, then you are suffering for doing something worthwhile and valuable!
5. J.B. Green notes the following about suffering for Christ,
6. **"When set within the grand story of God's will, the severity of present-day suffering is assuaged. The reality of suffering is not denied nor is this cancerous malice cured, but the crisis of suffering is lessened by its reinterpretation in 1 Peter—by means of assurances that the life-chapter currently being written is not the story's finale and that present suffering effectively serves the overarching, salvific aim of God."¹**
7. So, verse 17 points us to a commonsense reason of why it's worth suffering for Christ, because if we are suffering for Christ then we are suffering for doing something that mattered!

¹ Green, J. B. (2007). *1 Peter* (pp. 112–113). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

8. But there's more. It's not just that you can know what you're suffering for is good, but also there is good that is going to come to you! Let's go back to the beginning of the passage!

The second way Peter demonstrates that suffering for Christ is worth it is that,

B. Suffering for Christ has a guaranteed eternally good outcome. (2:13-14a)

- 1. 13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?**
 - a. The qualifier here is "if you are zealous for what is good?"
 - b. On the word "**zealous**," Kistemaker and Hendriksen write, "The Greek word Peter uses to express the Christian's eagerness to do good can be translated "zealots." This particular word had political overtones in first-century Israel. For example, one of Jesus' disciples, Simon, was a Zealot (Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). However, Peter is exhorting the readers not to become political extremists but to spend their energy on doing good."²
 - c. Christ is what is good! Jesus said, "**No one is good except God alone.**" (**Mark 10:18**)
 - d. So, to be zealous for what is good is to be hyper passionate, committed, and ultimately consumed with loving God; living your life in a way that honors Him as God and as such loves others the way He loves!
 - e. But, did Peter just say if you live this way you won't have any harm done to you? That is, if I'm zealous for God does that protect me from the physical and financial consequences of persecution? Well, absolutely not! What then does he mean? Well, let's look at the next verse.
- 2. 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed.**
 - a. Suffering through a diet eventually provides the reward of better health. When you suffer through all that's involved in starting a business you do so in order to reap the future benefits of that business. Athletes suffer through all kinds of intense training so they can attain the reward of winning. In each of these examples, a person embraces the suffering because the reward that suffering brings makes it all worth it.

² Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and the Epistle of Jude* (Vol. 16, p. 132). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

- b. In this verse, Peter says even if you should physically suffer for “righteousness sake,” that is be harmed for loving and obeying God, then you need to know what you will get in return for your suffering is more significant than your suffering! Roger Raymer writes,
- c. **“For even if suffering should occur, Christians are blessed and thus should not be frightened. The word here translated “blessed” was used by Jesus (Matt. 5:3–11). To be “blessed” in this context does not mean to “feel delighted” but to be “highly privileged.”³**
- d. This is why Paul wrote the verse I’ve shared with you a few times in this series,
 - 1. **16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8:16–17)**
 - 2. A few verses later Paul wrote,
 - 3. **28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)**
- e. If your vision of life only extends to the now, then this truth of a future reward is irrelevant for you. For this to matter you have to believe eternal life is real, heaven is real, and the Gospel is true! Life on this earth may never be freed from suffering for the sake of Christ, however, if you believe in eternal life then you know the suffering you are doing for Christ’s sake here cannot compare to the eternal glory in front of you!

The 2nd foundational element Peter gives us to thrive in persecution comes in the form of instructions; specifically,

(2) Three Foundational Instructions to Thrive In Persecution. (3:14b-16)

In 1 Peter 3:14b-16 there are three foundational instructions for thriving in persecution ...

The first foundational instruction is ...

³ Raymer, R. M. (1985). **1 Peter**. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 850). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

A. **Don't let opposition dictate your emotions. - "Have no fear of them, nor be troubled" (3:14B)**

1. **"Have no fear of them," (3:14b)**

- a. When you fear somebody you are saying they have power over you. Peter however tells us not to fear those who persecute us because they don't have power over us at all. They may act like they do, and it may even appear for now that they do, but Jesus made it clear they don't! Its why Jesus said this,
- b. **4 "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. 5 But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! (Luke 12:4-5)**
- c. Jesus was saying the only one you need to fear is Him! He is the only one who truly has power over you because His authority over you is total and His judgements are eternal! Man can't do anything to me that will last forever, but Christ can and will! He will either save me for eternity or condemn me for eternity, and there is no appeal process and no escape! The worst possible thing man can do to me, as well as the best possible thing man can do for me, both fall eternally short of what Christ can do!
- d. Peter then adds,

2. **"nor be troubled," (3:14c)**

- a. "The word "troubled" in the Greek means "to disturb, be agitated."⁴
- b. "(a figurative extension of meaning of ταράσσω 'to stir up,' 16.3) to cause acute emotional distress or turbulence—'to cause great mental distress'."⁵
- c. "ταράσσω (*tarassō*): vb.; ≡ Str 5015—**1.** LN 16.3 **stir up** (Jn 5:7+; Jn 5:4 v.r.); **2.** LN 25.244 **cause great distress**, trouble, disturb (Mt 2:3; Jn 14:1); **3.** LN 39.44 **cause a riot**, throw into confusion (Ac 17:8+)"⁶

⁴ Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Vol. 11, p. 88). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

⁵ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 314). New York: United Bible Societies.

⁶ Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (electronic ed.). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

3. So in other words, Peter is instructing us to exercise the emotional intelligence that comes from a right understanding of the character and nature of God; that comes from a right understanding and belief in His salvation. It's what led the Psalmist to write,

4. **6 The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? (Psalm 118:6)**

The 2nd foundational instruction is ...

- B. **Don't allow anybody or anything to compete with your love and loyalty to Christ. (3:15a)**
 1. **"15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy," (3:15a)**
 2. The word "heart" reflects the entirety of who we are. Whatever is in our heart is what we are honestly about as a person, so much so it becomes obvious. Its why the Bible says,
 - a. **23 Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." (Proverbs 4:23)**
 - b. "in your hearts' 'Hearts' is an OT idiom referring to the whole person."⁷
 3. The word "honor" reflects respect, praise, and loyalty.
 4. To be "holy" is to be set apart as not only uniquely different, but also divinely better than all else.

Note: "There is none holy like the Lord; there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God." (1 Samuel 2:2)

5. Therefore, putting this all together, "**in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy,**" means with the entirety of who you are as a person, sincerely live in a way that recognizes and responds to Christ as the all-powerful, dominate, majestic, loving, righteous, just, and eternal God that He is. Refuse to respond to Him as anyone less than the one who rescued you from eternal damnation. Refuse to respond to Him as anyone less than the one who graciously gave His life for you, knowing you would fall short of obeying Him. Refuse to respond to Him as anyone less than the one who has given you the hope of eternal life! Let your life be a testimony of your belief that what the Bible says about Him is true.

⁷ Utley, R. J. D. (2000). *The Gospel according to Peter: Mark and I & II Peter* (Vol. Volume 2, p. 244). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

6. “Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all.” (1 Chronicles 29:11)
7. “The Lord reigns; he is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed; he has put on strength as his belt. Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved.” (Psalm 93:1)
8. “To the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (Jude 1:25)

The 3rd foundational instruction is to

- C. Be prepared to humbly articulate why you live your life for Christ’s glory. (3:15b-17)
1. “always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you;” (3:15b)
 - a. D.R. Helm noted,
 - b. “One good thing that emerges from our obedience is that we will have plenty of opportunities to speak about Christ. Now, I know that many Christians point to this verse as a proof text for gospel witness and the need for apologetics. However, given the context that we have been exploring—namely, faithful submission in a hostile world—it is more likely that what Peter intends is that we will have a chance to explain why we are suffering.”⁸
 - c. Peter is not asserting that every believer needs to be able to be a professional debater, seminary theologian or apologist ready to take on every argument against Christian doctrine. What he’s saying is you need to be able to articulate why it is YOU act the way you do! You need to be able to explain the HOPE THAT IS IN YOU!
 - d. Specifically, it’s an effort to articulate why you are willing to suffer for Christ! It’s an effort to tell people why you love being loved by Jesus. It is not a command to win a debate, it is a command to explain yourself!
 - e. Peter then adds how to give this explanation. He writes,

⁸ Helm, D. R. (2008). *1 & 2 Peter and Jude: sharing christ's sufferings* (p. 116). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

2. **“yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience,” (3:15c-16a)**
 - a. Christian apologist who properly engage in formal debates on college campuses have an awesome ministry. This isn’t a slight against that at all.
 - b. But I can’t emphasize enough that this is not a verse calling Christians to go into the world and out debate all the skeptics and critics! This is a verse that says, when people want to know why in the world you are willing to suffer for Christ, explain it to them in a way that doesn’t run them off, but instead draws them in!
 - c. Its why Peter says to give this explanation with “gentleness” and “respect” which are both characteristics of humility, that is, of seeing the other person as an equal; seeing them objectively; not trying to win the argument or belittle their perspective, but rather sincerely sharing information for another person to consider without the threat of retribution if they don’t agree; or arrogance if they don’t understand.
 - d. This is how you respond to people and maintain a good conscience. In giving a defense it first gives you a good conscience that you didn’t let suffering or persecution cause you to hide the Gospel or run away ashamed of Jesus. But in addition, when done with “gentleness” and “respect” (humility), then no matter how offended or angry a person may be at your explanation of why you love and obey Jesus, you can hold your head up high and know you demonstrated the same kind of love, respect and humility that Jesus gave His accusers! Your conscience is clean! We can look in the mirror with the peace of a good conscience derived from knowing we have treated others in a way that is acceptable to the Lord (2:5) and proclaims His glory (2:9).
 - e. And here’s the results,
3. **“so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.” (3:16)**
 - a. Earlier Peter wrote,
 - b. **“15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.” (1 Peter 2:15)**
 - c. The good works, humility and respect you live your life with, will put to shame those who falsely accuse you (slander) and speak evil (revile) about your good behavior. Even in persecution you will have the victory of turning heads towards Jesus!

- d. Years ago, I read a book called The Insanity of God, by Nik Ripken. If you want to hear a bunch of amazing stories of how people have powerfully suffered for Jesus and gave an account for the hope withing them, then read that book!
- e. There are thousands of stories throughout history of men and women faithfully loving God, giving an account for the hope within them and then God using that to turn heads away from the persecutors and to Him.
- f. In closing, let me read a story with you. You can read it and others by clicking the link in my footnotes.
- g. **"Billy was born into a religious family in Mogadishu. His father was a tribal and religious leader who had memorized the entire Koran. Out of curiosity, Billy started studying an English Bible alongside his Koran. After three years of study, he converted to Christianity. He learned a lot from Christian radio broadcasts from the Seychelles and Kenya, and it was on the radio that he first heard the voice of another Somali who was a Christian. Billy's family threatened him when he confessed his new faith. That was when he first began to understand the words of Paul in 2 Timothy 3:12: "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Six years after his conversion, Billy met his first Christian Somali. Together, as underground Christians, they gathered fourteen believers and started an underground church. A year later, Muslims discovered the growing Christian community and started persecution in earnest. One of their church members, Liibaan, now a famed Somali martyr, was the first to be murdered. Then a doctor who attended the church was shot to death. An educator was kidnapped and executed. A Christian man and his Muslim wife were executed together in their bedroom. Another church member was taken off a bus and executed in broad daylight. Twelve in all were murdered. None of the murderers were ever prosecuted. Today, just two members have survived out of the original church of fourteen—Billy and one other. Billy escaped many attempts on his life before moving to another country. From that base, he travels in and out of Somalia, planting and nurturing underground house churches. No longer are there only fourteen Christians in Mogadishu. The church is quietly growing, partly because of the testimony of those twelve who died for Christ."⁹**

⁹ <https://www.tyndale.com/sites/readthearc/true-stories-of-the-persecuted-church-around-the-world/>

- h.** Heads turn when we live our lives above reproach, love others, and still suffer for our faith in Christ. When we suffer for Christ's sake and lovingly share why we embrace it, the fools who revile our good works look more foolish, while others begin to turn their heads to the one who gave us the hope within us – Christ!

With that said, here's the challenge I would like to leave you with.

Challenge: What is your response to suffering or persecution? Is it fear, anger, frustration, or worship? Given what the Bible teaches us about God and His character, how intelligent is your emotional response?

I said this a few months ago. How we respond to things says more about us than anything. I'm not saying this in a judgmental way but in a diagnostic way. My response to suffering, no matter what it is, pushes out the true condition of my heart and testifies of who I truly believe God is, and how great the eternal life is that He's given me. It exposes the weaknesses of our faith, the shallowness of our opinion of God, and the frivolity of our view of eternity and heaven. I'm not suggesting you aren't a Christian if you don't respond to suffering or persecution in a way that honors the Lord, I'm just saying your response demonstrates where you need to grow.

Peter knew this better than anybody. When Jesus was being tried, Peter, who insisted he would never reject Christ, failed to even admit he knew Him! Peter never forgot that day, nor the grace Jesus assured him of after His resurrection.

So, are you cowering away from sharing Jesus with others out of fear of rejection? Are you compromising and doing things you know dishonor Christ so that you can gain the honor and acceptance of others?

Is the suffering life has brought you, that has nothing to do with your testimony of Christ, leading you to worship Jesus or live in fear, anger and frustration?

No matter if its persecution or suffering that causes these understandably negative emotions and experiences in us, the information we learn from the Gospel should recalibrate our response!

Let the evidence take you where you need to be – with HIM!