

“PERSECUTION: INTIMIDATION OR OPPORTUNITY?”

1 Peter 3:13-17

Theme: The believer who endures persecution faithfully fulfills the call of Christ to shine brightly for Him.



I. Intimidations by Persecutors – 3:13-14

A. Immunizing Christians to Intimidation – vv. 13-14a

1. The focus of the book changes now to address specifically the plight of these Christians encountering persecution.
2. Peter has been carefully building a case for the attitude that He summarizes here: we are aliens to this earth, focusing rather on the inheritance that awaits us and for which we are being protected – cp. **1:3-6**
3. The previous statement of **3:12** provides the basis off which Peter elaborates that we are not being ignored when we suffer.
4. *“Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?”* - Peter’s point is – in light of these things – who can truly harm you if your faith is proven? – cp. **Matthew 10:28; Romans 8:31; Psalm 56:4**
5. Thus, there will be those who are wicked and who will seek to “harm you,” yet Peter says that we are blessed through such persecution – *“But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.”*
6. Believers who suffer and yet *refuse to relent* of their *“zeal for what is good”* and *“for the sake of righteousness”* have lives that speak more eloquently for the genuineness of Christlikeness than a library full of theology books.
7. God’s Word never promises that the Christian life is going to be a good life – in fact, it does the opposite – cp. **2 Timothy 3:12; John 15:18-21**.

B. Inducing Conformity through Intimidation – v. 14

1. By using terrorist tactics, unbelievers attempt to use that which **they** fear to intimidate the believer to apostasy – loss of property, reputation, friends, ease, and even life – *“AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED”* – cp. **Isaiah 8:12-13**.
2. These are the natural reactions to the *“intimidation”* of persecution – but

the genuine believer will display the power of God's sustaining grace by supernatural response

3. Instead of succumbing to *“intimidation,”* the true believer is able to utilize times and experiences of persecution to demonstrate that have been born again to a living hope.

II. Intentions of the Persecuted – **3:15-16**

A. Solidify Loyalty to the Savior – **v. 15a**

1. In the face of the temptation to abandon the Lord because of persecution, redouble your loyalty to the Lord – *“... but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts ...”*
2. *“sanctify”* [ἀγιάζω] – to “set apart,” or “to consecrate;” “to eliminate what is incompatible with ...”
3. He is calling us to protect *“Christ as Lord”* – acknowledging His authority to do with us what He wills – He is our Master.
4. Another part of sanctifying Him in our hearts as Lord is to fear the horrors of bowing to another – **Isaiah 8:13.**

B. Suppress Libel through Excellence – **vv. 15b-16**

1. Once we choose loyalty to our Savior, we must then be prepared to defend Him as the focus of our Hope – *“... always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”*
2. This is done through three avenues:
 - a) Verbal defense of Christ's promises of glory – *“... always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you ...”*
 - (1) The way that we are *“... always being ready”* is to remain steadfast in sanctifying Christ as Lord.
 - (2) *“... to make a defense ...”* [ἀπολογία] – is to provide a reason for something – “apologetics.”
 - (3) *“... to everyone who asks you to give an account ...”* – a reference to those who are intimidating you through seeking to harm you.
 - (4) *“... for the hope that is in you”* – a reference to the confidence in the face of intimidation that this life and the comforts of this life are not what one lives for when one follows Jesus Christ.
 - b) Continued excellence in your behavior - *“... yet with gentleness and reverence ...”*
 - (1) *“gentleness”* [πραΰτης] – describes a quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance; to refuse

to seek to overpower another with intensity or vehemence

- (2) *“reverence”* [φόβος] – an awareness of the gravity of the situation and the awareness of the need to handle it properly for the glory of God’s sake .
- c) Preservation of a conscience which is unimpeachable – *“... and keep a good conscience ...”*
3. These things will bring shame to those who oppose Christ – *“... so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.”*
4. The timing of the fulfillment of this seems to be eschatological – cp. **1 Peter 4:16-19**.

III. Incentives through Persecution – **3:17**

A. The Acknowledgement of the Determination of God

1. *“For it is better, if God should will it so ...”*
2. There are times when God determines to bring Himself glory through the suffering or persecution of His children.
3. Essentially, Peter is declaring that the suffering that is endured by the will of God in the life of the believer *“is better”* [κρείττων] – to be preferred or “advantageous,” than the suffering that *will be* endured by those who torture the believer as an enemy of God.

B. The Avoidance of Discrediting the Lord

1. The only time that suffering will produce growth and improvement is when we remain faithful to Christ through them – *“... that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.”*
2. It is not the mere suffering that is to do us good; it is the manner in which we think, and feel, and act under suffering that results in an eternal weight of glory!
3. The suffering for *“doing what is right”* is at the hands of men; whereas the suffering *“for doing what is wrong”* is at the hands of God who is the avenger of all evil – cp. **Matthew 10:28**.