

# STAND UP FOR CHRIST: SUFFER FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE

## 1 PETER 03:13–17

### *Introduction*

This passage begins a new section dealing with persecution. Genuine believers suffer all kinds of persecution: being ridiculed and mocked, ignored and bypassed, isolated and cut off, abused and beaten, imprisoned and murdered. All genuine believers face some persecution at one time or another, all to varying degrees. The question is this: How can we bear up under the persecution? How can we be assured that we will stand up under the persecution and be counted faithful by God? How can we be assured that we will endure and inherit the hope of eternal life, of living with Christ forever and ever? There is only one way: we must stand up for Christ no matter the suffering or its ferociousness.

- I. First, do what is right and good (vv. 13-14).
- II. Second, set your heart on Christ and the great hope He gives (v. 15).
- III. Third, readily answer and defend the hope of salvation (v. 15).
- IV. Fourth, keep a clear conscience (vv. 16-17).

### **I. *1 Peter 03:13–14 Do What is Right and Good***

The first answer to persecution is to do what is right and good. Note the verse: it actually says to become “eager to do good.” The word “eager” (*zelotai*) means zealot. The believer is to be so zealous for what is right that he is actually known as a zealot for good. Imagine being gripped with so much passion and zeal for good that one becomes known as a zealot! This is the challenge of this passage. Several attitudes toward doing good permeate society.

- => Some persons have a *care less attitude* toward goodness. Doing what is right and good matters little. What is right and good is rebelled against, ignored, cursed and rejected. The person has little conscience about right and wrong. His values are ever so weak. He could care less if he does what is right and good.
  - => Some persons have a *selfish attitude* toward goodness. If doing what is right and good benefits them, then they do it. If it helps them, meets their need and enlarges their holdings, then they do what is right. But if it costs them, demands discipline and control, and takes away from their pleasure and holdings, then they reject the good and refuse to do what is right.
  - => Some persons have a *surface or sentimental attitude* to what is good and right. They readily profess to believe in what is good and right and want to be known as moral and upright. But behind the scenes they go ahead and live like they want and do their own thing.
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Some persons, of course, have a zealous attitude toward what is right and good. They have committed their lives to seeking and doing what they should. This is exactly what Scripture is saying: “Be a zealot – be a fanatic – be a passionate follower – after that which is good and right.” Note three points.

1. The believer who does good will be less likely to suffer persecution (v. 13). Most people will appreciate the good that we do, including our neighbours and civil authorities. Doing good will keep us from getting into trouble with the law and from offending our neighbours, fellow workers, and community. Therefore, the chance of our being persecuted becomes less likely.

*Heb 13:5-6* Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”

*1 Pet 3:13* Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?

*Job 11:18* You will be secure, because there is hope; you will look about you and take your rest in safety.

*Psa 91:5* You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day,

*Psa 112:7* They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the LORD.

*Prov 3:24* When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.

2. The believer who suffers persecution will be blessed by God. How can a person who is suffering persecution be blessed? When a person focuses his mind and life upon the things of this world, they can be snatched from him overnight. The person can be stricken with a disease, suffer a heart attack, have an accident, go through bankruptcy, lose everything he has through an economic slump or stock market crash. A black Monday can happen anytime and anywhere in this world. A person of the world can suffer such a crushing blow that he is destroyed and left hopeless and helpless in life, but not a true believer. The mind and life of the true believer are focused upon Jesus Christ; therefore, no matter what he suffers, he still has his most cherished possession – Jesus Christ, the very Son of God. He knows that Jesus Christ is going to look after him and take care of him: that Christ is going to work everything out for good.

The very same thing happens when the believer is persecuted for righteousness' sake. His mind and life are focused upon Christ; therefore, he possesses Christ and all the promises of Christ. He possesses such promises as these:

=> God will work all things out for good for him.

**Rom 8:28** *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

=> God will provide all the necessities of life for him.

**Mat 6:33** *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

=> God will give him a very special Spirit of glory to rest upon him.

**1 Pet 4:14** *If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.*

=> The life of Christ will be revealed in his body.

**2 Cor 4:11** *For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.*

=> God will give him a great reward in heaven.

**Mat 5:11-12** *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

**2 Tim 2:12** *If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us.*

=> The Lord will take him on to heaven and preserve him through all of eternity when the time comes for him to leave this earth.

**2 Tim 4:18** *The LORD will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Note how wonderful and glorious these promises are. There are so many more promises, so many in fact that, as John the Apostle says, the world itself could not contain enough shelves to hold the books if all the promises of God were written out (cp. Jn. 21:25).

3. The believer is not to fear nor be troubled by the terror of persecution. No matter what the suffering is — ridicule, mockery, abuse, assault, rejection, being bypassed, imprisoned or martyred — if the believer is persecuted because he stands up for Christ, he is not to fear. God will meet his need. God has great things in store for the believer; therefore, God shall never forsake him.

=> God will strengthen him to bear the persecution.

=> God will use his suffering as a strong testimony for Christ and touch the hearts of some of the persecutors.

=> God will use his suffering to make him a far stronger believer, to make him more and more secure in Christ.

**Exo 14:14** *“The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.”*

**Deu 31:6** *“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”*

**2 Chr 16:9** *For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war.*

**Psa 34:7** *The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.*

**Psa 91:4** *He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.*

**Isa 41:10** *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

**Isa 41:13** *For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.*

**Isa 43:1-2** *But now, this is what the LORD says — he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.”*

**Mat 10:30-31** *“And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”*

**Phil 1:27** *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel, without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved — and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,*

**Rev 1:17-18** *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.*

## **II. 1 Peter 03:15 Dedication: Set Your Heart Upon Christ**

The second answer to persecution is to set your heart upon Christ and the great hope He gives to believers. The believer is to receive Christ into his heart. Christ alone is to fill the heart of the believer. The believer's heart is to be sanctified, that is, filled with Christ

and focused upon Christ. Why? Because Christ is his only hope of salvation. Jesus Christ promises to save all who receive Him into their hearts. Therefore, if a person wishes to be saved, he must have Jesus Christ in his heart.

The point is this: if Jesus Christ is in the heart of the believer, then the believer has the greatest of hopes, the hope of salvation and of living forever. It is this hope that stirs the believer to bear persecution. Christ, who lives within the believer, strengthens the believer. How? Christ stirs the hope of salvation within the heart of the believer and arouses him to endure the suffering no matter how fierce and threatening. Christ arouses great assurance within the believer, the assurance that the hope of salvation is true and that it is right around the corner. The person who has truly sanctified Christ within his heart loves Christ and wants to please Christ. He knows that Christ has died for him and is going to conform him into the very image of the Son of God Himself. Therefore, the true believer wants to please Christ. The believer would never think of displeasing Christ nor of hurting and causing Christ pain, especially by buckling under to persecution and denying Him. But remember: only the person who has sanctified Christ within his heart can stand fast against persecution. Our hearts must be filled with Christ and focused upon Christ to bear suffering for righteousness' sake.

***John 17:23** "I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know; that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."*

***Ga1 2:20** I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

***James 1:12** Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*

***2 Pet 2:9** If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*

***1 John 3:24** Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.*

***Rev 3:20** Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*

### **III. 1 Peter 03:15 Readily Defend the Hope of Salvation**

The third answer to persecution is to readily answer and defend the hope of salvation to every man, but to do so with meekness and fear. The word "answer" or "defend" (apologian) means just that, to answer back or to give a defence of the believer's hope (A.T. Robertson. *Word Pictures In The New Testament*, Vol. 6, p. 114).

1. The believer is to answer *every man* who asks him about his hope of salvation and of living forever. He is to answer every...

- neighbour
- friend
- foe
- civil authority
- employer
- employee
- classmate
- legal authority
- stranger
- fellow worker

The believer is to miss no opportunity to witness for Christ. He is not to shirk his duty in witnessing, and he is not to neglect or ignore anyone. Day by day as he crosses the path of others, he is to give an answer and defend the hope of salvation to all who ask and will listen.

2. The believer is to *be ready* to answer and defend the hope of salvation. This means preparation; it means study, meditation and prayer. The believer must study the Scripture, study all about God and Christ, all about the salvation and promises of God. The believer must know the Scripture and live in prayer in order to be ready to witness.

**Thought 1.** The great tragedy is that most professing believers do not know what they believe. They know little about Christ, what it is that makes Him so unique and superior. Few can witness and lead anyone else to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Few are willing to take the time or exert the effort to study God's Word and to learn the truth. Most are just not willing to pay the price to learn about God and Christ and to prepare themselves to be dynamic witnesses for Christ.

3. The believer is to be very careful about how he answers and defends the hope of salvation. He is to answer people with a spirit of gentleness and of respect before God.

=> By gentleness is meant a spirit of tenderness and softness, of care and love, of humility and brokenness. But note: gentleness also means a spirit of strength and courage. Gentleness does not put up with sin and shame, license and indulgence. It does all it can to relieve and correct evil and mistreatment. Too often witnessing is done in a spirit of superiority and arrogance, argument and controversy, criticism and divisiveness.

=> By respect is meant fearing God lest one misrepresent or twist the truth of God's salvation. It means to hold God in such reverence and awe that one bears witness only in a spirit of constant prayer and dependence upon God. One knows and acknowledges that God is the Source of salvation; He alone can save a person. Therefore, one is ever so careful to present only the truth of God's Word and of salvation.

**Thought 1.** Too often witnessing is done in a spirit of pride and bitterness, of pushing oneself forward instead of God. The spirit of fearing God is all but forgotten; God is not revered: the truth of His salvation is twisted to make oneself more acceptable and recognized.

The point is this: the answer to persecution is to bear a clear and strong witness for Christ, but to do so with gentleness and in the respect of God. By bearing a strong but gentle witness, those who oppose us will understand more about why we hold to such a glorious hope. In some cases, some of them will even be saved.

**Thought 2.** Alan Stibbs has an excellent statement on this point that is well worth our noting:

“We have here some practical guidance concerning Christian witness. It is wrong to be always preaching at people. The Christian wife has been encouraged by Peter to seek to win her unbelieving husband without speaking to him on the subject (3:1). But the whole situation is changed if the other person asks for an explanation. Also, if Christians are on the alert, they may often rightly discern an implied question in some passing comment. Then is the time to speak; but one can do so only if one is seeking to be ready.

“The Christian is then to engage, not in an aggressive attack on the other person’s will or prejudice, but in a logical account...or reasoned explanation of the hope that is [in him]” (*The First Epistle General of Peter*. “The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries,” p. 136).

**Mat 28:19-20** *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

**Mark 16:15** *He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”*

**Luke 19:10** *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”*

**John 20:21** *Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”*

**Acts 1:8** *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

**Acts 4:20** *For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*

**2 Cor 4:13** *It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak.*

**2 Tim 1:8** *So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.*

**2 Tim 2:2** *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*

**Titus 2:15** *These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.*

*1 Pet 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*

#### **IV. 1 Peter 03:16–17 Keep a Clear Conscience**

The fourth answer to persecution is to keep a clear conscience. Note the reference...

- to a good or dear conscience.
- to a good behaviour, that is, good conduct.

The only way a person can have a clear conscience is to have good conduct. If the believer is to stand against persecution, he must have a clear conscience, and to have a clear conscience he must have good conduct and behaviour. The believer must be living a good life; his conduct and behaviour must be holy, righteous, pure, decent, upright and above reproach. He must have a conscience and a behaviour that are without blame, that cannot be justly blamed with any sin or evil. Note two points.

1. Those who oppose and persecute believers will be put to shame by the believer's good behaviour and clear conscience. Some people will always oppose and persecute believers. If a person really lives for Jesus Christ, his righteousness and self-denial convicts those who love this world and its pleasures and possessions. Therefore, they often persecute the believer, ridicule, mock, isolate, abuse, imprison or kill him. The worldly do all they can to stop the witness of the believer. But note: eventually those who oppose and persecute the believer will be put to shame. The good and righteous behaviour of the believer will vindicate the believer either in this world or in the next world. The persecutor will stand ashamed of his attacks against the believer; the idea is that he will be eternally shamed.
2. It is better for believers to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. This is only common sense: a person can bear suffering much easier if he is suffering for a good and just cause. It is very difficult to stand up under suffering when it is an unjust and evil cause. Note also that it is the will of God for believers to suffer, that is to bear up under persecution, but not for doing evil. God wants believers living righteous and pure lives and He wants them witnessing for Him even if they do face persecution for it. This is the will of God; therefore, believers are to keep a clear conscience before God.

*Mat 5:16 "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*

*1 Th 1:8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia — your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it.*



**1 Tim 4:12** *Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.*

**Titus 2:7** *In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness.*

**James 2:18** *But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.*

**James 3:13** *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.*

**1 Pet 2:12** *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

**2 Pet 3:10-12** *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ■*