



Standing Fast in the Lord
1 Peter 3:13-17

1 Peter 3:13 And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?

14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled."

15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;

16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.

17 For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

“There's a battle outside, And it is ragin'. It'll soon shake your windows And rattle your walls For the times they are a-changin.” so wrote Bob Dylan way back in 1963. Dylan of course was singing about the cultural revolution of the late 1950s and 60s, and the profound changes that it brought to Western society. That battle never really ended, the times have continued to change ***haven't they?***

Things are even different from when I was kid. Sometimes I'm just knocked back on my heels by the way people speak, or what is considered normal. And one of the most profound changes that we have seen since the 1950s is that a society that was once nominally supportive of the church, and at worst indifferent to Christianity, is becoming openly hostile towards both.

Living in Fayetteville, you know the feeling of having artillery shake your windows, and rattle your walls on occasion. The closer you are to that artillery the more you are shaken. Well Christians, it is your windows, your walls that are being rattled by the changes in the culture these days. Its not that bad at present, but with each passing year, there's tremors get more violent as the front lines creep closer. We aren't suffering open persecution, like our brothers and sisters in other countries – for instance VOM tells us that for the last few decades an average of 400 Christians are martyred in Islamic countries *every day* – but persecution is just over the horizon. We may not feel it, but I'm fairly certain that if Jesus doesn't come back before then, our children will.

As a pastor, part of my calling is to prepare the sheep for persecution and hard times for the Christian faith, and sometimes I wonder am I misreading the signs, have I just developed an Elijah complex? I worry about that, because I do see a lot of churches going on assuming that it'll be business as usual until the end of the age. So I'm grateful when I read things like Ed Clowney's commentary on Peter and he notes: ***“Churches today that experience little persecution need Peter's instruction; in a future nearer than they suppose they may find themselves suffering with the rest of Christ's afflicted church in the world.”***

Clowney of course is right in saying that the church need look no further than scripture for instruction in all matters of faith, life, and practice including preparing for persecution. Peter was writing to Christians living in similar circumstances, they too were living in a hostile culture that was losing patience with Christianity, their windows and walls were already being rattled, and that culture was going to get a whole lot more hostile. Soon it wouldn't be windows rattling but doors being kicked in. What he is writing is therefore particularly relevant to you and I.

In these verse, Peter extends his thoughts from the prior verses. He has quoted from Psalm 34, about departing from evil and becoming doers of good and noted that the eyes of the Lord were on His righteous children, that He heard their prayers, and that the Lord was against the evil doer.

So Peter then asks rhetorically in verse 13, *who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?*

Now kids, there Peter is definitely pointing out something that I hope you know by now, namely that you don't often get in trouble for doing the right thing do you? I bet nobody here has parents who spank them when they do what they are told. I've never seen any parent get upset for instance that their child is paying too much attention to the sermon and drag them out for a talking to. Peter says, if you do well, you will generally receive blessings and not cursings.

Now you won't always be commended by everyone for doing good, plenty of Christians, including the Apostles were persecuted precisely because they were living lives of holiness. As Spicq put it "the spectacle of moral beauty does not disarm all the wicked they are often even irritated by the radiance of a virtue that condemns them." And these days society is in the process of calling good evil and evil good so doing the right thing is frequently called doing the wrong thing by our society.

But he means much more than just do the right thing and you will generally be treated well, and he develops that in the next verse, he means if you are really following the Lord and under His care and His control then no real evil can befall them.

Well wait a minute you might say, "What do you mean no evil can befall you, in the next verse he says *even if you should suffer for righteousness sake*. Isn't that evil? Isn't that harm?" No, brothers and sisters you see to suffer for Christ's sake does not harm the believer. As a matter of fact it is so far from being harmful to suffer from Christ, it is a blessing. That is what Peter says: "*if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed*" and Peter didn't make that up he is repeating what he heard Jesus say in the beatitudes:

Mat. 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

12 "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Suffering is not the opposite of blessing, brothers and sisters. And sometimes it **is not suffering for Christ** that is the curse. Peter graphically learned that lesson in the Courtyard of the high priest on the night of Christ's trial. He denied Christ in order to avoid suffering, but oh the pangs of conscience he suffered as a result. Have you ever done something similar? I mean not spoken out for Christ when the

opportunity presented itself, how did you feel later? *Did you feel blessed or ashamed, didn't you wish you could go back and change that moment?* Peter learned that lesson, and that is why a few days later he did take a bold stand for Christ before the Sanhedrin and this time he rejoiced to have been found worthy to suffer for Christ's sake.

Avoiding suffering is a fleeting reward and it is hollow, but the rewards Christ's martyrs obtain and the weight of glory they inherit are eternal, to know Christ takes the curse out of that suffering and even the sting out of death. To die for Christ is not to be a victim but a victor.

Don't even be afraid of the enemies of Christ and their threats, instead fear and reverence God, and here Peter quotes a section from Is. 8:12-13

12 "Do not say, 'A conspiracy,' Concerning all that this people call a conspiracy, Nor be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.

13 The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow; Let Him be your fear, And let Him be your dread.

That's the wonderful thing, the fear of the Lord drives out the fear of men. What can men do to you? If you love the Lord Jesus Christ and have made him first in your hearts, the worst men can do is merely to deliver you into his presence. All things that men do to you, Christ assures you, will work to your good.

Have you ever considered that although it is the weak Christian who appears to be the one who should fear, it is actually His persecutors who should be afraid? They are the ones who are cursing themselves, even as they are ultimately working God's blessings in your life.

So those of you who know the Lord, who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, what should you be doing?

Peter mentions three things: first, ***you must hallow Jesus as God in your hearts***. Love Him and Trust Him. Remember that it is as you fix your eyes upon Him, that you will be able to endure the worst storms and tempests. Peter was able to walk on water while he had his eyes fixed on Christ and trusted in Him, but when he looked away at the wind and the waves, and began to fear the power of the tempest, he sank. Remember brothers you can rely on Jesus because he is not merely your friend, he is IMMANUEL GOD WITH US. Yes the storms are scary but He is God and he has the power to still them with a word.

Winston Churchill said that the best nights sleep he ever had during the war came the night after the Pearl Harbor attack. Because he knew at that point that America was in the war, and unlike Germany and Japan, Winston whose mother was American, knew the power of America and the character of Americans. He knew that the Axis powers could not hope to prevail against them, and therefore he was no longer really afraid. Even though he knew much suffering would occur he knew that final victory was now certain, so he slept content.

Well you know that your enemies cannot hope to prevail against Jesus. Jesus has even said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) Final victory is His. Do not fear.

Second, you have something very important to do, you must *always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear*; that doesn't mean that you must be able to talk anyone into the Christian faith. It means that you Christians, need to be ready and able to explain the Christian faith to anyone, friend or foe, who asks. No one is exempt. That means you must know it yourself, for how else will you be able to explain it. That means that all of you need to heed Spurgeons advice in your folder: "Have your doctrinal views, and all your knowledge of Christ, packed away in a handy form, so that, when people want to know what you believe, you can tell them. If they wish to know why you believe that you are saved, have your answer all ready in a few plain, simple sentences; and in the gentlest and most modest spirit make your confession of faith to the praise and glory of God. Who knows but what such good seed will bring forth an abundant harvest?" – *Spurgeon*

It is in explaining and defending the faith that you truly become a witness or Martureo, which is where we get the word Martyr.

And brothers and sisters, whether you are explaining it to your best friend or your worst foe, do so in a gentle and winsome fashion, not in the fear of men, but in the fear of the Lord.

Thirdly, you must have a good conscience, a clear conscience, and that can only happen if you are living a consistent life of holiness. Brothers and Sisters, to profess Jesus with your lips and deny him with your life, will cripple your witness, internally and externally. Guard your hearts against impure motives. There has always been a connection between the holiness of Christians and God's blessing of the church with an abundant harvest. I think that is one of the reasons why we see so little revival. Also, if we were a more holy people, the world would be more ashamed to heap approbrium on the Christ's people. I fear that as it is, we invite their scoffing by our lawlessness and justify their bad reports.

Finally Remember this Christian when you suffer for doing God, it is because it is God's will that you do therefore remember that as Bill Harrell puts it "We should always fear sinning, but never fear suffering. God has ordained our course, including our sufferings, with holy wise and loving intention." Brothers and Sisters, in the end all this will work to bless you, it is better to suffer for doing good then, than to be one of the persecutors. I can attest to that having been on both sides of the persecution fence.

And if you are still on the other side as I once was, then I beg you, plead with you, to cross over before it is too late. Close with Christ, if you will stand fast with Apostles and not the Sanhedrin, if you will stand fast with the disciples and not the Roman empire, if you will truly stand fast with Christ and his church today, and not a vicious and spiteful culture, then I promise you, you will stand fast with them in glory forever. Hallow Christ in your heart, and you will know the blessings that Peter speaks of here forever.