

XXVIII. I Peter in Biblical Perspective

The Elect in the Exile

“An Unwanted but Effective Gospel Platform – Part 3”

I Peter 3:13–17

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We have one more study in I Peter 3:13–17 on Christian suffering. I Peter 3:13–17 says *[13] Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good (the 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.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Does the name Andrew Brunson ring a bell? On Monday through Friday I do a ten minute podcast on current events from a Christian world and life view and I've done two on Andrew Brunson and his situation. I'm grateful for our government's persistence in this matter with him where he has recently been released from a Turkish prison and reunited with his family. He is a faithful Gospel minister and has given his life for ministry. There were false accusations and charges that were made against him which was the reason he was put in prison, being separated from his family and all that was related to that suffering for Christ's sake, for righteousness sake. He was put in prison in the area of the five provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, that Peter is writing to in this text. Then it was known as Asia Minor and today it's known as Turkey.

In this text Peter is preparing those in the first century who were already suffering and the suffering would intensify from social, verbal, physical and lethal suffering in fiery ordeals and this type of suffering is still happening in the same place in the 21st century. As our theme this year has been a lifestyle of evangelism and discipleship, this is why my heart wanted to preach through I Peter because this book is preparing elect exiles who have been saved by the grace of God on what it means to be a pilgrim/sojourner under the persecution of the world as an ambassador of Jesus Christ. This particular text (I Peter 3:13–17) is absolutely crucial and that is why I have done three studies on it.

Why? If I understand Jesus, Paul and Peter rightly and read church history with any intelligence at all every faithful Christ and church inevitably to some degree and at some time will suffer persecution to some extent. Here Peter starts in I Peter 3:13 and goes all the way to I Peter 5:12, discipling these believers in one focus which is Christian suffering. He walks them through the escalating types of suffering from social, verbal, physical to lethal because it is inevitable in the life of a Christian. Although I am not a prophet nor the son of a prophet, neither am I an apostle or the son of one, all I have is God's Word and the sense of what is happening around us and if I'm reading this tsunami wave of secular humanism that is utterly devoted to manifesting its rebellion against God through various forms of sexual anarchy in our society today, every Christian and church that wants to be faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in His Word, unless God intervenes with a sweeping revival in His church with the resulting Gospel

awakening throughout our nation, will be targeted. Christians and the church will suffer this type of escalating suffering Peter is describing here. What will you do if faced with this kind of suffering?

Peter tells us what to do and starts with this text in I Peter 3:13–17. To sum up the last two studies Christian suffering is a Divine blessing providing an opportunity to fearlessly confirm Christ as Lord in our heart and persuasively communicate Christ as our Hope to the world. I did not say ‘Christians suffering’ but Christian suffering. Christians suffer just like everybody else in this world because this world is under the curse of sin. This is not what Peter is talking about. Peter is talking about suffering because of Christ, for Christ’s sake, for righteousness sake. He isn’t talking about suffering that comes when you’re obnoxious or your participation in the evil that’s around. He is talking to believers who attempt to be faithful to Christ in word and deed and irrationally are persecuted for being zealous for the good. So how are we to respond when we suffer in this way?

I Peter 3:13–17 gives us a perspective, a prescriptive and a descriptive portrait as to how we are to respond this Christian suffering. Peter has already given us Gospel blessings and Gospel commands that we have already looked at in our study of I Peter. He has given us 13 Gospel blessings and the Christian perspective is Gospel blessing 14 found in I Peter 3:13–14a which says *[13] Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good (the good)? [14a] But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed.* This is the Christian perspective to Christian suffering.

Then Peter gives a prescriptive response and one it is your opportunity to embrace a fearless witness for Christ. Here is Gospel command 6 and that is I Peter 3:15 which is to sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart. You say ‘no’ to their fear. If someone can intimidate you then they can get you to act irrationally, silence you, cause you to flee or panic or withdrawal or compromise but that is the desired effect that Satan has through persecution. By God’s grace it will not have that desired effect in your life. Your response will be to have no fear for the perfect love of Christ cast out all fear (I John 4:18). It becomes your opportunity to confirm Jesus as Lord in your heart as holy and sacred for you already made Jesus as Lord when He saved you. It also becomes the occasion to faithfully communicate Him as your Hope to the world.

When persecution comes and you respond fearlessly with increased fidelity that Jesus is Lord, the world then wants to know why you are doing that. That’s what King Nebuchadnezzar wanted to know when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego as they were being thrown into the fiery furnace. That’s what King Darius wanted to know when he threw Daniel into the lion’s den. That’s what Joseph’s brothers wanted to know when they thought Joseph was going to drop the bomb on them since he was now in control over them after all they had done to him. That’s the way Paul responded to a Philippian jailer who wrongfully beat him yet he stayed to lead the jailer and his household to Christ singing psalms and hymns from the jail instead of running off when the earthquake crumbled the door of the jail.

Our answer is Hope and it’s what the Bible calls the blessed Hope, the Hope that purifies. It’s a glorious Hope and it’s something the world doesn’t know. The world is hopeless and it keeps trying to manufacture hope in achievement, applause or whatever and then it finds out while those things can be useful to a believer as they serve the Lord, but those things don’t make very good lords or gods. It’s all hopeless and instead of being filled with faith, you’re filled with despair and filled with love, you’re filled with hate, even as you’re talking about love. People want to know why you respond without fear as you confirm Christ as Lord.

Here is what hope does. When Christ is your hope in the day of prosperity you exhibit humility because it's Christ that is at work. I am what I am by the grace of God. Then when the days of prosperity dissipate and in the providence of God comes the day of adversity you exhibit strength, and assurance because your hope is not in the circumstances but in the Lord. He will never leave you nor forsake you for He is always with you wherever He has put you. In the days of difficulty you exhibit patience and persistence. We see this in Daniel 6 as Daniel becomes a glorious testimony and type of Christ when he is thrown in the lion's cave with a stone rolled in front of it. King Darius hurriedly comes the next day as the stone is pulled back, saying 'Daniel are you there? Has the God whom you serve continually delivered you?' Daniel says 'Oh king, fear not' and out from the den/cave/tomb he walks. Notice how respectfully Daniel speaks back to the one who put him there.

We see this in Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. Their response to King Nebuchadnezzar is in Daniel 3:16–18 which says *[16] Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. [17] If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. [18] But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."* When they were commanded to come out Nebuchadnezzar said in Daniel 3:28, *[28] "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God."*

We see this humility, patience, persistence, strength and assurance in Joseph's life and all that he goes through and when asked why Joseph gives us the answer in Genesis 50:19–21 which says *[19] But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? [20] As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. [21] So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones."* Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. His hope was not whether he was in a pit or a palace but it was in the Lord. God is sovereign and He had designed it for that moment.

Then we see another example of Christian suffering in the life of Stephen. Stephen wasn't delivered from the stones but he was delivered through the stones as he stood and said in Acts 7:59–60, *[59] And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."* ⁶⁰ *And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.* It is that Hope when it burns that they come and ask you about it. Now you are ready to answer.

Let's look at the descriptive picture of you who are answering. When I was a kid I used to read two types of books. One was a mystery book about a group of kids who solved these mysteries and the other books I enjoyed reading were by Horatio Alger. Back in the 20th century they started this thing called a forensic artist who would sketch a description given by witnesses to crime and the finished sketch would be called a composite drawing/portrait of who the witnesses described. That is exactly what Peter gives us in this text – a composite portrait of those who are under persecution and have Christ as Lord in their hearts. He also gives how they respond when their very persecutors ask them about their hope.

Here is the composite portrait Peter gives in this text and there are nine of them. One is they are zealously obedient. They have a zeal to do that which is pleasing to the Lord. One fellow said their philosophy of ministry was that Christians seek the good of the city. I believe that but the city doesn't determine what's good. God determines what's good for the city and

what's good for you. This isn't to be saved for the Gospel blessings have declared your salvation but this is done out of love to your Savior.

Number two is they are intentionally prepared to speak for Christ and communicate their hope. Peter says to be always ready. In other words, if there is some kind of evangelism training going on like EE or Bridge to Life or an apologetics conference on how to defend the faith then determine to go to one of these for the training. When the question comes I want to be prepared to the best of my ability to answer.

Number three, they are personally engaged. When the question comes they answer and they don't say 'here's my pastor's phone number.' I'm all for this but I would love for you to tell them so that you are personally engaged.

Number four, it is universally expected. Peter is talking to every single Christian and not just some of us. Some of you have a gift of bearing witness but we're all called to bear witness. All of us are to give account for the hope that is within us.

Number five is fearlessly faithful. If you get full of fear you will soon be faith less, but by the love of Christ that casts out all fear, full of faith then you can be fearless.

Number six, is they are surprisingly winsome. Think of Stephen being stoned that is not a fun way to leave this world yet while that was happening he says 'Father forgive them' as he learned from his Savior at the cross. There is a surprisingly winsome communication of the hope that is within us, even to our adversaries and those who would intimidate.

Number seven is there is a reasonable dialogue. I Peter 3:15b says [15b] *always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you **for a reason** for the hope that is in you.* You give them the reason when you answer the question.

Number eight is there is lifestyle integrity. Peter says "*yet do it with gentleness and respect, **having a good conscience...***" We don't have a perfect life but we can have a life that when we sin we're ready to confess and when God allows us to be obedient we give Him praise.

Number nine, is non-discriminatory communication. We are to give an account to anyone for all are made in the image of God and they need to know the God of glory and grace. If they persecute you then you have a platform to share Christ with them.

After reading these nine, where are you in these nine and how would you rate yourself in each of these? I know you're zealous but are you zealous for the good? I know some of you know the top ten blue card picks in the college draft but can you give me the Ten Commandments or the books of the Bible or why creation is so important as a doctrine? There are so many things we get zealous about and I'm not a killjoy but let none of those be lord in your hearts. Christ is Lord so have a zeal for what pleases Him.

Are you taking advantage of opportunities to be intentionally prepared to give an account? Are you fearlessly faithful by God's grace, not because you're courageous but because the love of Christ is casting out fear in your life. Have you found a way to be winsome where when they revile you, you don't revile in return or when they slander you, you don't slander in return. Is there that good conscience of confessing your sins and walking with the Lord? Use these nine things as a checklist in your life and ask the Lord to show you how to work on these things.

Here is the takeaway. In the day of Christian suffering, the authentic Christians are called and enabled to do two things. One you are called to give a vigorous and verbal witness for Christ. None of us are allowed to be in the secret service of Jesus. Jesus said in Matthew 10:32-33, [32] *So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my*

Father who is in heaven, [33] but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Paul says in Romans 10:10–13, [10] *For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. [11] For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” [12] For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. [13] For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

There are two ways for you to be a verbal witness. One is by what you don’t say and the other is by what you say. So an example of what you don’t say is when you are reviled you don’t revile back. When they gossip you don’t gossip back. When you are slandered you don’t slander back. We don’t do any of this at any time or on anything. This false under the ninth commandment of not bearing false witness. This is not our calling. So an example of what we do say is that we want to give an account of the hope that is within us from our heart where Christ is Lord. We want to tell you who are persecuting us about the One who died for your sins, will receive you unto salvation and will never leave you nor forsake you. We want to bear that vigorous verbal witness.

Secondly, we want to have a validating visual witness. We want the way we live to validate what we say. What if you went to one of our staff people and said ‘I heard that you live next door to and work with Harry Reeder. Did you know he was a Christian?’ Now look at the response. It will be one of two. One will be a response of shock, not realizing I am a Christian or the other will be something like ‘that explains it.’ So if someone went up to your co-workers, friends or neighbors and said that you were a Christian, would your lifestyle have validated, not perfectly, what the verbal witness is saying?

Peter is saying that our witness is both. Peter said ‘when they deliver you over’ not if, so that you can bear witness and there are two ways we bear witness – in word and deed. We are witnesses for Christ but the question is are we good or bad witnesses. Verbally and visually, are we are good witness or a bad witness? We don’t do this for salvation because Jesus has already saved us but we do it for our Savior. Jesus says when you are delivered over that He will give you what to say and how to say it in that moment so that we can bear witness (Luke 12:11–12). And our lifestyle should validate the verbal witness that we are called to give for Christ.

Recently I made a trip to Philadelphia to learn more about leadership and one day I went to Independence Hall which was the first place our Supreme Court met. It is not quite like it is today but in that courtroom there is a desk for the prosecuting attorney, a desk for the defending attorney and then there is a platform surround by a rod iron fence with a gate. This is known as the dock. Whoever is on trial and has to bear witness stands in the dock. That is where God has put every one of us. Now the world wants to put God in the dock but they can’t get to Him. But in God’s sovereign plan He lets them get to you.

I’m praying for myself that I will be so moved out of love for Christ that I can’t wait to get to the dock. Let me get to the dock. Let me live so I won’t discredit what I’m about to say. By Your strength that You supply and then let me say with reverence, respect and dignity what they need to hear. Let me defend the faith. Defend in the Greek is *apologia* and we get the word apology from it. There is a whole discipline in the Christian life called apologetics which is how to defend the faith. Peter has given us this profile of the great defenders of the faith with their verbal, winsome witness for Christ and their validating witness of life for Christ. Lord, help me defend it without being defensive. Help me contend for the faith without being contentious.

People tend to say ‘I don’t want to win the argument I want to win the person.’ I think that’s a false dichotomy because I want to do both. I want to win the argument lest the fool is wise in his own estimation but I want to win the argument in a way that wins the person I’m talking to. I don’t think it’s an either/or but a both/and. I think you defend for the faith without being defensive to contend for the faith without being contentious to win the person. I think the Spirit of God, the Gospel and the Word of God can allow, help and call us to do that. So God, I’m ready, put me in the dock and let me tell them of the hope that’s within me.

His name was Telemachus. He was 80 years old and had just finished his ministry. It is the fourth century A.D. and had just made his way to Rome to the Coliseum. He wanted to go where Peter and Paul had finished and hoped to finish there. God answered his prayer. He went to the Coliseum that day and they weren’t attacking Christians but there was a gladiator event where people killed and maimed each other for the entertainment of others. He couldn’t believe that it really happened and when he saw it he was nauseated. So he moved down to the rim of the Coliseum and with all his strength he lifted up the name of Jesus and bore witness. He said, ‘In the name of Christ, stop!’ The crowd shouted him down but then this small frail monk got into the dock for he climbed down into the arena, stood between the two gladiators and put his hands up between two large muscular men. He repeated ‘In the name of Christ, stop!’

Like the swat of an irritating mosquito one of the gladiators knocked him to the ground. He rose again with the strength that he had and lifted up the name of Jesus one more time saying, ‘In the name of Christ, stop!’ As the monk stood between the two gladiators one of the gladiators reached for his spear, ran it through the monk, lifted him up and then impaled him with the laughter of the crowd. As his life blood was flowing he went back in the dock again and said ‘In the name of Christ, stop!’ Silence fell over the Coliseum and the gladiators looked at his lifeless body as the blood was pouring from it. They laid down their weapons and walked out. The crowd in a hush and silence turned and left and it was the last gladiator battle fought in the Roman Coliseum.

Go, defend the faith without being defenseless, contend for it without being contentious and say to this world, ‘In the name of Christ, live, for He lived to die for you and He lives so that you can live forever!’ Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Let the Holy Spirit speak to your heart. If today you are seeking Jesus know this; you are because He sought you and when He begins a good work He finishes it. Would you like to come to Christ? You are only a prayer away and you can call us at (205) 776-5200 to pray with someone. It’s a wonderful prayer. Jesus I’m helpless and I’m hopeless but I have heard there is a Savior who loves me and gave Himself for me. I want to live. I want to come to Him today.’ We praise God you are reading this today, come to Him. Now Father, help us who know You to now go and tell the world that Jesus lives and they can live for the One who died for their sins is risen and is coming again. The One who is our Hope and no matter what the persecution He will never leave us nor forsake us and He is the same One who will give us what to say and how to say it in the very moment that we’re in the dock. O God, help us to bear witness well by grace for Your glory, verbally with our words and visually with our lives, in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Power Point

Christian suffering is a Divine blessing providing an opportunity to fearlessly confirm Christ as Lord in our heart and persuasively communicate Christ as our Hope to the world.

THE SOJOURNER'S JOURNEY

The Perspective

The Prescriptive

The Descriptive

LIFE TAKEAWAY

In the day of Christian suffering, authentic Christians are called and enabled to...

- A vigorous verbal witness
- A validating visual witness