

# IF I'M DOING THE RIGHT THING, WHY DOES IT HURT SO MUCH?

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1 Peter 3:13-22

## Introduction:

→ Illustration – The story is told of a missionary who was assigned to some remote islands in the Pacific. After three months, he sent a fax to mission headquarters: "I'm being plagued by rats. What shall I do?" Soon a crate arrived, filled with rattraps. However, hardly a month later the missionary sent a second fax to headquarters: "The rats won't take the bait. What should I do?" Not long after, a second crate arrived, filled with rat poison. However, hardly another month passed, when the missionary found it necessary to send a third fax to headquarters: "The rats won't touch the poison. Do you have any other suggestions?" Soon he received a fax from mission headquarters: "We suggest you get used to the rats!"

Pastor Ray Ortlund says this: *"Sometimes there is no way to get out of suffering; but there is a way to get through suffering, because God is the ally of sufferers."* He also says that *"trust in God, not [an explanation] from God, is the pathway through suffering."*

Peter, in his letter to these believers in Asia Minor, has had much to say about suffering. I believe that the theme of the entire letter can be summarized by two verses, one near each end of this epistle. Early on, in 1:13, Peter challenges his readers to be prepared – *"Prepare your minds for action, think clearly..."* Then in 4:12, he reminds them that suffering should not be unexpected. *"...do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you..."*

In between, he does everything he can to prepare them and to prepare us for whatever suffering we may encounter. For his first-century readers, suffering often meant severe persecution just for professing the name of Jesus. They faced the wrath of Roman tyrants, who were determined to rid the world of this religious sect known as Christianity. We may not ever face that kind of suffering or persecution, but we might. We certainly live in a society that is increasingly intolerant of anything that seeks to promote Biblical truth or values.

The key verse in our Bible passage today, and a good summary of Peter's whole approach to this subject of suffering is found in v. 17 – *read it*. The whole thrust of our text today is the importance of doing the right thing, doing what is good. That thought immediately raises the question, why does suffering hurt so much, if it is God's will? ***If I'm doing the right thing, why does it hurt so much?*** I am not sure I can adequately answer that question this morning, but as we look at the Word of God I trust that we will find some answers and be encouraged today.

## Doing the Right Thing vv. 13-14a

Read vv. 13-14a – There are some important truths which come out of these 1½ verses.

1. Doing the right thing will save you from a lot of suffering. This is suggested by the question in v. 13. Peter, with this question, refers back to what he has already stated in the previous verses. Peter seems to be saying that the Christian who seeks to live with the attitudes of harmony, sympathy, brotherly love, compassion, and humility, being gracious by not retaliating will have a more peaceable and rewarding life than those who don't. As one commentator said, "Obeying God's Word spares us much needless suffering."
2. However, there is a second truth that follows close on the heels of that. Doing the right thing does not always remove (or avoid) suffering. This is seen in v. 14a. Peter wants us to know that we may face suffering even when we are doing right and living the way God has instructed us. In fact, suffering may come our way **because** we are living godly lives. There are many Christians and many teachers who fail to grasp this idea. They believe and teach that if they follow the divine principles of Scripture, they can expect to have a happy, trouble-free life, a life of "prosperity."
3. Doing the right thing is always the right thing to do. *Read v. 14a*. Peter is very clear that when we suffer for doing what is right, we are blessed. Note that Peter uses the same root word as Jesus uses in the Beatitudes. Just because we suffer does not mean that God has withdrawn His blessings. Peter insists that suffering for the sake of godliness is a blessing. He certainly understood this concept – Acts 5:41 – they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer...

Doing the right thing is always the right thing to do. Let me conclude this point by making this application: the only way to know the right thing to do is to know the Scriptures and study them carefully and faithfully.

→ Illust. - THE VOICE OF GOD

When we study the Scriptures with a seeking heart, God speaks to us and we experience His transforming power. The Bible not only serves as an inspired document that tells us who made us, who we are, and how we can live and die with serenity, it also functions as "the voice of God" that imparts His presence and power into our lives. This truth is clearly illustrated in the experience of Bishop Berggrav of Norway. During World War II while the Germans occupied his country, he was at his home with a friend when he heard a knock at the door. He opened it, and there was a German officer with a guard. They told him he was under arrest. Putting on his overcoat, he followed the soldiers to the waiting car. Just before it sped away, his friend called to him, "Remember 1 Peter 3:13." The bishop said he immediately reached into his pocket, pulled out a small Bible, and read the passage. As he did, he experienced an indescribable peace. He testified later that the reality of Christ's nearness came to him through this verse: "And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?"

## Facing Suffering with Right Attitudes vv. 14b-16

There are some important attitudes to consider in order to be victorious in suffering and to benefit from it.

**First**, we need to be absolutely certain who it is that we are serving. Verse 14b seems to be a reference to Isaiah 8:12 – *"Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread."* This is a warning to God's people about following the footsteps of the pagan nations around them.

Peter's warning here seems to suggest a concern about the very real possibility of the believers collapsing under the pressure of persecution and suffering. He wants us to be sure that our thinking and priorities are right – don't fear those who seek to harm you... don't be troubled or upset. Rather, *"...in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy..."*

NKJV – *"...sanctify the Lord God in your hearts..."* The word literally means to sanctify or set apart as holy. (*Discuss the importance of the Lordship of Christ in our life.*) If a soldier goes into battle unsure of whose side he is really on, he is in big trouble. The same goes for us.

→ Illust. FULLY TRUSTWORTHY

Chuck Swindoll tells the story of a house church in the former Soviet Union several years ago. They had to meet in secret to avoid reprisals from the communist government.

"One Sunday these believers arrived inconspicuously in small groups throughout the day so as not to arouse the suspicion of KGB informers. By dusk they were all safely inside, windows closed, and doors locked. They began by singing a hymn quietly but with deep emotion. Suddenly, the door was pushed open and in walked two soldiers with loaded automatic weapons at the ready. One shouted, 'All right—everybody line up against the wall. If you wish to renounce your commitment to Jesus Christ, leave now!'

"Two or three quickly left, then another. After a few more seconds, two more. 'This is your last chance. Either turn against your faith in Christ,' he ordered, 'or stay and suffer the consequences.'

"Another left. Finally, two more in embarrassed silence with their faces covered slipped out into the night. No one else moved. Parents with small children trembling beside them looked down reassuringly. They fully expected to be gunned down or, at best, be imprisoned.

"After a few moments of complete silence, the other soldier closed the door, looked back at those who stood against the wall and said, 'Keep your hands up—but this time in praise to our Lord Jesus Christ, brothers and sisters. We, too, are Christians. We were sent to another house church several weeks ago to arrest a group of believers...'

"The other soldier interrupted, 'But, instead, we were converted! We have learned by experience, however, that unless people are willing to die for their faith, they cannot be fully trusted.'"

Our commitment to Christ affects all our other relationships. The more devoted we are to Jesus, the more faithful we will be to our church, family, and friends. [Living Above the Level of Mediocrity by Charles Swindoll.]

Believe me, if a person has never determined who is really Lord in his heart, there is nothing like persecution and suffering to force you to that decision.

Peter says, "Do not fear what they fear..." Jesus said in Matt. 10:28, *"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."*

Quote (Robert Deffinbaugh) – *"If we fear men who are able to kill us, we will be shaken and silenced by their opposition. If we fear God, we*

*will not be shaken or silenced but faithfully persist in proclaiming the gospel. Persecution forces us to settle the question of whom we fear—God or men.”*

Have you settled the question of who is Lord of your life?

**Second**, we need to be prepared to answer the questions of those who would enquire about your faith.

When you face suffering, whether it is persecution or illness, or opposition or pain, sooner or later there will be those who will ask you why you have such hope. Are you prepared to give them an answer, a good answer, that will point them to Christ? The key here is that suffering becomes an opportunity for the proclamation of the gospel. But that will only happen if we are prepared when the question comes. That does not mean just having a canned speech or script ready, but rather, we need to know the gospel well enough and be sure enough of our knowledge of God and His Word that we can respond clearly, even though the questions come in different forms.

**Third**, we need to have a clear conscience. What is the conscience? The conscience is that inner voice, that inner conviction, that tells us what is right and wrong. The Bible tells us that the conscience can be deadened by sin to the point that we no longer feel it when we are doing wrong. Yet we are exhorted here and throughout Scripture to strive to maintain a clear conscience.

In this text, Peter points out a very important aspect or purpose of a clear conscience. He says we are to have a clear conscience so that, “...when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.” That is an important consideration. Godly conduct puts sinners to shame.

Jesus said in John 3:19-20 – *“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”*

But when sinners are faced with the light of godly conduct, it often results in persecution. It is tempting for the Christian to seek to change

his behavior in order to minimize the persecution. Peter certainly understood what this was about. I’m sure that as long as he lived he was haunted by his behavior the night of his Lord’s arrest, when he sought to avoid personal harm by denying that he even knew Jesus. But, the Lord sought him out and restored him, his conscience was cleansed, and I believe that he determined to never again violate his conscience by compromising his convictions. And now he urges us to do the same.

A clear conscience enables us to witness with a boldness that is not possible if we are compromising with our actions what we believe with our heart and mind. We see this in the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul. When Paul was falsely accused by his Jewish adversaries, he was able to say, *“Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.”* (Acts 23:1)

## **Keeping Our Eyes on Christ vv. 18-22**

There is one more area I want to look at briefly this morning. Let us look for a moment at Jesus Christ – his sacrifice for us, his example to us, and the assurance he gives us. We want to focus on vv. 18,22. There are three things I want to draw your attention to in these verses.

1. He suffered and died innocently – for us v. 18a  
His suffering was for righteousness – he did not deserve it.
2. He came back to life – resurrection v. 18b  
This bring us assurance of resurrection someday. What a comfort that is in the midst of affliction and suffering.
3. He is now at God’s right hand v. 22  
All of his suffering was not for nothing. He now rules at the right hand of God, with everything and everyone subject to Him.

vv. 19-21 – a difficult passage, esp. v. 19 – I am not going to even attempt to explain them at this point.

## **Conclusion**

I want to conclude today by trying to make some application of these principles to our lives. The truth of the Word must go beyond the academic to become part of our daily walk. The Holy Spirit can apply these things to you personally, but I want to suggest a couple of things.

One of the key truths that Peter keeps coming back to in his approach to suffering is the hope that we have as believers. This life, with all of its struggles is not the end of the story. There is a future that is far more glorious. Because of that, the struggles we face here are more bearable because of what lies ahead. This is encapsulated in the idea that we must live our lives here with eternity in view. That also means that we need to recognize the impact that our present suffering has on our eternal destiny.

I would like to offer three thoughts that tie our present struggles to our eternal hope:

1. **Suffering is a way of identifying with Christ.** The Apostle Paul certainly understood this.  
*Philippians 3:8-11 - "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."*
2. **Suffering provides an opportunity for witness.** When we are attacked by opposition it gives us the opportunity to share with our persecutors and others the reason for our hope and joy.
3. **Ultimately, we need to understand that present suffering contains the promise of future glory.**  
In Romans 8:17-18 Paul reminds us that if we are children of God, then we are *"...heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."*

What kind of suffering are you going through today? Remember, "It is better, if it is God's will to suffer for doing good than for doing evil." Suffering is never in vain.