

Today over 365 million believers are persecuted for being a follower of Jesus. Some estimates state that 1 in 7 believers face physical persecution.

In 1 Peter, the apostle is writing to the persecuted church in modern day Turkey, preparing them for more extreme persecution.

In America, we are blessed to be able to worship freely without fear of persecution; however that is changing as people are standing against the culture with Biblical truth. One may lose a promotion, a job, or key opportunities, and the day might be coming when if you and I stand for the truth of God's Word, we may very well face legal action and even prison.

Fearless Living

According to God's Word, there is real hope and blessing in times of trial. In fact, persecution and trials are always the fuel that God uses to build His church. There is a divine grace and comfort that only those who have experienced real suffering will be able to understand. The key to this grace is that the fear of the Lord conquers every other fear.

In verse 13, Peter encourages his readers to be zealous in doing good (see also Hebrews 10:24-25). Followers of Jesus are called to be "salt and light", living counter culturally and sacrificially blessing others with our time and resources.

Peter continues to write that even if his readers are persecuted, they should not fear (1 Peter 3:14). Fear is pervasive in our culture. Jesus taught us not to fear—in fact there is only one healthy fear (see Matthew 10:28). What fear is holding you back today?

In verses 14 and 15 we read, "have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy".

The word "holy" means to be set apart. Fear tempts us to make unholy alliances and compromise our faith. As Christians, when we face a crisis that is forcing us into a corner, we are tempted to give in to fear and make a hurried decision. Decisions made in fear are often the wrong decisions and are outside of the will of God for our lives.

The Bible reminds us today that as we honor Christ as Lord over our lives, we never have to fear any circumstance. In fact, we bring greater harm to ourselves if we fail to trust God.

Making a Defense

Verse 15 continues, "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".

When we face a crisis, people are watching to see how we respond under pressure. Do we really believe what we profess?

To honor Christ as holy means that we turn every situation and decision over to him. One of the characteristics of submitting our lives to the Lordship of Jesus is that we witness about him. We tell others about what he has done in our lives, and we invite others to become followers of Jesus.

Every Christian should be able to make a Biblical defense for their hope in Christ, especially when the situation looks hopeless. It is in those crisis situations that opportunities for witnessing come about.

Peter challenges us to witness with gentleness and respect. We are not called to win arguments. When people are suffering, there come those moments when there simply are no words. When you have lost everything, when that loved one dies, when the cancer returns... it is in that moment that the only thing that has any value is the grace of God. Let the grace of God shine through you as you victoriously proclaim the hope that you have in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Maintaining a Good Conscience

There is an interesting progression in this text: first, Peter tells his readers to “do good”. Second, he encourages his readers to publicly speak about their faith. Finally, in verse 16, he addresses the mind of the believer—our thoughts, where all good or evil actions and words come from (see 1 Peter 3:16). We all have a conscience, even unbelievers. Our conscience may be compared to a window that lets in the light of God’s truth.

If we constantly disobey God, the window gets a little dirtier and dirtier, blocking out the light, eventually leading to the defiled conscience that Paul writes about in Titus 1:15. When someone sins consistently, their conscience becomes seared and they lose sensitivity to right and wrong.

As we feed on God’s Word, allowing the Holy Spirit to speak truth to us, our conscience becomes more sensitive.

How does a good conscience help us when we are going through trials?

Courage

When you know the will of God, even if it is not popular, you have the courage of a strong clear conscience to stand for the truth.

Written on the monument to Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer, are the words, “Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me. Amen.” His conscience, and his knowledge of God’s Word, gave him the courage to defy the entire established church in 1521.

Peace

When you have a clear conscience, you have peace. With peace, you have the clarity and strength to move forward.

Having a clear conscience means that we do not fear what other people may know or say about us (see Psalm 118:6).

Having a clear conscience gives us courage and produces peace, even in the face of opposition. A clear conscience comes from a life of holiness and repentance (see 1 John 1:9).

Spending time in God’s Word cleans the window of our souls and allows the light of Jesus to shine in us and through us.

Suffering Well

As Christians, we should not be surprised if, from time to time, we are slandered or persecuted for standing for what is right. Peter wrote in verse 17, “For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.”

In a world that calls evil good and good evil (see Isaiah 5:20), we will be tested. In those moments, we are called to live without fear, be prepared to make a defense with gentleness and respect, and maintain a clear conscience before the Lord.

How are you making a defense for what you believe?