

SOUL FOOD

MAY 16, 2017

I PETER 3:13-17 SUFFERING IN HOPE

One of the things that all people have in common is that we all suffer. Followers of Christ are certainly not exempt from suffering. In fact there are some unique ways in which believers suffer that are far different from the ways in which non-believers suffer. There will be times that believers will suffer particularly because they are followers of Christ. Persecution comes in many forms. While we might not currently be suffering persecution to the degree that Peter's hearers were, we still have to deal with oppression and persecution. The question is, how should we live in the light of suffering and persecution for the sake of righteousness?

First of all we must honor Christ the Lord as holy. This is the language of worship and devotion. In all circumstances, including suffering, we are called to live lives that honor Jesus and reflect His character. In the midst of His great suffering on the cross, Jesus' desire was to do the Father's will. Even on the cross Jesus demonstrated concern for others, including Mary, His mother. As Peter exhorts us, one of the ways in which we demonstrate the character of Christ is the way in which we treat those who mistreat us and sin against us.

As we seek the glory of Christ in the midst of suffering we will reflect the very light of Christ. As others see this they are moved to ask us about what makes us different. We should always be prepared to give the reason for our hope to those who ask us. We must not only speak the truth of the gospel but we must do so with "gentleness and respect." Do you find this exhortation as amazing as I do? Even in the midst of persecution we are called to love our neighbors enough to speak truth to them while being motivated by respect for them and gentleness toward them. We can only do this in the context of heart-based worship of Christ.

Through these means, we are enabled to pursue a good conscience so that even if we are falsely accused there will be no evidence against us. We are not called to pursue being defensive. We are called to honor Christ through our good behavior toward others. It is very difficult to defeat a person of integrity. A person of gospel integrity is even willing to suffer when he does what is right. It is incredible to consider how we are able to live such lives when we live out of our eternal hope. Hope and power!