

Turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter 3:13-17. “And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.”

We can rejoice that in the United States today there is not a great deal of overt hostility towards Christians. I believe there’s a couple of reasons for this. First of all, the Rule of Law protects us, otherwise I believe without the laws in our land there would be many who would seek to destroy us and would feel they did the world a great service if they got rid of us. I also believe the other reason could be that many people who claim to be Christians are not Christians. Therefore they are indistinguishable from the world and when the world looks at many so-called Christians, they think, “These people are just like us. Why would I in any way disagree with them or not like them?” Many churches even go to great lengths to flaunt their worldliness in a misguided attempt to make sinners feel comfortable with their sin. You can see this in the invitations of so many. Invitations that go something like this: “God loves you so much, He just wants to make you happy and save you from all of your problems and give your life a sense of purpose and a sense of meaning. So come to Jesus just as you are. By the way, once you come it’s okay to stay that way. God just wants us all to get along and be happy.”

Naturally such an apostate form of Christianity endears itself to those who would otherwise be hostile to the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Certainly had Jesus preached that kind of message, He would not have experienced the hostility that He did. But for those who preach the gospel and those who live the gospel; those who would say that we must enter by a narrow gate; that we must agonize or strive to enter through that gate, a gate that very few will even be able to find; those who preach a gospel that says you must jettison your pride and your selfishness; those who preach a gospel that says that by nature you are offensive to a holy God; that your very nature contradicts His character and His desires, and therefore you must be somehow reconciled to God and you’re unable to do that by yourself, you must depend solely upon one person, the Lord Jesus Christ; otherwise you will experience the wrath of God in an eternal hell. Those who preach that kind of message and believe that kind of message are hated even as Jesus was hated.

But the question before us today is simply this: What can we do to somehow mitigate the hostilities of the world around us? You’ve heard me say before that they are going to increase. What can we do to avoid unnecessary suffering? This is a very important topic for our listeners in other parts of the world that are experiencing profound abuse and persecution. Those who have had family members murdered. What are we going to do? What we could do is what many people today are doing and that is be ashamed of the gospel and reinvent the gospel. Compromise the message so that it won’t be so offensive. We’re not going to do that. Or we could isolate ourselves and go live in some kind of Christian commune and hope the world leaves us alone. The question is, are there things we can do that will at least lower the probability of persecution? But not only that, allow us to experience divine blessing in the midst of it? The answer is yes, there are some things we can do. That’s what we see in the text before us.

Peter gives four very practical admonitions in this regard. Let me give them to you and I will elaborate on them. First he is going to tell us that we need to be zealous for what is good. Secondly we need to sanctify Christ as Lord in our heart. Thirdly we need to defend the hope that is in us, and fourthly we need to keep a good conscience. These are powerful spiritual concepts that we should all grasp and apply to our lives. This is in keeping with Peter's overall emphasis in the epistle, namely to encourage the persecuted saints who were scattered abroad in that day, spiritual aliens as he described them, who were in desperate need of good old-fashioned sound doctrine, so that when the persecution comes they would have discernment and they would be able to stand firm in the faith, even in the midst of mounting persecution.

We have learned so far in our studies that the Holy Spirit has spoken through the inspired apostle by stirring their spiritual affections, reminding those of that day—and of this day—of the glorious nature and benefits of our salvation, reminding us of our holy calling, and the importance of feeding on the Word of God. He moved from that to describe the importance of submission in a hostile world, to be submissive to our government, to our masters, wives to husbands and husbands to the Lord. Then he reminds us of the virtues of the consummate Christian that leads to a life that will honor God and bring joy to us. I'm amazed when I read Scripture to see how immensely practical it is. Let's examine these admonitions with hearts of thankfulness and joy.

First of all, in verse 13 he is going to say that we need to be zealous for what is good. "And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?" I ask you, how many people do you know that you would characterize as truly good? This goes beyond just being nice, just being someone that everyone likes. I'm talking about someone who is good in the biblical sense, that would include things like being thoughtful, considerate, generous, charitable, one who is compassionate, kind, unselfish towards others, one who is gracious and forgiving, one who is merciful, longsuffering, even one who is mannerly and dignified, above reproach. Now when you think of that person, and I know of many, even many in this room who are that way, ask yourself the next question: How many enemies do those people have? And the response is, not very many. Certainly there are going to be some who are hostile to the gospel, but not hostile necessarily towards that particular person.

Frankly what Peter is doing here is calling us to piety, if I can resurrect an old word. Piety, which means goodness, devoutness, holiness, piousness. The antonym would be someone who is wicked. You might remember the old term pious, we don't use that much. The dictionary defines it as having or showing a dutiful spirit of reverence for God and an earnest wish to fulfill religious obligations. To put it simply, it means to be Christlike. This would be one who is filled with veneration, awe and worship toward God, and manifests those godly virtues in their life and in their conduct in such a way that other people see and experience their goodness. How many people do you know that are like that and therefore are zealous for what is good, as we see here?

What Peter is setting forth here is a very important principle that we need to remember. He is saying in essence that imitating Christ in our lives, in the midst of hostility, can help alleviate further persecution. "Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?" This question elaborates upon the same principle that he set forth in preceding verses where he quoted Psalm 34:10-12 that underscores the importance of guarding our tongue from evil and our lips from speaking guile. Additionally, if you're a deceitful, foul-mouthed, hot-headed big mouth, you are going to invite persecution. I think of the passage in Proverbs 11:9 where we are reminded that, "With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous will be delivered." And in

Proverbs 13:3 we read, “The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; the one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.” My, we would all do well to remember that. In Proverbs 14:27 we read “The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death.” And in chapter 15:1 we read that, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

Now you must ask yourself the question, what platform do I have for the gospel of Christ given my reputation? Would others consider me one who is really not zealous for what is good but rather one who is overbearing, sharp-tongued, who is perhaps an antagonist prone to slander and deception? Again in verse 13, “Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous” or in other words passionate, enthusiastic, “for what is good?” That is, one who is zealous in their character makes sure they are thoughtful and considerate and generous and charitable and so forth. One who is Christlike.

We read more concerning the power of being zealous for what is good in Psalm 37:3. The psalmist says there, “Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.” In Colossians 1:10 the apostle Paul says, “...walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work.” In 1 Thessalonians 5:15 we read, “See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men.” And one more text, in Hebrews 13:16 we are told, “And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” This should be the zeal that drives every believer. As a result, we are told, “who is there to harm you?”

We must remember, this is no guarantee. Jesus lived a perfect life, but we understand that it raises the probability that we will not experience the level of persecution that might be our bad fortune given one who does not pursue good. Piety does not necessarily guarantee prosperity. This was the error of Job’s friends. Job’s friends basically told him, “If you will just confess whatever it is you have been doing, then God will be obligated to somehow bless you.” We know that is not true. God is not obligated by anything we do. This was also the misconception of the Pharisees in Jesus’ day. They believed that anyone who had some kind of sickness or experienced poverty was a person who had some kind of devious sin in their life. The point of this text is simply this: godly living helps us avoid unnecessary suffering at the hands of our enemies. Moreover, if you want to have a more effective witness in the workplace or with your family or friends, learn what it means to be zealous for good works. Then when the persecution mounts there will be far fewer people in that mob to come and do you harm.

I might hasten to add that while indeed we live in days of increasing adversity, and as we watch our world descend into the pit of ungodliness, naturally anyone who worships the true God is going to experience hatred and persecution. But please understand, the seed of the gospel thrives in the soil of adversity. We should be vigilant to help someone in need. As we help other people, as we are zealous for good, then perhaps that becomes the spiritual plow, if you will, to stir up the hard ground of that person’s heart, that the seed of the gospel might find a place of lodging and bear much fruit. So regardless of the persecution we encounter, we must always see it as an opportunity for the gospel to be proclaimed and for God to be glorified. When this is our passionate resolve, we notice that there is another remarkable result that follows. It says that we’re going to be blessed in verse 14. “But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.” This is a comforting thought. Again, there is no guarantee here that we can do certain things and avoid all suffering, we know that, but we do have a guarantee that when we suffer for the cause of righteousness on the Lord’s behalf, we are going to be blessed.

You must understand this is not referring to some kind of positive enjoyment in the midst of great suffering. That's not the idea. Rather, it's the blessing that would include a profound, steadfast understanding that our condition, whatever it is, has been ordained by God for our good and His glory. You will remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:10, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

So here the blessing to which Peter refers is that of an unshakable awareness that our suffering is a privilege, it is an honor, a fortunate opportunity that we have to be considered worthy to suffer for the Master. This is the blessing. Peter would later say in chapter 5:10, "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you." Never forget that the steel of our faith will always be forged in the fires of adversity. So when they come, we must remember the words of James in chapter 1:2-4, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." In other words, that you would be able to manifest all the virtues of Christ. It is for this reason that we can confidently ask that rhetorical question, "if God be for us, who can be against us?"

Moreover, regardless the extent of our suffering for Christ, it all will pale into utter insignificance when we enter into glory. I'm reminded of the words of the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

So the first admonition that we receive in this text is that we need to be zealous for good works. The second is that we must learn to sanctify Christ as Lord in our heart. In verse 14 it says, "And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled. But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts." It is a common experience for many Christians to cower in fear when they are confronted by someone who perhaps knows error better than they know truth. When they experience some forceful cult member, for example. Or when they experience some high-powered personality, maybe a co-worker or family member that lambastes them. It is easy for us to succumb to our fears, to allow ourselves to be intimidated. We have all kinds of strategies of self-protection that we use to alleviate those situations. Some people will very quickly change the subject and get onto something that's much more comfortable. Others will just get louder and more aggressive, and their veins begin to flare and they start pointing fingers and their necks stick out. Some people learned to intimidate others that way, a very wicked way to relate.

Others will just agree with whatever, they don't want to rock the boat because conflict is bad. Then there are others who will run from the scene like a scalded dog, looking for a place of safety. Anything but standing for the truth and experiencing something that might make me feel afraid or embarrassed. Proverbs 29:25 warns us about such behavior. "The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the Lord will be exalted." We've all seen people ensnared in cowardice as this verse would indicate. People that are afraid of men and therefore they experience a snare. We've seen abused wives that are

afraid to stand up against a bully husband. We've seen employees that are too scared to confront an overbearing, perhaps unethical boss. We've seen students who are too intimidated to stand up and challenge a professor. Indeed, the fear of man is a snare. What it does is renders you powerless, like an animal caught in a trap, unable to function in the freedom of the truth.

We can convince ourselves that this is such a dangerous situation here, that "I really can't stand for the truth, Lord, because I'm not sure that Your resources are enough to sustain me. So thank You, but I will wear my own kind of armor and I will use my own strategies of protection to somehow survive this situation." This is not of God, and if this describes you, you must understand this. We read in 2 Timothy 2:7 when Paul admonished young Timothy who was prone to such fears. "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity," or a spirit of fear. In the original language it's a term that means cowardice or shameful self-protection. God has not given that to you. But he says, "He's given us a spirit of power." In the original language it is *dunamis*, we get our word dynamite from it. It's the idea of a great force of productive energy. He's given you a spirit of power and of love, the agape love is used there. Selfless, volitional love that we have the power to enact, that's what He's given us, as well as discipline. Power, love and discipline, the latter meaning to have self-control, having a mind that has the proper priorities. A mind that would say, "God I know You are in control and therefore because of Your strength, even in my weakness I will be strong and I will stand for the truth, come what may."

This was the attitude of the psalmist in Psalm 118:6 where he says, "The Lord is for me; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" The next time you feel your knees begin to buckle with fear, your mouth gets dry and you begin to stammer and stutter, stumbling over your words, remember Peter's admonition, "do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled." To not be troubled literally means don't be shaken, don't begin to tremble.

How do we do this? The Holy Spirit gives us insight here. He says that we are to "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts." This is a curious statement. What does that mean? The word sanctify means to set apart or to consecrate. Literally to venerate and to adore, that's what we are to do. We are to set Christ apart in our heart. Here's the point. What we must learn to do is focus on the Lord, set Him apart in our hearts, focus on the Lord of hosts. When He is exalted in our hearts, and when we see His glory and His majesty and we live consistently with those glorious truths in our lives, then the Lord of hosts begins to permeate our thoughts and then all fear of man is quickly dispelled. That's the point. That's what it means to sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Think of it this way. Why should I be afraid of some puny human being, when I serve the King of kings and the Lord of lords? What a silly thing, when I serve the Creator, the Sustainer, the Consummator of all things.

I'm reminded of that great story in Exodus 14 when the Israelites were fleeing from Pharaoh's charioteers. There we read of their fear in Exodus 14:10-11. "...and they became terribly frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord. Then they said to Moses, 'Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt?'" In other words, they thought for sure that the Egyptians would soon catch up with them and butcher them. In verses 13-14 we read, "But Moses said to the people, 'Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.'" Isn't that a great text? Then in verse 15, "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward.'" You will remember that there was the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. We read how the Shekinah glory of His divine

presence, which was that cloud, goes from before the children of Israel, and goes behind their camp and separates the approaching charioteers. We read in that text that that glorious cloud became like the blackness of night to the Egyptians but it was light to the covenant people.

Then we read in verses 21-22 of that same chapter, “Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. And the sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.” You will remember that the Egyptians thought they’d better hurry up and get across with them, so they pursued them and God commanded Moses to stretch out his hand once again over the waters, and the waters covered them up. In verses 30-31, here’s what we read. “Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. And when Israel saw the great power which the Lord had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses.” And I would add at this point, they sanctified the Lord in their hearts. They began to understand again who He really was. In fact, I wanted to read to you that great song of Moses that they sung right after this particular scenario. Talk about sanctifying the Lord in your heart! Here’s what we read in Exodus 15:1-18. Before I read this, I hope that all of you will take this particular passage and read it and put it in a prominent place in your home and mark it in your Bible, so the next time you feel your knees begin to tremble, you will pull a passage like this out and read it and sanctify the Lord in your heart.

“Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the Lord, for He is highly exalted; The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father’s God, and I will extol Him; The Lord is a warrior; The Lord is His name. Pharaoh’s chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea. The deeps cover them; They went down into the depths like a stone. Thy right hand, O Lord, is majestic in power, Thy right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy. And in the greatness of Thine excellence Thou dost overthrow those who rise up against Thee; Thou dost send forth Thy burning anger, and it consumes them as chaff. And at the blast of Thy nostrils the waters were piled up, The flowing waters stood up like a heap; The deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall be gratified against them; I will draw out my sword, my hand shall destroy them.’ Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them; They sank like lead in the mighty waters. Who is like Thee among the gods, O Lord? Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders? Thou didst stretch out Thy right hand, The earth swallowed them. In Thy lovingkindness Thou has led the people whom Thou hast redeemed; In Thy strength Thou hast guided them to Thy holy habitation. The peoples have heard, they tremble; Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; The leaders of Moab, trembling grips them; All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. Terror and dread fall upon them; By the greatness of Thine arm they are motionless as stone; Until Thy people pass over, O Lord, Until the people pass over whom Thou hast purchased. Thou wilt bring them and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, The place, O Lord, which Thou hast made for Thy dwelling, The sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established. The Lord shall reign forever and ever.” Dear friends, this is what it means to sanctify the Lord in your heart. For our heart is indeed the sanctuary of our innermost being.

So we are to be zealous for good works, sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts, and thirdly, we are to defend the hope that is in us. Notice verse 15. There we read, “Always being ready to make a defense

to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” If you manifest the first two virtues that we’ve just talked about—being zealous for good works and sanctifying Christ as Lord in your hearts—people are going to ask about your faith, especially if you’re being persecuted. They might say, “You’re one of the most religious people I know. You’re a person that is loving, kind and benevolent and you’re being treated so unfairly here. You’re being slandered and abused, yet you continue to smile through your tears. Your faith is unshakable. Your joy is unassailable. It’s irrational to me. Can you explain this?” To which we can quickly reply, “Yes, I’m glad you asked. The reason why I experience the confidence that I do is because I serve the one true living God. I know that He has ordained all things for my good and for His glory. I am absolutely certain that only He knows what type of saving purposes are being concealed in my calamity. I want you to understand that my trust rests in Him. He is my rock, He is my fortress, He is my refuge. Though He slay me I will hope in Him.”

The year was 1539, during the reign of Henry VIII. Two men were arrested by the Roman Catholic archbishop. Their names were Jerome Russell and Alexander Kennedy. Kennedy was a youth of about eighteen years old. After being confined to prison for a short period of time, they were eventually brought before the archbishop and they were tried in a mock court and deemed to be heretics. The archbishop then pronounced the dreadful sentence upon them: death by burning at the stake. He immediately handed them over to the executioner. The next day they were led to the place of their suffering, where the older Russell saw some fear in the face of his younger fellow sufferer. Here’s what he said to him. “Brother, fear not; greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world. The pain that we are to suffer is short, and shall be light; but our joy and consolation shall never have an end. Let us, therefore, strive to enter into our Master and Savior’s joy, by the same straight way which He hath taken before us. Death cannot hurt us, for it is already destroyed by Him, for whose sake we are now going to suffer.”

John Foxe, in his classic Book of Martyrs goes on to describe what happened. He says, “When they arrived at the fatal spot, they both kneeled down and prayed for some time; after which being fastened to the stake, and the fagots lighted, they cheerfully resigned their souls into the hands of Him who gave them, in full hopes of an everlasting reward in the heavenly mansions.” What a picture of the hope that is within us. What a picture of men who understood the reality of all that they believed, who experienced the power of the Spirit of God in their final minutes of life. A hope that we must all be willing and ready to defend to a watching world that knows nothing of the supernatural faith and power that is ours by the power of the Spirit of God. When we make our defense, we’re told here in 1 Peter, when we are asked to explain the peace that passes all understanding, we are to do so with gentleness, in other words humility, speaking the truth in love, not in anger. And also in reverence, in other words having an attitude of worship and devotion to the God that we love and serve. It is not a time to curse our tormentors. All that would do is add fuel to the flames of their hatred.

Can you offer a clear and concise explanation of your faith? If the answer is no, then you might want to reexamine your heart. Do you really know the Lord? If your answer is yes, but probably rather poorly, then I would say to you in all love that you need to grow up, you need to mature. You need to understand the elements of the gospel well enough so you can communicate it. Because if your testimony is weak in a time of peace, it will utterly collapse during persecution. As a result, you will bring dishonor to Christ and forfeit blessing in your life. Certainly at a time like that you will lose even the assurance of your salvation.

Our merciful God prepares us for days when we might be called to suffer for Him, instructing us to be zealous for good works, sanctifying Christ as Lord in your hearts, defending the hope that is in you, and finally keeping a good conscience. Notice in verse 16-17 he says, “and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.” Our conscience is our innate, God-given ability to determine right from wrong. Though it has been profoundly affected by our sin nature, everyone has a moral compass within them, even non-believers. We read this in Romans 2:14-15. Speaking of non-believers, the apostle Paul describes them as those “who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law...they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.”

I want to add quickly that you do not want to trust your conscience. Your conscience is not infallible. It is not some kind of inner voice where God speaks to you. My goodness, you can get into all kinds of trouble when you start saying God told me this or that. You need to know that your conscience will only hold you to the highest perceived standard of right and wrong. Some people may have a standard within them that may excuse what God abhors. Others may conversely abhor what God permits. John MacArthur speaks to this and says, “The conscience functions like a skylight, not like a lamp; it does not produce its own light, but merely lets moral light in. Because of that, the Bible teaches the importance of keeping a clear or good conscience. ‘The goal of our instruction,’ Paul wrote to Timothy, ‘is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.’”

Therefore we must have the right standard, this proper standard for our conscience to hold us to, and that standard is the Word of God, the Scripture. That’s why we must know it. As believers we can rejoice knowing that at salvation God cleansed our conscience that had been rightfully accusing us of our sin and guilt before a holy God. We read in Hebrews 9:14 that “The blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, [will] cleanse [the] conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” In fact, as believers our hearts have been “sprinkled clean from an evil conscience,” Hebrews 10:22 tells us.

That’s great news, to know that our past sins that God has forgiven and that He chooses to no longer remember are no longer being resurrected in our minds and hearts by our conscience because they’ve been forgiven. However, you must never ignore your conscience. You might think of your conscience as a bit like an “idiot light” on a car. If you’re driving along and you see a light come on, you don’t turn up the radio and cover the light with your hand and keep driving until something blows up. Some of you are laughing, I guess some of you may do that. But the point is you shouldn’t do that. The same thing is true of your conscience.

Remember Paul exhorted Timothy to keep a good conscience in 1 Timothy 1:19. He says, “a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.” We’ve all experienced this in our lives. Our conscience tells us not to do something, that it is dishonoring to the Lord. If you do that you will place yourself in the path of divine chastening. Oh, but the flesh is so powerful it overrules the conscience and we do that which we know we should not do, and we experience the consequences. Therefore the conscience is like sonar on a ship that warns us that there is a hidden reef ahead, so change your course. If we ignore that we will bring shipwreck to our faith. So Peter is telling all of us who may be experiencing some kind of persecution, some kind of suffering,

or perhaps some day might experience that type of hardship, to “keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”

Verbal abuse, false accusations, they are like water off a duck’s back if your conscience is clear, aren’t they? The Lord knows the truth. You can say what you want, but the Lord knows the truth. Therefore we can echo the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:3-4. “But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.” Oh the power of a clear conscience! Knowing that we are suffering for “doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.” In conclusion, may we all take great comfort in these important and very practical admonitions, especially when times of persecution arise, knowing that we must be zealous for good works, we must sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts, we must defend the hope that is in us, and keep a good conscience.

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