

REACTION TO PERSECUTION

BY B. G. ECHOLS

If God's eye is over the righteous and His ear open to their prayers (1 Pet. 3:12), "...who is he that will harm you, if ye be zealous of that which is good?" (1 Pet. 3:13). This is a promise in the form of a question which makes the promise stronger. Two interpretations have been suggested. First, ordinarily no one hurts those who do good. Second, persecution cannot really harm since God will work it out.

In defense of the first view is the fact that there are no laws against doing good. Any suffering would be unjustified and rare. While, as a rule, good people are not molested, the second thought seems better. Peter is not saying that no one will want to harm you or that no one will try to harm. Suffering? Yes! Damage? No! Christians may indeed be persecuted, but God will work it all out for the best. The next verse explains the point. The true believer sees no harm in slander, unpopularity, or persecution because he knows Whom he has believed.

The promise is only to those who can be described as "zealous of that which is good." We must be zealous if we would obtain the benefit of the promise. We must be like the merchant seeking goodly pearls and be willing to give all for it. Our character must be one of obvious, single-minded enthusiasm for good. Zeal is neither good nor bad in itself, but it is always powerful. The aim of zeal determines whether it is good or bad. Zeal is warmth and fervor in pursuit of an object that has gained the approval of the mind. We are zealous for a purpose which we accept as worthy. Christians desire that which is good. No great or worthy cause was ever successful without zealous labor. Abundant zeal often compensates for slender abilities.

The source of our zeal is love and devotion to Christ. Its evidence is earnestness in devotion, praise, prayer, doing one's duty, repressing sin, and exerting an influence to spread the truth. The presence of zeal promotes our spirituality and the spiritual prosperity of the church. Its absence produces a spiritual decline in both. Zeal is going to

involve preaching and teaching righteousness, and this is what is offensive to the world and provokes its dislike and malice.

"But even if ye should suffer for righteousness' sake, blessed are ye" (1 Pet. 3:14a). Peter knew persecution was coming and he wished to prepare his readers for it. "Righteousness" in this verse is synonymous with "that which is good" in the prior verse. Thus Christians may suffer, not only for their confession of Christ, but because of the purity of their lives which is a reproach to the ungodly.

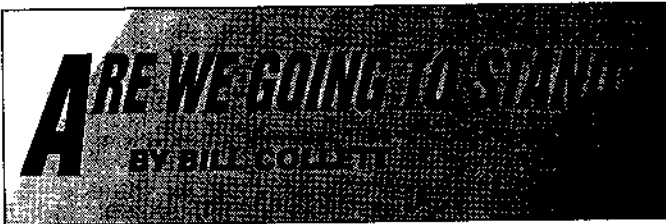
Suffering does no real, lasting harm for it is turned into a blessing by the grace of God. Suffering is a test of our faith as it shows its worth. While outward religion crumbles under stress, deep spiritual faith grows brighter and more refined in the furnace of affliction. Only true faith can endure. Thus deep faith in God and Christ cannot be hurt by external troubles which only deepen and purify faith. Thus the blessing. One who endures for truth's sake is brought closer to God for he is imitating the example of Christ and sharing His cross.

"And fear not their fear, neither be troubled" (1 Pet. 3:14b). The best idea for the meaning of this is that we should not fear the terror which they cause. We must not allow ourselves to be distressed or agitated by surrounding troubles. Restless excitement is destructive to the peace that should characterize us. The way to avoid such fear is found in the words that follow.

"But sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord" (1 Pet. 3:15). "But" puts this in contrast to earlier words. Instead of being terrified, have Christ sanctified in your heart. "Sanctify" is the same word used by the Lord in "hallowed be thy name." Thus we hallow or sanctify when we recognize the holiness of Christ and honor it. Set Christ upon the pedestal of your heart and submit to Him in reverence and obedience.

"For it is better, if the will of God so will, that ye suffer for well-doing than for evil doing" (1 Pet.

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Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to **STAND AGAINST** the wiles of the devil.... Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to **WITHSTAND** in the evil day, and having done all, to **STAND**... **STAND** therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness..." (Eph. 6:11, 13, 14 kjv). What an interesting thought to "stand" and "withstand."

"Withstand carries the idea of standing against. One can stand when he has no adversaries, but he should still be standing after withstanding the assault of the enemy." (Wilbur Fields, *The Glorious Church*, pg. 189)

Is it the imagination of this poor writer, are does there seem to be a lowering of our guard, a failure to stand and withstand in many areas of doctrine today? Allow me to note several examples:

1. We are taught to "withdraw" from those who walk disorderly (2 Thess. 3:11-15). **ARE WE GOING TO STAND?**

2. We are taught by our Lord that there is but one reason for divorce and remarriage, fornication/adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). **ARE WE GOING TO STAND?**

3. We are told to expose the false teacher (Eph. 5:11; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; 2 Tim. 4:1-5). **ARE WE GOING TO STAND?**

4. We are instructed not to fellowship false doctrine (2 Jno. 9-11). **ARE WE GOING TO STAND?**

5. We are informed by scripture that homosexuality is sin (Rom. 1:24-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11) **ARE WE GOING TO STAND?**

6. We are taught by inspiration that Christians cannot abide immorality (Eph. 4:17-20). **ARE WE GOING TO STAND?**

This is by no means an exhaustive list, just a few areas where this writer believes we are lowering our guard (in some places). Brethren, let us always **STAND/WITHSTAND**.

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3:17). It seems Peter is saying, if persecution comes, God is allowing it for our good and/or for the good of His gospel (Gen. 50:20). Thus God is always on the scene. Be not afraid. He has not lost control. The Christian may be assured that God has some purpose in mind when He lets His people suffer for doing right. Such suffering is not punishment. Doing God's will is not always easy, but it is always right. Nothing is wasted when it is given to God, not even suffering. We cannot do wrong and always expect God to overrule it for good, but if we suffer while doing our best, God has some purpose in allowing it.

Christians may have to suffer, not simply while they are doing good, but because they are doing good. Christians know that suffering for well-doing is the highest form of suffering for it makes us more like the Lord. We will have to suffer from the injustice of this world which does not appreciate our character or our efforts for its good. The worldly mind will speak evil of us and take pleasure in detracting from our merits, magnifying our faults, misrepresenting our motives, and slandering our lives. Nevertheless, we can triumph "because Christ also suffered for sins once" (1 Pet. 3:18).

