

HOPE AGAIN: When Life Hurts and Dreams Fade

STUDY NINE

Hope Beyond Bitterness: When Life “Just Ain’t Fair”

1 Peter 3:13–17

How can I feel blessed by God if I’m getting unfair treatment? That’s a good question. Because you have been called to go through this, it’s a reminder that God’s hand is still on your life.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHAT do children on the playground say when someone picks up the soccer ball and throws it into the goal? *That’s not fair!* People have a similar reaction when a young mother or father’s life is cut tragically short by illness: *That’s not right!* And when a criminal goes free while the true victim goes to prison, protestors line the streets shouting, *That’s not just!*

Engrained in the very nature of every human being is a deep desire for fairness, rightness, and justice. That’s because every human being is made in the image of God, and He is entirely righteous and just. Yet we all must come to a hard realization at one point or another . . .

Life just isn’t fair.

Many who come to this realization choose to maintain a *human* perspective. They say things like, “Because life isn’t fair, I’m not going to play fair.” But that kind of thinking only perpetuates the problem.

The apostle Peter, however, calls us to adopt a *divine* perspective—one that recognizes that God remains just even when life isn’t fair. This *Searching the Scriptures* study will explore how to keep your eyes on God even when you face mistreatment because of your commitment to Him.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

When life feels unfair, it’s easy to grow bitter and shake your fist at God, wondering, *How could You let this happen to me?* Yet God is righteous and just, and His divine plan is greater than our small human imaginations. Offer this prayer as you prepare your heart for Bible study:

Father, life hasn’t always been fair to me, but I praise You for lighting even my darkest days. Teach me today how to better trust You and love others—even those who treat me poorly for no reason at all. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The tagline for Peter’s first letter could read: *finding hope when life isn’t fair*. The apostle’s original audience was undergoing a season of persecution, and he wrote to encourage them regarding the eternal hope they have in Christ. Specifically, he wrote to:

- Citizens of an unjust government (1 Peter 2:13–17)
- Slaves of unjust masters (2:18–20)
- Wives of unjust husbands (3:1–6)
- Husbands of unjust wives (3:7)

Despite all the mistreatment his readers endured, Peter offered a word of hope:

*The eyes of the LORD watch over those who do right,
and his ears are open to their prayers.
But the LORD turns his face
against those who do evil. (1 Peter 3:12)*

Then in 3:13–17, Peter explained why believers can find hope in Christ despite the worst mistreatment.



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Observation: Suffering Harm for Doing Good

Read [1 Peter 3:13–17](#) carefully, slowly, repeatedly. As you read, keep track of any observations about what the text says.¹ We’ll uncover what this passage means and how we can apply it later in the study.

Peter opened this passage with a rhetorical question. Yet he provided no direct response to this question because the answer ought to be obvious. What is the implied answer to the question Peter posed in [3:13](#)?

According to [3:14](#), what will God do for those who suffer for doing what is right? How should those who remain faithful to God respond to threats against them?

What two commands did Peter extend in [3:15](#) to those who suffer for doing what is right? (Note: In the original Greek, this second line technically isn’t a command. Instead, it describes *how* one can practically carry out the main command.)

1. _____
2. _____

Overall, Peter desired his readers to maintain a clear conscience when they face mistreatment. According to [3:16](#), why is it important to live a life of integrity during trials?



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Peter clearly stated the central theme in *1 Peter 3:17*. Summarize Peter’s conclusion in your own words.

When you face undeserved treatment, consider yourself uniquely blessed by God. Do not run in panic or sit in worry. Acknowledge Christ as Lord even over this event. Be ready to give a witness. And always keep a good conscience. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: A Reason to Hope

Sometimes, the word *if* suggests a nearly impossible reality—like the person who wishfully imagines, *If I win the lottery*. . . Many apply this kind of thinking to *1 Peter 3:14* and assume Christians will *never* “suffer for doing what is right.” Yet Peter’s perspective was quite different.

Peter thought it unlikely for someone to endure unjust treatment for doing good deeds. After all, who would want to harm another who is “eager to do good” (*3:13*)? Yet the Greek of *3:14* shows that Peter acknowledged that this kind of suffering is still a very real possibility. In fact, he had already personally endured such mistreatment for his faith in Christ.

What timeless principles does this passage teach about Christian suffering at the hand of others?



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Hope. An essential element of this passage and a central theme of the entire book. Biblical hope—*true* hope—is more than wishful thinking or even enthusiastic optimism. It’s an assurance that God will do what He says He will do.

Hope looks back to remember God’s past faithfulness. In what ways does hope look to the future (see [1 Peter 3:14](#))? How should this confident expectation affect how we live in the present?

In [3:15](#), Peter exhorted his readers to “be ready to explain” the reason for their hope in Christ. A key Greek word in this verse is *apologia*, from which we derive the English terms “apology” and “apologetics.”

Peter didn’t want his readers to apologize for their faith in Christ. He also didn’t expect them to engage in heated debate with every naysayer. While it’s important to be able to articulate what you believe and why you believe it, Peter had something specific in mind.

Based on [3:14–16](#) and the broader context of the letter, what did Peter envision a believer’s explanation of his or her hope to look like?

There is nothing like being observed in a time of mistreatment. It is a perfect platform for a witness. Your neighbors will want to know how you do it. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Correlation: Love for Jesus, Hatred from the World

As these difficult words flowed from Peter’s pen, his mind likely returned to the final meal he enjoyed with His Master and Friend. As Jesus prepared His disciples for His imminent death, He shared what life would be like for His followers after His departure. Read [John 15:18–26](#) to see what Jesus said about mistreatment.

According to [15:18–19](#), what kind of treatment should followers of Jesus expect from the world? Why should they expect this kind of treatment?

According to [15:24](#), what kind of good deeds did Jesus do? How did the world respond to these good deeds? By extension, what response should followers of Jesus expect when they do good deeds in His name?



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This seemingly bleak audit of the Christian experience ended on a high note: “But I will send you the Advocate” (*John 15:26*). Later in His conversations, Jesus explained why this is good news. According to *16:7–11*, why is the presence of the Holy Spirit better than the physical presence of Jesus? How do Jesus’ words here relate to His warnings in *15:18–25*?

Jesus did nothing but good works. He was the only human being ever to do so. Yet the world hated Him. Compassionate teachings were met with scolding. Merciful miracles were met with beatings. A call to a new way of life was met with crucifixion. If Jesus suffered in this way for doing good, then we who follow Him should expect the same.

So how can we prepare for such mistreatment?



Application: Facing Unjust Treatment

Just as Peter warned, you won’t often face mistreatment for your good deeds. Yet it will likely happen at some point, so it’s worth being prepared. Pastor Chuck Swindoll suggests five perspectives to maintain when you face unjust treatment:

1. As far as the act of injustice is concerned, be happy. Consider yourself uniquely blessed by God.
2. As far as your persecutor is concerned, be calm. Remember that nothing can cause eternal harm to those who rest secure in Christ.
3. As far as the Lord is concerned, be faithful. Acknowledge Christ as Lord even in your suffering.
4. As far as others are concerned, be prepared. Testify about your hope in Christ that carries through mistreatment.
5. As far as you are concerned, be pure. Keep a good conscience—especially when you feel bitterness and resentment.



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Have you ever faced mistreatment for doing good? How did your hope in Christ and His promises carry you through this trial?

What actions does your current cultural climate consider *bad*, even though God considers them *good*? How does your awareness of these conflicting standards help you prepare for a time when you might experience mistreatment for your good deeds in the future?

Peter knew better than anyone that this world is hostile to Jesus Christ, to His message, to His followers. Peter’s life would later come to a gruesome end when he faced an upside-down crucifixion for his faithfulness to His Savior. Peter really believed his own words: “Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong!” (1 Peter 3:17).

Will you also believe these words?



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A FINAL PRAYER

You may be enduring a season of unjust treatment right now. Use this prayer from Pastor Chuck to place this situation in God’s hands.

Lord, I know you’re with me right now. You’re much too gracious to take advantage of me. You’re much too kind to be cruel. You’re much too good to be unjust. Take charge. Use my integrity to defend me. Give me the grace to stay calm. And above all, be the Lord over my present situation. In Jesus’ name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, “*How to Study the Bible for Yourself.*”

