

Two Christian Secrets For Surviving Suffering

¹³ Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; ¹⁴ as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; ¹⁵ but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct, ¹⁶ because it is written, “*Be holy, for I am holy.*” (1 Peter 1:13–16)

John Chrysostom (c. 349–407), was a gifted preacher “the golden-mouthed,” was known for his uncompromising preaching against sin in all social strata. His boldness extended to the imperial court: he denounced extravagance, greed, and vanity among the nobility.

Aelia Eudoxia, wife of Emperor Arcadius, took personal offense at some of Chrysostom’s sermons—especially those criticizing the luxurious dress and conduct of wealthy women. Matters escalated when Chrysostom opposed the placement of a silver statue of Eudoxia near the cathedral of Hagia Sophia (403). The dedication involved noisy public festivities that disrupted worship, which Chrysostom denounced as sacrilegious.

Chrysostom's enemies fanned the flame and convened an council, where they accused him of arrogance, disobedience, and heresy. But Eudoxia threatened him with exile and banishment. Chrysostom responded by describing his hope.

“You cannot banish me, for this world is my Father’s house. You cannot kill me, for my life is hid with Christ in God. You cannot harm me, for death is my gain. You cannot take my treasures, for my treasure is in heaven. You cannot exile me, for the whole earth is the Lord’s. I fear nothing but sin.”

Chrysostom could face suffering because of his hope.

Responding to suffering as a Christian is not what you'd expect. The most common responses to suffering are: “stop the pain”, or “dull the pain”, “fight back and prevent the suffering from happening again.” But the Christian response is completely different.

In fact, it revolves around *being* different. Different in your hope, different in your conduct. Different on the inside, and different on the outside. What the Bible prescribes for suffering Christians in 1 Peter is not what we expect. But we know it will work because our Father in Heaven is sovereign over all, in control of good and bad, pain and pleasure, so what He prescribes will be the best response to suffering.

Peter describes a response very much like what Chrysostom had before queen Eudoxia.

Having spent 12 verses immersing us in privilege after privilege, promise after promise, Peter finally gives his first commands of the book. We go from position to practice, from God's grace to us to our response to Him.

Peter is going to get very practical from the middle of chapter two, but he is first going to show us some pillars of how Christians respond to suffering. Today we focus on two of the three pillars he'll show us. We can call these “two Christian secrets for surviving suffering”.

I. Hope Fully In Future Grace

¹³ Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

The first word of verse 13 is *therefore*, which means what he is about to tell you to do is based on what he has just told you. In light of vv1-12, do the following. Because of all the privileges we have

as believers, in light of all that has been done for us: chosen, born again, eternal inheritance, eternally secure, faith verified, seeing and enjoying Christ, living in the age of fulfilment, on the basis of that: do what verse 13 tells you to do.

What is that? Verse 13 has one main action, the active verb, and two assisting actions, two participles. The main, central command is rest your hope fully. You are assisted to do that by girding up the loins of your mind and being sober.

It's no surprise that *setting your hope* is the first command, because he's been telling us what a living hope we have in Christ. He's told us in detail what we are looking forward to, what our confidence is in, how certain it is. As if to say: you have this hope, so hope! This hope is yours, so practise it! You have it, so use it!

The NKJV translates it “rest your hope fully” which is a good translation of the idea: hope completely, hope entirely, hope to the end-point when Christ returns, and all these things become sight: the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, reserved in heaven for us, now seeing the One we believe in and love. When all the praise, honour and glory we read about in verse 7 comes to you, when that finally breaks through the clouds. Until then, place your hope fully in these promises.

Set your hope. What is this like? Hope is bringing the promise of the future into the pain of the present. We do this all the time in smaller ways. The athlete anticipates competing and winning in the future, so he endures the pain of training now. He sets his hope on winning. The student anticipates good results in the exams and holidays after the exams, and they bring that hope into the present pain of studying. The 8 to 5 job is motivated by the thought of hometime, of the weekend, of payday. In fact, probably every area of life has some situation where some future anticipation keeps you going through the present. It's how we're made.

Now the Bible says, Christian, you are going to experience suffering and pain as a Christian. But you too have a holiday, a weekend, a payday, a reward, a victory coming. He's described in verses 1-12. You can either go through suffering by feeling that this world is taking away your hopes, or you can go through suffering and look forward to future grace. In the one, you suffer pain, and you add grief and despair to your pain. In the other, you suffer pain, but you have joy and hope as you look upward and forward.

But you can't have it both ways. That's why the command is “rest your hope *fully* upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;”. Not rest some of your hope. Rest your hope partially on this world partially on the next.

No, Peter says, when it comes to what you hope for, long for, desire, your hope is *ultimately* in God Himself. Yes, you can enjoy the gifts of God in this world. You can be thankful for every creation, and live in glad gratitude. You can enjoy the gifts of family, friendship, food, health, nature, hobbies, sport. But that cannot be where your heart rests its full and ultimate hope. Those things cannot be where your being places ultimate satisfaction, contentment, fulfilment in. No, those things are meant to be signs that point you upward and forward, breadcrumbs on the path that points you upward and forward, sweet appetisers that point you upward and forward. But if or when the lawful and good things of this world are removed, restricted, taken away in suffering, you can still have joy. You should not be in utter despair, because your ultimate hope is God Himself.

Adoniram Judson (19th c., Burma): Imprisoned in fetid conditions, he told a fellow prisoner who asked about the prospects of their mission, “The future is as bright as the promises of God.”

But how do you do that? Verse 13 gives us two ways to rest your hope fully. One is gird up the loins of your mind, and the other is be sober.

What does *gird up the loins of your mind* mean? This is a phrase that has almost no meaning to our modern ears. To gird up the loins was a saying in the Ancient Near East and where people wore long flowing garments. When they needed to do some vigorous action like running or some manual labour, they would take the loose garments, gather them up, wrap them between and around their legs, so they become like shorts, and tuck them into their belt, their girdle around their loins. They'd remove the hindrance of long, flowing garments that could trip you up so that they could be ready for action.

So the phrase, gird up your loins was the ancient equivalent of roll up your sleeves. In this case, Peter says the loins of your mind. So the idea is, fully engage your mind. Get ready to think clearly, to think well, to think incisively. No lazy thinking, vague thinking, sloppy thinking, hazy thinking.

The second helping verb in this verse is *be sober*. This is a related idea. It also has to do with thinking. It means to control excessive emotions, don't let passions or rashness or confusion control you. Just as drunkenness leads to a loss of control over proper thinking, so wild emotions, passions mislead our thinking. The opposite of an undisciplined, irrational mind is a sober mind: rational, clear, in full control, well-balanced.

This is not a sober age. Just this week we had another rapture prediction, people believing the extreme statements of some that the rapture was going to occur on the Feast of Trumpets. People live by giddy emotion rather than by clear truth.

Now, why would Peter tell us that the way to rest your hope fully is to have a clear and fit mind? Why must I tighten up my thinking, focus, and be reasonable and logical to rest my hope? What have they go to do with each other?

It must be because hope is not a vague feeling, not a hazy emotion, not a lazy wishfulness. Hope is a **calculated confidence**. You thoughtfully, logically, rationally understand who you are in Christ, what the promises are to those in Christ, and you determine in your mind that this is where your ultimate satisfaction lies.

Consider how calculating people are about their retirement investments, which is future hope. They find out how much they'll need when they retire. They are presented with investment options that can grow a certain amount every year. They then calculate how much they can put away towards that. And financially, they've soberly, thoughtfully rested their confidence in that future investment.

That's the kind of way Peter wants us to treat future grace. Don't treat your hope like some hazy, vague, fairy-tale ending. Don't sentimentalise your hope and make it seem less real. Don't trivialise your hope by turning it into vague clichés, airbrushed pictures with plenty of lens flare. No! Give your hope hard edges, distinct outlines, clear dimensions. What has God promised you in Christ? Where? When? How? It's not as if He has been vague or evasive in telling us: there's plenty to know and study!

This is where a good and lawful study of eschatology takes place. We study the doctrine of future things not to tickle and scratch mere curiosity, not to play crystal ball with the Bible, not to argue endlessly with other schools of interpretation. We do so so that our hope is really clear, defined. Study. Learn. Know.

Take Paul as an example: ¹² For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until

that Day. (2 Timothy 1:12) . Paul's suffering had hope, because he knew rationally in whom he had believed, and he was soberly, rationally persuaded that He was able to keep His promise until that day.

If the trial is financial, think clearly about where your ultimate hope is. If the trial is physical, concentrate on where your ultimate hope is. If the trial is relational, focus on where your ultimate hope is. If your mind begins murmuring, complaining, whining, tighten up your thinking, and insist that your thoughts line up with your ultimate hope. Soberly, rationally rest your hope fully on all this future grace that is coming to you. This is the first Christian secret for suffering, the first pillar that upholds us during trials and tribulations.

But now, for the second secret, Peter is going to move from inward to outward, from the heart to the hands, from the thoughts to the actions.

II. Be Holy All Your Conduct

⁴ as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; ¹⁵ but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct, ¹⁶ because it is written, "*Be holy, for I am holy.*"

Here is the second command of this section: you yourselves be holy in all your conduct. Holiness. What comes into your mind when you hear the word *holy*? Some people see choirs and priests in frocks. Some people see stuffy religious people frowning, looking down their noses at anyone having fun. Some people see incense and candles and chanting monks. What is holiness?

Actually our English word *holiness* comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *hailiga* which means to be whole, sound to be healthy. The word *hale* is a rarer English word which means to be in good health. This translates the idea of holiness from Greek and Hebrew, where it means something pure, without defect, without spoilage, and therefore dedicated to God.

Pure, and therefore distinct. Like a bowl of fruit where the fruit is ripening the other fruit, and you find the fruit that is perfectly ripe, not overripe, not spoilt, and you separate it from the others and dedicate it to God because it is perfect. Or you have clay vessels being made by hand, and one of them is absolutely spherical in shape, no cracks, scratches, bumps, and being so perfect, it is separated from the rest and dedicated to God.

This is the idea of holiness. It is when the character, the heart, the desires and loves, the thoughts and intentions, the speech, and the actions are so free from defect, so fair, so balanced, so wise, so perfectly loving, that it is distinct from the way sinners think and act. It is separate from sin, and dedicated to God, because it is like God.

But we have a very distorted idea of holiness, mostly through Satan's deception, that holiness is lifeless, dry, stuffy, stiff, prudish, even haughty and self-righteous. But it's easy to see why that is so false.

Imagine have a few bottles of water lined up on a table. One of them is dirty brown. Another is less brown, but still quite dirty. Another is more milky coloured. Another is nearly clear, but plenty of particles floating around in it. Another is crystal clear. Which one do you want to drink from? Well, we'd pick the clear one. And we'd drink, and be glad that it was *100% pure*. We'd know it was healthy, life-giving, not introducing any spoilage into our bodies.

What would you say to someone who then said to you, "Yes, but pure water is so boring. It's not as fun as pollution"? We'd think it rather strange that polluted should be fun, and healthy should be boring. But that's exactly what Satan, and the world, and the flesh tell us about holiness and sin.

Holiness is boring. Sin is fun.

God is saying, in all your conduct, choose the 100% pure bottle of water. In your financial conduct, drink the pure bottle of God's holiness. In your sexual conduct, drink the pure bottle. In your parenting and marriage, drink the pure bottle. In your work conduct, drink the pure bottle. In your entertainment and leisure hours, drink the pure bottle. And when we understand holiness as spiritual healthiness, it makes sense. Why drink the polluted kind?

Now for Christians, the reason we are holy is not to appear better than others. It is not to feel more righteous or to feel less guilty. We're told why we must be holy in verse 15. He who called us is holy, so we must be like the one who called us into union with Himself. Peter then quotes God's words to His people Israel in Leviticus 19:2: you be holy, for I am holy. I am your God, Lord, Redeemer, so you are be like Me. God is the purest, most perfect Being of all. All His loves, desires, thoughts, intentions, words are of the best kind, the purest kind, the most life-giving kind. So we are to be like Him.

This is a matter of imitation of our God. We represent Him, we are His people in the world, so we are to have His relationship to sin. We should respond to it and treat it like He does. In a world of things going morally rotten, morally and spiritually decaying and spoiling, ethically polluted, we must be like God: separate from it, a pure, healthy alternative.

Be holy, for *I am* holy; He *who called you is holy*. He is the source of our holiness.

The Christian gospel has a very different message about holiness. We don't become holy by our works. Instead, the Holy God calls us to Himself. His Son died on the cross to take away our sin, rose again holy and righteous from the grave. His Spirit calls us to come, persuades us to repent of our sin and believe in Christ. Our sin is forgiven, His holiness is counted towards us. Now our Christian lives are lives of becoming what we are in Christ. In Him we are holy, so now in conduct and practice, we must become holy. We must flesh out what God has put in. We must act out what is true of us. We are His people, His children, with His nature within us.

So how do Christians, already holy in position, become holy in practice?

Verse 14 tells us how we do it: ⁴ as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance;

There's a negative there and a positive, a put off and a put on. Negatively, we don't conform ourselves to the old sinful desires we had when we were ignorant of God and His Word. Our foolish, selfish pursuits, the things we thought were important, amusing, fun, worthwhile, fashionable, stylish. Those desires, those lusts, came out of a life where we didn't know any better. Our whole world was that small, self-centred world of the person living for this world, this moment, this body.

Peter says, don't let those old desires shape you. It's the same word used in Romans 12:2: do not be conformed to the world. It means to be squeezed into a mould, shaped like soft clay or plasticine by these worldly desires. Don't be moulded by peer pressure, by worldly media, by family pressure, by social pressure to be like the world. He describes it in chapter 4:

³ For we *have spent* enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. (1 Peter 4:2–3)

Positively, be like obedient children, seeking to be like your Father. “Learn much of the Lord Jesus. For every look at yourself take ten looks at Christ. He is altogether lovely. . . . Live much in the smiles of God. Bask

in his beams. Feel his all-seeing eye settled on you in love. And repose in his almighty arms.” Loving, compliant children copy the ways of their parents. In all your conduct: speaking, dressing, spending, speaking, working, relaxing, reading, listening, be like your holy God, like your holy Father. Choose the pure bottle.

Now you might say, I can see why having this internal hope would see me through trials. But why is holiness a secret to enduring suffering?

1. Holiness makes us close to Christ when we suffer. When we are seeking to be like our Lord, then we are different. We are different, not only in pleasure, but in pain. And being holy during suffering brings endurance, like Christ. Without holiness, we will suffer just like the world, and suffer for the same reasons. But the more we resemble our Father, the more we suffer like Christ did.

Hudson Taylor buried children in China, suffered ridicule, endured illness, and survived near-starvation. What gave him endurance? Holiness. His journal records: “Give me holiness rather than health, give me holiness rather than life.”

And when we have that endurance, and we suffer like Christ, we also look like Christ.

¹¹ Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, ¹² having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:11–12)

Holiness in our trials is the spiritual healthiness to a very sick world. Holy responses to suffering are like antibodies to a disease, like white blood cells to an infection. The world looks on, and sees a people responding to pain and evil very differently. They begin to wonder what our hope is, what is sustaining us, what we are looking for beyond and ahead of this suffering.

¹⁵ But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; ¹⁶ having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. (1 Peter 3:15–16)

3. Holy people remain useful to God during trials.

When Christians act out our God-given holiness, they do not give in to murmuring, or complaining. They don't become despairing and despondent. They don't curse God and others. They don't rage against God and life. They don't look for someone to blame. They don't become resentful. They don't become cynical. They don't become depressed. And because of that, God can still fill and use them and bring good fruit from them.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne "The greatest need of my people is my own holiness. I am tempted to spend time in public rather than private duties, but I see that private prayer and holiness are the most important of all."

It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awesome weapon in the hand of God."

I wonder if you and I had to go through the Job test, and lose money and possessions, and then reputation and respect, and then family and friends, and finally health and wellbeing, if all the hopes of this world are stripped away, what is left? This morning, if you say, nothing, I'd want to end my

life, then your hope is in this world. Then you need a living relationship with the living God through Jesus who rose from the dead. You need new life from above, which will begin when you come to Him in trusting faith, forsake your independence and autonomy, and place your trust in God.

Is your hope fully on future grace? Or are you betting on this world as well? Elijah asked Israel, how long will you limp between two opinions? If Baal be God, then serve him! If Jehovah be God, then serve Him!

Are you putting off the old lusts, and imitating your Father in all your conduct? Are you choosing the pure, the spiritually healthy? That way, you'll be in a position to be different to a world that almost never sees a different response to suffering. And you'll remain a clean, useful instrument in the hands of God.

Hope and holiness. Two Christ secrets of suffering like Christ before a world that suffers without Him.