

1st Peter 1:13-16

13 Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. 14 Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. 15 Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; 16 for it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

The letter is one of encouragement for victims of religious persecution. Their strength comes from their faith in God and unwavering trust in Christ. The letter provides hope and comfort as Christians are no longer accepted in their culture. Hope is found, not in humans, but in God who promises an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and lasts forever.

For the first century Christians the primary thing was the cross and the empty tomb. It was mainly about what God did for us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Then it was a matter of learning about his teachings, the Old Testament promises of God being fulfilled. The Messiah has arrived with divine power. The appeal of the Good News leads to repentance, baptism, and a life of devotion. This includes not just the things you are to do in following the will of God but includes steadfast devotion in the face of suffering and persecution. The teachings of Jesus were the treasured guide for the pattern of Christian living.

The first century church had solid theological doctrine. The doctrine of God is the almighty creator of the heavens and the earth. God is holy, gracious, loving, and chose Israel to be God's own people. This is a sharp dichotomy from the other nations that chose a god or gods out of a realm of reason. Israel is the nation that God chose. The doctrine of Christ is the Son of God, a suffering savior that is raised, and exalted. He saved us by taking on all of our sins, exempting us from its consequences so that we can live righteously in covenant with God. The doctrine of the church is that the church is God's people. They are in alignment as the flock of God with Jesus Christ as the shepherd.

The readers that the letter is addressed to were suffering for their faith. They were Christians; converts at a time when identifying as a Christian was enough to provoke suffering. They were despised as a foreign religion. Roman society was hierarchical and feared influence from foreign religions. Christians faced slander and alienation as their values conflicted with mainstream society. The first century Christians were able to remain faithful to their convictions because their example is Christ and Jesus suffered all the way to the grave. Jesus did not abandon the world. Jesus changed the world to be a better place. Jesus lived by faith even when being persecuted for it. Now the followers of Jesus face the same challenges.

The letter pertains to people that are challenged to live as God's obedient children. That means to live according to their faith even if they are being persecuted for it. They are encouraged to live like Christians and obey the word of God. The main point that the letter gets across is that if you suffer for righteousness God will reward you for it. Believers get a great benefit if they do not abandon their faith when put under pressure.

The paradox of Christianity is joy in the face of suffering, assurance of deliverance in the face of persecution, and complete reliance on that which is not visible.

We may not be under persecution ourselves, but we live in a society where true Christian values conflict with mainstream contemporary society. We come under attack by Satan in many ways that we are not readily able to recognize. Satan could not defeat the Son of God so now Satan goes after the children of God. We are not perfect; we all make mistakes, but being devoted to God, transgressions are the exception not the rule. The best way for us to silence critics is to live an honorable life. Holiness is more than a ritual and outward action. Holiness is pure in the heart. Don't be surprised if you live a righteous life and it makes you a target of evil. Because, once again, Satan cannot defeat the Son of God so, as a consequence, he goes after the children of God.

A crown of glory is the reward that is promised to the faithful. We are to live our lives holy because God is holy. We live a life of devotion, not because we should, or because we are supposed to, but due to gratitude. We owe our all to God. Our obedience is grounded in the goodness of Christ that is taught to God's people. We praise God for all the gifts that have been given to us. Christians have a responsibility to respond to these gifts. Our response is a call to holy living; being devoted, thankful, and expressed through our love.