

1 Peter 3:13-17

1Pe 3:13 (NKJV) **And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. 'And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.'** 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.** ¹⁷ **For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.**

This is our third message on this passage. Initially, we took a brief look at the word “**sanctify**” simply because it is the controlling verb in this section of Scripture. From a negative standpoint, and this is important for anyone who is serious about their Christian life, we saw that God does not appear to be overly inclined to use people who have no meaningful faithfulness or commitment to Him. That should be fairly obvious and somewhat apparent. The culture of the American church has so watered down what it means to be a disciple and follower of Christ, that having a good understanding of the idea of biblical faithfulness is quickly disappearing. If we owned a business, we would not be too inclined to keep an employee who was always late for work, took extra-long lunch breaks, complained all the time, and did really sloppy work to boot. If we were smart, we would probably give him “the boot”.

We also saw that those who are spiritually uncommitted to Christ in their hearts for the most part have no meaningful spiritual usefulness to God. We will look at this phrase “**in your hearts**” in v15 in a little more detail, but just think about it for a moment. Why would God want someone representing Him in some form of service or ministry, but in their heart, they really did not want to be doing what they were doing? Maybe it was just inconvenient, not fulfilling or gratifying enough, or even a little troublesome or untimely for them and their busy schedule. So, why would God want them to be doing anything? It is not like He needs us to accomplish what He wants to accomplish – not at all. My personal opinion is that it will be a sad day for the believer who will stand before God and give an account of their life, and look back over it only to realize that they forfeited what was eternal for that which was temporal, fleeting, and had no eternal value whatsoever. Unfortunately, that may be more the norm than the abnormal on that fateful day.

That is why we stated that one of the governing ideas embedded in the word “**sanctify**” is that it is something that is very intentional and deliberate on the believer’s part. Every part of the Christian life has to be intentional and deliberate, and this area is no different. No one will “**sanctify the Lord God in their heart**” by accident. Everyone of us personally decide in our hearts how we are going to live our lives and whether or not we are going to give to Christ the rightful place He so fully deserves. As a part of that, every believer has to understand that his behavior is the most significant indicator as to whether or not he has in reality honored God in a way that truly sets Him apart from everything else. To sanctify Christ in our heart means that we have to turn away from anything that we know would be dishonoring to the Father and to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We just turn away, walk away. It means to separate ourselves from anything and everything that would dishonor Christ in some way. This is where the battle always rages – deciding who is going to be Lord of our life.

What stood out to me the most in those first two studies was that for those individuals who choose to consecrate and set themselves apart to God, there is a presence of God's divine power that is released in their life. This is difficult to quantify because it is not released at any one time, but over a lifetime. God is not interested in a flash-in-the-pan kind of Christianity that so often we see. Those who truly sanctify Christ in their life are given a measure of God's divine strength, His encouragement, and His presence that the half-committed and the uncommitted will never experience.

Now, as we proceed, it is important to appreciate that most theologians teach that there are three stages of sanctification – one that happens at the new birth, one that happens during the Christian's lifetime, and the eternal sanctification that happens after physical death. So for most theologians, the second level of sanctification would be applied in [1 Peter 3:15](#). The second idea of being sanctified is termed by theologians as “progressive sanctification”. The idea is that the believer is involved in a personally determined and disciplined effort to allow the Holy Spirit to constantly be setting them apart so that they are useful to Him. [Romans 8](#) refers to it as becoming “**conformed to the image of Christ**”, but it is something that is progressive in nature.¹ No good theologian would deny this progressive aspect of sanctification during the believer's lifetime. We would call it “growing spiritually” and allowing Christ to actually control our life. So, the Scriptures' overall exhortation is to always be setting Christ apart as the very God of eternity, and by so doing give Him absolute first place in our life and demonstrate that honor by obedience to Him in all that we do. It means that the believer recognizes who Christ is and because of that they honor Him unconditionally with their life. That is the idea of “progressive sanctification”.

However, what is utterly critical to understand about this word “**sanctify**” is that because Peter uses the aorist imperative tense, his idea of the believer sanctifying themselves for God's use in this passage carries with it a sense of immediate urgency.² This aorist imperative verb is placed in the Greek language in what is called a “constative” category. The constative state of the verb simply means that an action has occurred – what we call the past tense (aorist in Greek) where something has already happened. However, what the constative aspect stresses is the urgency and the gravity and the seriousness of the action. It would be like telling someone to “make this the very top priority of your life”. The importance and insistence of this verb type cannot be overlooked. An English word that would contrast the opposite of this word would be to vacillate, to be indecisive, to hesitate, or to waver. Here a person is in a very critical moment of their life and rather than being able to make an urgent and critical decision for their life, they simply vacillate and hesitate. Please appreciate that this is not a present tense verb where we are always sanctifying the Lord God in our hearts, but this is that moment in time when we make a spiritually crucial decision that we will always put Christ first in our life, and we do not waver on that decision. We make that decision and we do not look back.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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¹ Practical, #3371, *hagiozo*, ep.

² Precept Austin, *1 Peter 3:15*, ep.

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