

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.**

If we examine these verses carefully, the primary verb and action of the passage is clearly v15 where believers are told to “**sanctify the Lord God in your hearts**”. That is the governing and controlling verb for all of the reasons we have previously studied. To support that aorist imperative verb, there are several other subordinate clauses that support the main statement. Peter desires for his audience to know several other things that he wants them to incorporate into their life.

The first subordinate or secondary clause he presents is in the form of a question – “**who will harm you if you become followers of what is good**”. His question is who will injure you, who will hurt you, or who will vex you? Most likely this was already a reality that was taking place in their lives. People were trying to harm them for doing what God wanted them to do. This is the only time outside of the book of Acts (5X) where this word for “**harm**” is used, and it means to afflict or to mistreat someone.¹ In our culture, it is not yet legal to harm Christians for their beliefs, even though there is plenty of social sentiment that Christians need to have their spiritual freedoms curtailed and diminished greatly. It will come. One day all of the religious freedoms that we currently enjoy will be removed and in all likelihood we will become the target both socially and eventually physically.

The second subordinate clause Peter provides is that these believers may in fact suffer. He says in v14 “**But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed.**” Please appreciate that Peter, nor any other New Testament writer, states that suffering for righteousness sake is bad. In fact, this verse says that it is a source of great blessing in the believer’s life. In America, it is incredibly difficult to equate suffering with blessing. The average Christian actually associates God’s blessing with a total absence of suffering. Peter introduces this clause with the word “**but**”. It is called a contrasting conjunction and what it does is exert an influence on the meaning that is far greater than its size. By making the contrast with 13, Peter is warning these Christians that they in all likelihood will “**suffer for righteousness' sake**”. They will suffer specifically because of their relationship to Christ.

The third thing he tells them is to “**not be afraid... nor troubled**” – “*And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled*”(v14). Now, telling someone to not be afraid is easy, but for the individual who is facing the threat of suffering or hurt, it is not always that simple. It is like the child who is afraid to jump in the water even when his father is in the water encouraging him to jump. The child is perfectly safe and nothing will happen to him, so what the father is actually doing by encouraging him to jump is teaching him not to be afraid. There are times when every believer will have to go through very difficult and trying times just so that they can learn to trust God in every situation. I have no personal idea what

¹ Harris, *kakoo*, ep.

any of you may be experiencing in your life, but whatever it is, you need to be assured that God the Father is in complete control of every circumstance of your life and He wants you to simply trust what He is doing in your life. Do not complain, do not protest His deeper work in your life. To the contrary, except all of His dealings in your life as good and spiritually beneficial to your life. Your struggles are what He uses to strengthen you and develop the courage and perseverance you need to glorify Him in your life.

The fourth subordinate clause says that when the believer is in this difficult time of their life, this stressful, even harmful moment, that they are to **“be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you”**. Think of it this way. The believer is going through some kind of suffering, and it is a suffering that is very stressful, very hurtful, and very painful. There is nothing pleasant or easy about what is happening to them – nothing. So, the lost person is thinking, as they watch all of this developing, *“What kind of God would allow His children to go through something like this? Who would want to serve a God like this?”* It is at that moment that the believer is to testify of the **“hope”** that they have in Christ, in the Lord God. The word **“defense”** is the Greek word *“apologia”* from where we get our word “apologetics” for defending our faith, for defending what it is that we believe, and ultimately for defending the name and the character of the God that we serve. In the sovereignty of God, He has allowed the suffering to occur. In fact, He may even be the One directly responsible for the trial. We must see that. We cannot miss that spiritual reality.

What God is doing, however, is creating an opportunity where we can glorify Him in the very midst of the worst of circumstances. Our Father receives the greatest glory from our life when we experience the most difficult of trials without complaining and murmuring, and without laying blame on Him for what is taking place. You can approach the difficult moments in one of two ways. On the one hand you can question God and ask *“Why are You letting this happen to me?”* You can doubt God’s goodness, God’s love for you, or His sovereignty over all things. On the other hand you can say, *“Father, I do not understand Your greater purposes in this difficult trial, but I know that whatever you are allowing in my life is for my good and your glory, and I fully submit myself to that purpose.”* You have to make that choice, but you can only make it if you have sanctified the Lord God in your heart.

As believers, we have this amazing **“hope”**, this deeply confident expectation and it cannot be erased. I tell people all the time that I am going to die and go to heaven. I am 100% sure of that reality for all of us. Each of us are going to die, and when we do, eternity will be our greatest blessing and not our worst nightmare. However, what may happen to us prior to that may not always be pleasant, but it is in those very moments of trial and suffering that we have the privilege of honoring Christ the most. That is one reason why it is so unbiblical to always be complaining and moaning and griping and whining. The believer whose life is characterized by those traits understands little to nothing of the sovereignty of God. We are people who have this amazing **“hope”** that simply cannot be quantified.

The fifth subordinate clause is Peter reminding us of the importance of **“having a good conscience”**. The word **“having”** is a participle in the imperative sense, and it is in the present tense, active voice simply meaning that it is something we are to always have and something that we are to always maintain. Nothing will work spiritually without our maintaining **“a good conscience”**. Without **“a good conscience”**, nothing that we tell someone can be sincere and transparent. Without **“a good conscience”**,

we really have no witness, and the idea of being ready to give a defense of the hope that is in us will never happen.

The sixth subordinate clause simply says in v17 “**For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.**” Peter reiterates that suffering and stressful moments are so often a part of God’s perfect will for our lives. When we study this phrase in more detail, what we will find is that the word for “**will**” is “*thelema*”. Now, the interesting nuance of this noun is that when it is used in reference to God that it denotes God’s gracious disposition towards His children. The will of God is never bad, but it seems that for many Christians that they are always questioning what God’s Word clearly indicates is the best for their life. Unfortunately, too often we think that we are actually smarter than God and know what is best for our life – even when it clearly conflicts with His Word. The truth is that the will of God is what He knows to be the very best thing for their life. However, and this is one of the nuances of this word, the will of God is not to be considered as a demand on the believer’s life, but as an expression of pleasure towards those whom God deeply loves.²

Here is the point, so listen carefully. As a believer, you will never fully accept and embrace the will of God for your life until you are willing at some point in your life to “**sanctify the Lord God in your heart**”. That is your only option for being able to both enjoy and greatly benefit from the will of God for your life. We have spent time understanding that this word “**sanctify**” is so strong of a parsing in the Greek language that it means to make this the very priority of your life, of setting God apart in your heart so that nothing else ever comes first. This is and He is the priority of our life. It is not our mate, it is not our family, it is not our church, it is not our jobs, it is not our ideas, and it is not our goals and plans for our life. We must sanctify and fully set apart ourselves for both God and Christ in our hearts. We must give them first place over everything else in our life. If we choose to continue to live as we please, we will experience several negative consequences in our life.

- (1) We will lose our desire to be a follower of Christ, to be followers of that which is good.
- (2) We will not be willing to suffer for righteousness sake and we will lose God’s blessings on our life. When the trials and struggles come, our default position will be to not allow God to use them mightily in our life to conform us to His will.
- (3) We will not be able to defend the sovereignty, love, and grace of God when difficult, trying, and stressful events happen in our life, and ultimately we will not be those who glorify God in their life. To the contrary, we will bring dishonor to His name and fail to give a meaningful expression of this great hope that is ours.
- (4) Our lifestyle and our choices will destroy our conscience and it will quickly become seared by our lust and desires for things other than God.
- (5) We will not be willing to accept God’s will for our life as the very best thing that we could ever have.

² Zodhiates, 721.

Each of these negative consequences are a by-product of a believer's unwillingness to sanctify the Lord God in their heart. It happens so subtly, so gradually, so faintly, almost imperceptibly over time – but it happens. [Hebrews 2:1](#) calls it drifting away.

Heb 2:1 (NKJV) Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.

Ultimately, it becomes a reflection of a shallow understanding of who God is and of the spiritual path that He has ordained for our lives. To not make the decision to follow Christ completely may cost us everything that is critical and valuable to our life. It may cost us our marriage. It may cost us our children. It may cost us our character and integrity. It will cost us our commitment to live for Christ. How to quantify all of this is relatively unknown, but we all have lived long enough to have witnessed the tragic consequences of other believers who chose to live their lives apart from God's perfect will for their lives. Why did that happen in their life? It is because they never made this choice. Whatever choices they made, it was not what we are addressing.

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