

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.

In last week's message we looked at the five subordinate clauses that surround v15 and the primary thrust of this passage which is to “**sanctify the Lord God in your hearts**”. Even though each one of these phrases was meant to be a great encouragement to these believers who were already living under the reality of suffering “for righteousness sake”, we also saw that they also revealed the dangers and consequences of not embracing the will of God for our life and making sure at some point in our life that we genuinely have made it a personal reality to “**sanctify the Lord God in our hearts**”. We have emphasized over and over that the parsing of this verb – aorist tense, imperative mood, constative attribute, and it means that we are to make this the priority of our life, and to set Him apart in our life so that nothing else comes first. We all understand the struggles and decisions that may create for us, but it is simply a part of God's outworkings in our life. Because these are such serious issues for the Christian life, I feel compelled to remind us what they were:

1. We will lose our desire to truly be a follower of Christ.
2. We will not be willing to suffer for righteousness sake and ultimately lose the blessings of God on our life.
3. We will not be able to defend the eternal attributes of God such as His sovereignty, His love, and His grace when the difficult and trying moments come in our life.
4. Our lifestyles and our choices will eventually destroy our spiritual conscience and it will quickly become seared by our lusts 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 things that we could ever have. We will never be content with God and God alone.

There is no way possible to quantify or measure the impact of these gradual, subtle, and almost imperceptible consequences until it is too late in our life to do so. What we may lose in the process cannot be measured or even imagined. We seem to always think that for us personally that everything will work out the way we envisioned, but that is a spiritual mirage at best. This is an incredibly serious passage of Scripture that simply cannot be overlooked.

Now, contextually it must be kept in mind that Peter is addressing believers who are undergoing some degree of suffering that was very uncomfortable. Notice what says later in [1 Peter 4:1](#),

1Pe 4:1 (NKJV) Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

This verb for “**arm yourselves**” is also an aorist imperative verb, and what Peter is clearly saying in this verse is that the believer is to have the same mind about suffering that Christ had. In order to accomplish His Father’s will, He was willing to suffer whatever He needed to suffer. He had that mindset. Over the last several months, I have repeatedly emphasized the necessity of being very deliberate and intentional in what we do spiritually. In this verse, think of the words “**same mind**” as resolve. Christ had a certain resolve and determination about His life. There was no indecision about how He was going to live – none, zero. He never wavered or drifted in His resolve, in His “**mind**”. There has to be that mindset, that conviction, that mentality and approach to our life, that same kind of resolve and determination – to be as much like Christ as is humanly possible. If we lack that conviction and that kind of resolve, then we will quickly fall prey to the five consequences we reviewed of not being willing to genuinely set Christ apart in our life.

So, Peter wants these believers to grasp the fact that they also are being called on to “**suffer for righteousness sake**”. [1 Peter 4:12-13](#) says,

1Pe 4:12 (NKJV) Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³ but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

What God is allowing their way is not just a trial. It is a “**fiery trial**”, and it is one that Peter says will try them and test the reality of their confession and their faith. This will not be easy. There is nothing in these words that give any sense of something that will bring pleasure and enjoyment to their life. The NIV translates it as a “**painful trial**”.

Listen very carefully to my next question here? How do you ask someone to be willing to suffer through a fiery, painful trial if in reality they have no real commitment to you? How do you ask anyone to do anything for you if they have no real commitment to you? What would ever be their motivation or their reason to be willing and inclined to suffer something very painful in their life if they themselves have not deeply entrusted their life to you? The answer is simple and is ultimately Peter’s point in this whole passage - there will be no motivation to do so. That is why Peter so fully understands the necessity of the imperative of sanctifying the Lord God in our hearts.

In this context, the idea of sanctifying Christ as Lord is Peter’s way of helping his readers to understand the truth that Christ, and not their human adversaries, is actually in control of the events surrounding their lives. Even though life that is ahead of us may become very difficult in the near future, we have no reason to be afraid – not of the government, not of the economy, not of the trials that may afflict us. Why is that? It is because Jesus Christ is the actual “**Lord**” over our lives and over everything else . Someone may have been persecuting these believers, harassing them, and troubling them in some way, but the believer who has truly sanctified the Lord God in their hearts knows that Christ is Lord and therefore sovereign over all that is taking place in their life. Understanding and yielding to the sovereignty of God is His way of strengthening our lives. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without His awareness. The believer who has that kind of honor and reverence for Christ and His sovereignty over their lives is an individual who will be able to maintain a deep-seated confidence in Christ as Lord over all things, to include angels, authorities, and powers that are fully subject to Him and His sovereign will.¹

¹ Grudem, 153.

Even if they do suffer, they will have a certain measure of God’s grace and peace over their lives. The sense of the passage is clearly to regard God as the sovereign God of eternity and to reverence Him with great confidence - which a proper respect for One so great and so utterly holy actually demands.² The reason that we sanctify Him is simple. It is because He is God, who Peter calls “**the Lord God**”.

Certainly, many of Peter’s readers were undergoing the kind of suffering that would create fear and apprehension in their heart, or anyone’s heart for that matter. It was the kind of sorrow, distress, and anguish that may be able to cause any believer to fear and to be troubled in their hearts. None of us are immune from this in our personal lives. Anything could happen to disrupt our confidence, our courage, and our peace. So, what Peter does is to provide the spiritual antidote for facing that fear and apprehension. It is **not** a cure for the problem of suffering, but an antidote for the fear and apprehension that suffering might bring. The antidote is simply to have revered and exalted Christ in the heart, to have acknowledged His Lordship over all things – even difficult and painful things. This is an issue that a believer has to settle now, so that when the difficulty arises they are not taken back and blindsided with an overcoming fear. This is the believer who has confidence in His God and will not become consumed with fear. This is not some kind of blind allegiance to someone who has no credibility. This is trusting in the Creator God, trusting in the living God.

In order to have any chance of peace and calmness in the midst of severe trials, Christ has to become the believer’s refuge and spiritual sanctuary.³ I say this graciously as a fellow-believer, but we have no other alternatives or options. From what other source can we receive courage or peace or grace? No wonder people are confused and struggling in their lives. No wonder people’s lives seem to always be falling apart. No wonder people lack direction and purpose and meaning for their life. It is because they have not yet settled the issue of who is to be in control of their life. It is this deliberate and intentional decision that will create a settled conviction of God’s eternal protection over the believer’s life and give them the needed grace, courage, and strength for their difficult moments. Please appreciate that those moments and those seasons in everyone’s life will come. No one is exempt from the pressures and trials and heartaches that life so consistently creates – no one. It is amazing how often it seems to be so easy to just complain about anything uncomfortable, anything stressful, and anything that seems to interfere with the believer’s comfort zone. Generally what that indicates is that the believer has never really “**sanctified Christ as Lord in their hearts**”. They have verbally acknowledged and accepted Him as their Savior, but are somewhat unwilling to trust Him with their life as Lord.

It must be appreciated that God has commanded every believer to “**be holy**” in all that they do. [1 Peter 1:15-16](#) says,

1Pe 1:15 (NKJV) **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."**

[2 Corinthians 7:1](#) says,

2Co 7:1 (NKJV) **Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**

² Barnes, 1420.

³ Barnes, 1420.

Our bodies are actually referred to as the “**temple of the Holy Spirit**” in [1 Corinthians 6:19](#). When these truths are connected to one another it clearly implies that the Holy Spirit is seeking to increasingly express His very nature in every believer’s daily life that He indwells.⁴ [Romans 8:5-6](#) says,

Ro 8:5 (NKJV) For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live* according to the Spirit, (set their minds on) the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

However, what needs to be appreciated in all of this is that it is much more than the believer just doing the right thing. That is why Peter said that believers are to sanctify Christ as Lord “**in your hearts**”. When a believer sets themselves apart for God, it must be from their heart. Yes, we obey His Word, and yes, we speak of Him with deep respect, and yes, we run to him during the very difficult and stressful times. Each of those are givens – but we do it because the commitment that we made to Him was from our hearts. It is never something that is merely a kind of external service, a kind of obligation to obedience, or a kind of intellectual agreement that it is simply the right thing to do. The believer does all of those things because in their heart Christ truly is their Lord. I do not just love my wife, but I love her with all of my heart. I am not simply going through the external motions of my marriage. I have set my wife apart in my heart. For the believer, this is not merely reciting some creed or attending some church or saying a prayer – never. It is always a matter of the heart. What if we found out that our marriage partner really did not respect us or love us or even care about us? Well, I imagine that much too often that may be how God the Father may feel by our misplaced affections for the world and the things of the world.⁵ Many believers come to church and say “Hallelujah”, and then live their lives in complete contradistinction and denial to what they confess. At best it is just hollow and insincere and a clear indication that they have never really sanctified Christ as Lord “**in their hearts**”.

Here is the point. When a believer has truly sanctified Christ as Lord in their heart, they know with a kind of divine certainty that all things are well and that Christ is in complete control of all things – even when life may not work out the way they had planned. No matter how dark something may seem, the one who has set Christ apart, who reveres Him and loves Him, and who has truly committed their life to Him – they will be at rest no matter what surrounds them and tries to beset them. That is really one of Peter’s messages in this letter. It is that the believer can actually trust Christ in every situation of their life, and to that Christ they are to flee in all of the trials that life may bring across their path.

So, how does all of this work itself out practically? What are some of the implications of this amazing reality that Christ is Lord over all things? When a believer sanctifies Christ in their heart, the evidence of that is that they are constantly esteeming His power, His goodness, His mercy, His truth, His sovereignty, and His amazing love and forgiveness. Some remain permanently earthly in their affections, fickle in their commitments to Him, and constantly trying to alter their understanding of God and His Word. To do so actually desecrates His person. If I can say it in a different way, it is like taking the Lord’s name in vain. To truly sanctify Christ in the heart is to ascribe to Him wisdom in all things without error, without limits, without falsehood, without evil in any form, and without any lack of understanding. To see God in any other way is to demean His person. He is infinitely wise, holy, true,

⁴ Campbell, 316-317.

⁵ Barnes, 1420.

and gracious to men and He has such a deep and abiding love for them that He sacrificed His own Son so that those who deserved nothing but death could be saved. No wonder we as believers can give a reason of the hope that we have in Christ.

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