

Thursday Evening English

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Date: 18 February 2016

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 0 0] Let's turn together now to God's Word, where we read in 1 Peter chapter 3. And tonight, for a little time, let's dwell our minds on verses 15 to 16 especially.

We can read from verse 13, just to get the run of Peter's thought in these verses. 1 Peter 3, verse 13. Now, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

2 Peter 3, verse 13.

To shame. 1 Peter is probably, in the New Testament, the most sustained treatment of suffering in the Christian life.

It's there, of course, in Paul's letters. It's there in John's as well. It's there all through the Scriptures, in fact. But Peter, in this first letter that he wrote, really is dealing with that as the main theme of the letter, in the different ways in which he wants to apply it to those that he's writing to who he knows are really suffering for their faith.

[1 : 3 5] They are people who are scattered in different parts, as he mentions at the beginning of the letter, but having given them his greetings and sought blessing from God for them.

He then immediately delves into dealing with the fact that they are suffering, and as he says there even, that it's necessary for them, so that the tested genuineness of their faith might be found to result in praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

And it's very instructive, as you look at the way Peter deals with suffering in the Christian life, and how, in fact, that comes to be related to some other very important aspects of the Christian's experience and the Christian's behavior.

Because, for one thing, he speaks about the kind of attitude that one must have to these sufferings in the Christian life, that they are, in fact, not misplaced, and that they are not without reason and purpose.

But it's in the way he relates suffering and the difficulties and the trials of the Christian life to other topics that you find most of the letter taken up with that.

[2 : 5 8] For example, he relates the sufferings of the Christian very closely to the sufferings of Christ himself, as you find there in chapter 2.

For example, he talks there near the end of the chapter that you have been called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps.

So that's one thing, very important theme or topic that he relates our Christian suffering to, the sufferings of Christ himself. He also relates them to the Christian's hope.

And, of course, that connects things with the world to come, with heaven, with that which awaits believers in heaven. Indeed, that's, again, near the beginning of the letter, what he wants to emphasize, that they have been, in fact, called, and God has caused them to be born again to a living hope, a hope that is unto an inheritance, that is incorruptible and undefiled and reserved in heaven for them, as they are being kept for that inheritance by the power of God, through faith on their own part.

And then you come to other things that are related to that. I don't want to spend too much time on that, but just to open it out as something that you can discover through the first letter of Peter, how he relates it, and relates it here, in fact, to our Christian witness.

[4 : 27] And it's not just in this passage. You find it, actually, at the previous passage as well, where he deals with how our witness is to be in the presence of the state or of the civil authorities.

Is there to be subject to the Lord's, for the Lord's sake, to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor or supreme or to governors and so on. And that, of course, needs qualification from other parts of Scripture.

But that's one of the things he mentions. Your Christian witness is so important even to those that you relate to in authority, those who govern you. And he then brings that, of course, into the home, as we've seen in chapter 3, the beginning, where, in terms of family relationships, husband-wife relationships, you find that Christian witness and standing, you're witnessing to one another as to what it is to be in Christ and what Christ actually means to us.

And he comes here in chapter 3, this passage we're going to look at, to look at how our witness is to be in relation to those who actually oppose the gospel and oppose our Christian witness and our Christian standing.

And, indeed, you can see how he really moves very quickly from the mentioning of the sufferings that they're enduring for Christ's sake. He says, now, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

[5 : 57] But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts.

In other words, he's very quickly moving from this mention of the opponents and the suffering that they're causing them to an alternative, an alternative to being afraid of them or being intimidated by them.

Don't, he says, be intimidated by them. Don't be afraid of them. Have no fear of them. Instead of having a fear of them, sanctify the Lord Christ in your hearts.

That's the first point that he's dealing with. An inward sanctifying of Jesus, of Christ as Lord, in our hearts. Now, I'm using different words to what's in the translation there.

We'll see that in a moment. So, there's an inward sanctifying of Christ. And then he speaks about an outward telling of our Christian life.

[7 : 01] In your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

These are the two things. An inward sanctifying of Christ, an outward telling of our Christian hope or Christian faith. Now, he says this, first of all, in your hearts.

This is the alternative, remember, to being intimidated or afraid of those who oppose the gospel and its message and your standing and your witness and your profession of it.

He's saying, in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy. And the words literally mean sanctify the Lord Christ in your hearts. Or you could put it another way, sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.

Now, you know from the Old Testament and from the New as well, but the whole idea of sanctifying is really to, it's a two-fold thing really.

[8 : 07] It's firstly to set something apart for God, specifically for God. And then in our own Christian sense and in our persons, there's the idea of being made holy or following holiness of life, being holy.

But the setting apart really is at the very root of what it means to be sanctified. God sanctifies his people by setting them apart.

And setting them apart then means on their own part and for their own activity of following holiness of life as God actually gives provision for that.

And that's why in the Old Testament, you find such things as the utensils that were used in the tabernacle, in the temple. They're actually called holy. Holy vessels, holy utensils.

They're not animate. They don't have life. But they are holy in the sense of being by God, specified for his exclusive use. They're for him.

[9 : 12] They're dedicated to him. And that's the idea that you now take with you, as you see what he's saying here. Instead of being afraid of them or troubled, sanctify Christ in your hearts as Lord.

Set him apart in your hearts. Let him have that special place that belongs to him and to no other. And keep on doing that as you find yourselves at times under difficulties for the gospel's sake.

Keep looking to this Christ. Keep looking to this activity. Sanctify him in your heart. Set him apart in your heart and give him, in other words, the place that belongs to him exclusively.

And, of course, his thing in your heart means inwardly. This is where our holiness of life begins anyway.

And although he's not dealing so specifically with holiness of life, it, of course, is part of the whole picture that he's drawing for us here. And that's really essentially where holiness begins, in the matter of our hearts.

[10 : 28] And when he says heart here, he's not just talking about one aspect of our inner being. He's talking about the whole of it. You sanctify Christ the way you use your mind, the way you apply your intellect.

You sanctify Christ in regard to your conscience. You let him be the Lord of it, not human beings, not any other authority, but him. You sanctify him in terms of your emotional life.

How you actually exercise yourself emotionally. What your reaction is to certain things that happen in your life. You actually set him up as Lord in your heart with regard to your will.

You are not actually dictated by your own will and what you might think best. You are under his Lordship. It's so important that we actually bring that before us in the words that he's using.

In your hearts, set Christ apart as Lord. In other words, there is no aspect of our life as Christians in which his Lordship does not apply.

[11 : 45] And because there is no aspect of our life in which his Lordship does not apply, when you sanctify him, when you set him apart in your heart as Lord, you are effectively saying, I want my whole life to be lived under your Lordship.

You are effectively saying, Lord, if I depart from this setting apart of you as Lord in my heart, please tell me, because I do not want to be dominated or governed by any other Lord but you.

Set him apart in your hearts. Now that's something your conscious offers.

You prepare for a communion. You remember the Lord's death till he come. And as you do so, you come to that table not confident in anything that you are doing.

not confident in the way in which you have set him apart in your heart as Lord as if that were perfectly done on your part. Not confident that you are now so holy that you deserve to be at that table.

[13 : 02] You come and you say, Lord, I have sanctified you in my heart. I'm still a sinner. I still need your acceptance, your help with my sin, with my failures, with my lapses, with everything that I know I'm conscious of in the failures of my life.

But as I've sanctified you in my heart, take me also as I come to your table and give me to see how perfect you are and how perfect your Lordship is over everything in my life.

Sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart. There are four very simple words that you could say really encapsulate for us everything that Peter is actually saying here and that he goes on to say as well.

Admit, submit, commit, and transmit. Sanctifying Christ in your heart as Lord means you admit to him.

Your sin, your need of cleansing, your need of his forgiveness, you admit that to him. You admit what you are. You admit your need of this Christ as your savior, of his righteousness, to give you acceptance before God, of his spirit to help you on the way through your Christian life.

[14 : 32] You admit. And you submit. You can't come to Christ as Lord and come to receive him and to set him apart in your heart as Lord of your life without that including a submission to him.

Submitting to the Lord is one of your chief ways of acknowledging that this is what is happening in your heart. that you have come to actually let him be the Lord of your life willingly as he himself has revealed himself to you.

And sometimes we find it difficult to submit everything to him, don't we? Including the step of coming to the Lord's Supper. Including that which we know is his command and yet we feel that either we're not ready or something or other is still in the way and so we let it pass.

If Christ is everything to you, if you know tonight that he's perfect and you are perfectly persuaded of that, that he is perfect for you and fits your need, then being at the Lord's table at the Lord's Supper is a means of feeding that confession and that commitment and that submission to Jesus that's in your heart.

And if you're here tonight and you've not yet taken that step and it's your desire to do so and you love him but you're afraid, think of what Peter is saying, don't have that fear, don't be afraid.

[16 : 20] Instead, sanctify him as Lord in your heart and say tonight, Lord, this may be the last thing that I need to do for you in this world.

This may be the last thing I need to do in terms of obedience to make my commitment to you complete and help me to do it. To take that step in submission to your Lordship.

Let your Lordship come to actually apply to this part of my life as well as every other one. Admit, submit, commit.

That means your daily action of committing your life to him. Committing your day to him. Committing all the events of the day to him.

Seeking him for each and every day as it goes by. And then there's transmit which really means to let his love and his grace and his saving of you be made known.

[17 : 24] And that's what he goes on to say here as well in the second part of the passage. That transmission of the hope that is in you or a reason for it from those who ask.

Now it's this outward telling of our Christian lives. So there's the inward sanctifying of Christ as Lord in our hearts. And then that leads straight into this outward telling of our Christian hope.

And there are two things in that. He first of all tells us what we are to do in verse 15 and then verse 16 how we are to do it or the spirit or manner in which we are to do it.

What are we to do? Well he says this very interesting he puts it this way always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

In other words that's where it begins in this context somebody comes and asks you for a reason of the hope that is in you. And it's understandable how that would be the case in the circumstances of these persecuted and afflicted Christians.

[18 : 35] People would see them standing fast. People would see them following Peter's direction here not being afraid and suffering for righteousness sake. and some at least would probably be prompted to say what is this about you people?

What is this about you continuing with your hope that you're expressing in your life? Why is it that you are this way? Tell me something about what moves you what makes you tick.

Why is it that when you suffer all these things for the sake of this Jesus that you're confessing why is it instead of being deflected that you just continue in your love and in your following offer?

And what he's saying is be prepared to make a defense to anyone. Now the word defense is possibly not the best translation.

It really is a word which means a reasoned or an argued explanation. It's really just an explaining of or a setting out of your Christian faith or your Christian hope as it is here.

[19 : 49] Give them a reason for the hope that is in you. It's a word from which we get that exercise of something you get to know very quickly when you get to seminary or to Divinity College called it's an exercise called apologetics.

And apologetics really has to do with in a way the defense of the faith but it's in a way that sets the Christian faith out to those that actually may not be vehement opponents of it but on the other hand may be as well.

So in every aspect wherever the Christian faith needs to be either defended or explained or set out in that way that's what Peter is getting at. But he's not just saying this is a professional thing this is something just for an elite group of people he's not saying this is something just for your leaders this is just as if this was just something for divinity students or for ministers or for elders or for maybe some gifted people who are good at theology or know their Bible so much that they're able to actually instantly go to whatever this or that is in the Bible he's talking to ordinary Christians he's saying to people who may not be confident in themselves and who are yet suffering for their faith and having to give this reason of the hope that is in them instead of being afraid he says and having sanctified Christ as Lord in your hearts be ready to do this in other words it's something that you need to be thinking of a lot it's not just when the situation comes up that you and

I need to think about making our apology or our defense or our explanation giving a reason of the hope that is in us a good way of doing it is to begin with yourself say it to yourself tell yourself why Jesus is precious to you tell yourself what he means to you tell yourself about this hope that's come into your experience where this hope has come from why you are holding to it why this hope that you have is attached to eternal things how it operates by daily coming as it should be at least although we all I'm sure like myself come very short in this respect to actually take the promises of God and study them and apply them and live by them and that feeds your hope self just as you find time every day and take time to do it I'm saying that as someone who finds all too little time to this sort of thing and that's the danger of caution in preaching that we often say things to people that we're guilty of not doing ourselves however that's the scripture and that's the exercise that this is really setting before us when you've done that and when you really have done that consistently then you see you're going to be in a position if somebody comes to you and ask you tell me about this hope that you're talking about as a

Christian what do you mean by this hope why is it different to the hope that people who are not Christians have how is different to that ordinary hope where does Jesus come into this and if you've been doing that to yourself and saying this to your own soul as the psalmist for example in psalm 103 he's talking to himself it's not a sign of somebody who's started to lose his mind he's talking inwardly to himself and saying oh my soul bless the lord don't be forgetful of all the benefits that he has bestowed upon you he's reflecting he's studying he's looking at how God has dealt with him and that's how then Peter is saying you give this explanation or defense to anyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you and please remember that's not something that most people feel qualified for you don't have to be able to put things together very skillfully with words you don't have to have a great insight into theology you don't have to have the kind of mind that is really analytical and able to incisively look at different parts you don't have to have a great memory even though it helps what you need is a conviction that you love the

[24 : 49] Lord and that when somebody asks you a reason for the hope that is in you in very simple terms that's all it need take you tell them why he's precious to you why this hope is in you and what it means and where it's going to take you and so on but he says be always ready then prepared to make this defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you so sanctify the Lord in your hearts instead of being intimidated or in any way afraid of your opponents do this and then be ready to give this defense and I think the two things are related it's really although he doesn't specify it or mention it explicitly it's really in terms of our Christian experience something that you will find that the more you set

Christ apart as Lord in your heart the more you are doing that and all that's entailed in that actually the more you're building up an ability to reason to give an account an explanation of the hope that is in you and then he says secondly how we are to do that do it he says with gentleness and respect gentleness is a word that's used of Jesus you remember his famous words in Matthew 11 although he uses it also a related word in the beatitude blessed are the meek same word but same idea translated there as meek and in Matthew 11 where he said come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek I am gentle and lowly in heart you don't get very far at all by trying to be insensitive or uncaring or just bullish when you're dealing with opponents of the gospel what you and

I need is to try and cultivate more of this Christ like spirit more of the spirit of Christ that put up so patiently with misunderstandings of who he was and of what he was saying that came to show his very disciples an example of how to deal for example a Syrophenician woman who came to him and pleaded with him to come and help her with the devil that was in her daughter and his disciples immediately responded send her away she's crying after us she's a bit of a nuisance we don't know what to do with her and then you read about how Jesus dealt with her and how tenderly and how patiently and powerful he did so well that's the pattern for our evangelism for our witness for our explanation of this hope that is in us as well do it with sensitiveness with tenderness with gentleness and also he says here with respect it's really literally the word fear which sometimes can mean the fear of

God but it looks here as the best translation here really would be that word respect and here in the ESV do it with respect in other words even if you vehemently disagree with the person who's asking you a reason for the hope that is in you of what they believe and disagree with their manner of life or their lifestyle treat them with respect even if you don't at all respect their point of view in terms of complying with it or accepting it as valid remember that everyone has the right in human terms I'm not talking about the right in terms of what God says is and isn't right but everyone really has the right to believe what they believe and to be treated respectfully even if what they believe is very different to the

Christian gospel do it he says with gentleness and with respect why so that those who slander you those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame having a good conscience as well as this so that those who slander you may be put to shame the Bible speaks about shame in different ways it says that our hope which we are giving an account of will never be put to shame will never come to no disappointment or crushing defeat but that's what he's saying here for those who slander you that they may be put to shame and perhaps he's thinking there too of them being put to shame so that they will actually give a proper place in their minds and in their thinking to this

[30 : 26] Christian faith that you've explained to them but in any case he's saying do it having a good conscience the Christian is not a double agent not somebody who is working for Christ and then secretly an agent for the other side do it with a good conscience keep sanctifying Christ as Lord in your heart which involves your conscience don't give in to double standards don't be tempted to actually take part of what these opponents themselves set before you and want you to live by how we are to do it gentleness respect having a good conscience being transparent so that those who slander you revile your good behavior may be put to shame we always want to see people converted to

Christ and we have far far better hope of seeing it by dealing with them the way Peter sets out here than by trying to bully them or argue them by our own impatient arguments into the kingdom of God it's so that they will be put to shame that they will come and see well maybe you're right and I'll go and think about what you said and hopefully that will lead to something else may God bless his word to us let's conclude