

1 Peter 3:14b–17

Introduction

Last week, we saw that as Christians living in this world, we're never to have a "martyr complex." Yes, we are always to take up our cross and follow Jesus, but it's also always our goal to overcome evil with good. There's a sense in which we always live in such a way as to make persecution and mistreatment the least likely of a reality as it can possibly be. We need to balance a perfect biblical "pessimism" with a perfect biblical "optimism." So Peter writes: "Now who is there to persecute or mistreat you—*if* you are zealots for what is good? But even if you should suffer **for righteousness' sake**, you are blessed." And now Peter goes on to explore this possibility more fully. What if we are slandered, falsely accused, or mistreated truly and only for righteousness' sake – having only, ever been zealots for doing what is good? What then? Peter begins his answer in the second half of verse 14:

I. 1 Peter 3:14b — The fear of them do not fear and do not be dismayed...

Now why do you think Peter talks like this ("The fear of them do not fear")? Even in Greek, that's a very strange and awkward way to say what he could have said far more simply, like this: "Do not fear them and do not be dismayed." So why not the simple and straightforward way? Why this awkward expression: "The fear of them do not fear?"

The answer to this question is that Peter is quoting yet again from his Old Testament Scriptures – basically word for word. In the days of Ahaz, king of Judah, the people were living in fear of two kings just to the north of them. Pekah, the king of Israel, and Rezin, the king of Syria, were threatening to attack Judah and replace Ahaz with a king who would share their own political agenda. Because of Judah's terror of these two kings, Ahaz and the people were putting their trust in an alliance with Assyria, hoping that he would save them. So, it's against this backdrop that the word of the Lord comes to Isaiah and all the faithful believers in Judah:

➤ Isaiah 8:12b [LXX] — The fear *of them* [of Ahaz and the rest of the people] do not fear and do not be dismayed.¹

In other words, "The fear that this people has—*their* fear of these two kings of Israel and Syria—*you* do not fear, and do not be dismayed! Don't be afraid of the things that *they're* all afraid of!" You see, in Isaiah, this language makes perfect sense. It's not strange or awkward at all. But now when Peter quotes this verse, *he's* not saying, "Don't be afraid of the things that they're afraid of." When Peter uses this same language, "the fear *of them*" is not *someone else's* fear that we're not to share (as it is in Isaiah); instead, "the fear *of them*" is just *our own* fear of *our own*

¹ Isaiah 8:12b [LXX] — τὸν δὲ φόβον αὐτοῦ οὐ μὴ φοβηθῆτε οὐδὲ μὴ παραχθῆτε (lit. "The fear of them do not fear and do not be dismayed") The antecedent of the singular *αυτου* is *ο λαος* (this people) and so its sense is plural. (Similarly, in the Hebrew)

1 Peter 3:14b — τὸν δὲ φόβον αὐτῶν μὴ φοβηθῆτε μηδὲ παραχθῆτε (lit. "The fear of them do not fear and do not be dismayed") Peter changes the singular *αυτου* ("of him/this people") to the plural *αυτων* because he doesn't have the grammatically singular antecedent that Isaiah does.

persecutors – “The fear of them [of those who would persecute and mistreat you] do not fear.” And suddenly, even though the meaning and message of Peter is ultimately the same as Isaiah, the language feels significantly more awkward than when we read the exact same language in Isaiah.

So why does Peter do this? Why doesn't he change the grammar to fit his own context a little better? Do you know what the answer is? It's because he wants us to know that he's rooting his own authoritative message here in this verse in the previous authoritative message of the Old Testament Scriptures. Peter could have said more simply, “Do not fear them and do not be dismayed,” but in quoting Isaiah exactly he's compelling us to see how his own apostolic, authoritative and inspired message is even grounded in the previous authoritative and inspired message of God's covenant word to His covenant people in the Old Testament Scriptures. Once we understand that Peter's quoting Isaiah, and once we understand the message and context of Isaiah, then the “awkward” language of Peter actually becomes crystal clear; in fact, now it's even doubly confirmed in our hearts as the very word of God to us both through the prophet Isaiah and now, again, through the Apostle Peter.

Brothers and sisters, where is the ground and the foundation and the authority, and so also the strength, and the power, and the joy for our living of all of life – for our thinking, and our feeling, and our words, and our actions? It's all here in this book – in the “inscripturated,” covenant word of God to us, His people. So how, then, should we delight to be always grounding ourselves in that Word? If Peter loved to ground even his own authoritative, apostolic message in the prior authority of the Scriptures, how much more should we rejoice to root all of our thinking and feeling and speaking and living in the firm and powerful foundation of God's covenant word to us? Always remember that you don't come here to listen to me, or to any other who ever stands behind this pulpit, but only in order that we may understand, **BY GRACE** and **BY FAITH**, the full counsel of this word of God.

Now, of course, none of this is actually the main point of Peter here in this verse. It's just a lesson that was impressed upon me by the fact that Peter talks so “awkwardly” – “only” so he can preserve more fully a quotation from Scripture. This, to me, is a beautiful and a powerful and an encouraging thing.

But what *is* Peter's main point? It's just this: We're not the first of God's people to ever be threatened or face the temptation to fear. What was the word of God to His people in the days of the prophet Isaiah when all around them were living in fear of the two kings of Israel and Syria? “The fear of them do not fear [do not fear what they fear] and do not be dismayed.” And what was God's word to the Christians in Asia Minor who were facing threats in the days of Peter? The Apostle Peter quotes Isaiah: “The fear of them do not fear [do not fear those who threaten or mistreat you] and do not be dismayed.” And what, then, is the word of God to us today, in 2018, whenever we may feel the threats of others to persecute or mistreat us for righteousness' sake? It's the *same* word that He spoke through the prophet Isaiah, and so also the *same* word that He spoke hundreds of years later through the Apostle Peter: “The fear of them do not fear and do not be dismayed [do not be troubled or afraid].” Are you hearing and listening to this word of God by faith? Fear always leads to sin. Fear always leads to compromise. In the case of King Ahaz and Judah, it led them to make an alliance with Assyria, ultimately putting their hope and trust in

men. Fear always leads to an inability to act and to truly live for God with a joyful obedience. And so God's people are never, ever, ever to be ruled or controlled, or in any way determined by fear. **This** is **God's** word – **to us**. And for us, there's a power and a strength to obey just in this – just in the command. It's a command, but, of course, it's more than that – it's also wonderful good news. But now Peter goes further and gives us this key to overcoming fear.

II. 1 Peter 3:15a — The fear of them do not fear and do not be dismayed, **but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord...**²

Let's all just stop here and ask ourselves the question: In my heart, am I daily sanctifying Christ as Lord? To sanctify Christ as Lord means that I'm bowing to Him, confessing and acknowledging Him as *my* King—and not only as *my* King, but even as the sovereign ruler over all human beings and over all the world. I think that's worth repeating. To sanctify Christ as Lord means that I'm bowing to Him, confessing and acknowledging Him as *my* King—and not only as *my* King, but even as the sovereign ruler over all human beings and over all the world. Do we realize the full implications of what we're saying? I wonder how often we're good with sanctifying Christ as Lord until we don't want to do what He says. But then were we really ever truly sanctifying Him as Lord? Peter's still *quoting* from the Old Testament Scripture, here, where the Lord says through Isaiah:

➤ Isaiah 8:12b–13a [LXX] — The fear of them do not fear and do not be dismayed. [And then he goes on to say:] The Lord [Heb. *Yahweh*], He is the one you shall sanctify...³

So the first thing we notice is that in quoting this verse, Peter identifies the Lord (*Yahweh*) as Christ (“but... sanctify Christ as Lord”) How do *we*, living today under the New Covenant, sanctify *Yahweh*, the God of the Old Testament? We sanctify *Yahweh* by actually sanctifying Christ *as* *Yahweh* – as the only exalted Lord and King over all.

But the second thing we notice is that Peter adds the words, “in your hearts.” This would have certainly been assumed in Isaiah, but Peter wants to emphasize this and bring it out to the forefront. For Peter, our heart is the place of our deepest and most strongly held convictions. It's the control room that determines all that we are and the entire course of our lives. So, already, Peter has said in chapter one:

➤ 1 Peter 1:22 — Love one another earnestly **from the heart...**

And then in chapter three, to the wives:

➤ 1 Peter 3:4 — Let your adorning be the hidden person **of the heart...**

² The Greek word order is, “but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.” The danger in English is that we might connect “in your hearts” only with “Lord” rather than with the entire preceding clause, yielding a very individualistic and privatized interpretation of Christ's Lordship (“He is Lord in my heart”). The point, for Peter, is that *in our hearts*, we are to sanctify Christ as the universal and sovereign Lord over ALL.

³ Isaiah 8:13a [LXX] — κύριον αὐτὸν ἀγιάσατε (lit. “The Lord, he is the one you shall sanctify”) 1 Peter 3:15a — κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν (lit. “Lord [the] Christ you shall sanctify in your hearts.”) The article with Χριστὸν indicates that “Christ” is the “controlling” word (Christ as Lord)

And now he writes: “**In your hearts** sanctify Christ as Lord.” As one commentator says, “The call is for more than an intellectual commitment to truth about Jesus, but for a deep commitment to him.” (Davids) And another one writes: “We must confess God’s lordship with more than mental assent. We must confess it with our heart’s devotion.” (Clowney) There is a difference, isn’t there? A big difference. Even a difference with eternal ramifications. So let’s stop, now, and ask ourselves again: In my heart, am I daily sanctifying Christ as Lord? In that hidden place of my heart—of my innermost being—am I bowing to Him, confessing and acknowledging Him as my King—and not only as *my* King, but even as the sovereign ruler over all human beings and over all the world?

So, now do you see the true power of this? Do you see what God is saying to us through Peter?—and not only through Peter, but through the Old Testament Scripture that Peter quotes? When we are truly, in our hearts, sanctifying Christ as Lord, there’s literally no longer any room—any place—in our hearts for the fear of men. The fear of men—even of those who would persecute and mistreat us—is displaced and completely overwhelmed by the deepest, innermost conviction of our hearts that Christ is Lord – and He is Lord over all. Peter assumes that we all know the context of the Scripture in Isaiah where the Greek translation continues with these words:

- Isaiah 8:13b–14a [LXX] — The fear of them do not fear and do not be dismayed. The Lord, He is the one you shall sanctify; **He shall be your fear. And if you trust in Him, He will be to you a sanctuary...**

The key to responding rightly to the threat of any kind of suffering—to insults or slander or mistreatment—the *key* to responding rightly to these things is to be truly, in our hearts, sanctifying Christ as Lord. How is this the key? In the first place, this will enable us never to fear and never to be dismayed. That’s the “negative” side. But then there’s also this positive side of our response to suffering – to those who would insult us or slander us or mistreat us for righteousness’ sake:

III. 1 Peter 3:15b — The fear of them do not fear and do not be dismayed, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord, **always being ready to make a defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you.**

I want to read those words again with a couple of words added so we see clearly what Peter is saying: “In your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord, **so that(!)** you will always be ready to make a defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you.” What is the key to our verbal witness and testimony? What is the key to our telling to others the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? It’s not brains and smarts. It’s not schooling and studying. It’s not having all the “right” answers. It’s just this: that in our hearts we are always sanctifying Christ as Lord – Lord over us, and Lord over all. Now this assumes that we know the message of Christ—that we know what the true Gospel of Jesus Christ is—but the point here is not that we know it only intellectually as one side of an argument, but rather that we know it as the deepest and innermost and most strongly held conviction of our hearts – because after all **our confession of the Gospel is our confession of Christ as Lord.**

When Peter says, “always being ready to make a defense,” the Greek word for “defense” is “*apologia*” which is related to our English word “apologetics.” When we hear the word “apologetics” some of us get excited and most of us probably get scared. But it’s possible that both of those responses (the scared response *and* the excited response) are only the result of not understanding what biblical apologetics really is.

In the first place, biblical apologetics always assumes the context of suffering and persecution – of being brought to trial (whether literally or figuratively) for our Christian faith. In other words, it’s not standing on a platform in front of an audience and politely going back and forth with the atheist or the Muslim with timed answers and responses. That’s not biblical apologetics. Neither is it debating with the Jehovah’s witnesses or the Mormons at our front door. Neither is it going out to someone else’s front door or reasoning with our unsaved neighbor, or co-worker, or family member about the Gospel. All of these things are certainly good (or, at least, they *can* be good), but none of these things are what we should call *biblical* apologetics. Why? Because biblical apologetics always assumes the context of suffering and persecution – of being made to stand trial (whether literally or figuratively) for our Christian faith.

The context, here in Peter, is explicitly suffering and persecution. So, the NIV says that we’re to be ready to give an “answer” to anyone who “asks.” But there’s a difference between the prosecution *asking* a question of the defendant and the student *asking* a question of his teacher. In other words, what Peter has in mind here is not the Christian who *answers* the question he’s been *asked* by a sincere inquirer into the Christian faith, but rather the Christian who’s *answering* the attacks and interrogation of the prosecution. So, instead of “asks,” it’s probably better to translate: “demands” or “requires” (as in the prosecution demanding an answer from the defendant; cf. Luke 12:48; 23:23; Acts 3:14; 13:21; 1 Cor. 1:22; NRSV). And instead of “give an answer,” it’s definitely better to translate, “make a defense” (as in the accused making his defense before the prosecution). Paul uses this word twice in Philippians chapter one:

- Philippians 1:7, 15–16 — It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my **imprisonment** and in the **defense** and confirmation of the gospel... Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here [**in prison**] for the **defense** of the gospel.

When the Jews had slandered and falsely accused Paul and even attempted to kill him, Paul responded:

- Acts 22:1 (cf. 2 Tim. 4:16; Acts. 25:16) — Brothers and fathers, hear the **defense** that I now make before you...

In fact, the Greek word *apologia* **only** appears when a person has been accused and is either literally or figuratively standing trial before his accusers. (1 Cor. 9:3; 2 Cor. 7:11) So finally, where the NIV says that we’re to be always ready to give an “**answer**” to anyone who “**asks**” us to give a “**reason**” for the hope that is in us, it’s more helpful to translate like this: “always being ready to make a **defense** to anyone who **demands** from you an **accounting** for the hope that is in

you.”⁴ (cf. Mat. 12:36; Luke 16:2; Acts 19:40; Rom. 14:12; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 4:5; NRSV; NASB)

But now we might have a question. Why would the world want to put us on trial for our hope? Why would the world ever demand an accounting for our hope? The answer is that Peter isn't describing things from the world's perspective (the perspective of the prosecution), but rather from our perspective as the defendants. (cf. Goppelt) The world wouldn't say that they're accusing us for the hope we have – of course not! But we know that all our refusal to conform to the ways of the world and all our pursuit of the righteousness and holiness for which we're slandered and mistreated (cf. 1 Pet. 4:3-5)— we know that this is just the expression and the living out of our hope – our hope that we have set fully on the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

➤ 1 Peter 1:13–16 — Therefore, having girded up the loins of your mind, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, not being conformed to the lusts of your former ignorance; but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

So, while the world may not think that they're accusing us for our hope, this is exactly how we *do* see it, and how we *must always* see it. (cf. Acts 23:6; 26:6-7, 28:20) It's not about us being anti-social or “holier than thou.” And it's certainly not about a dry set of doctrines that we're willing to argue about all the way to the stake. No! It's always all about our hope.

Are you beginning to see that the key to biblical apologetics is not brains and smarts? It's not schooling and studying. And it's not having all the “right” answers. The key to biblical apologetics is simply having a hope set firmly on the grace to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. It's this hope that will loose our tongues and teach us what to say. When Peter says that we're to be always “ready,” he's not talking about a studied readiness or an intellectual readiness. He's talking about a spiritual readiness – the readiness that we will all have whenever we are truly, in our hearts, sanctifying Christ as Lord. It's in this sense, then, that we are all, always, to be “ready.” Are you ready? Are you without fear? In your heart, have you sanctified Christ as Lord?

Once we understand these things, then we'll understand what the content of our defense—what our “accounting”—is to be. It's not eloquent speech or fancy arguments; it's rather the “foolishness” of Christ crucified and buried, and resurrected from the dead, and ascended into heaven as Lord over all, and now also coming again as judge of the living and the dead – all in fulfillment of what the Scriptures said beforehand must come to pass and now what the Scriptures have proclaimed have come to pass.⁵ (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1-5; Acts 17:16-34) Whatever other arguments we may have and however eloquent we may otherwise be, this is our defense. This is

⁴ **Contra** the NLT (cf. NCV; NET): “And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it.”

⁵ “For the Christian faith, a strong offence is the best defense; indeed, it is the only defense. Christians defend their faith by proclaiming the gospel, declaring the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the plan and power of God.” (Clowney)

the Christ that in our hearts we have sanctified as Lord. This is our only accounting for the hope that is in us. We have, and know, no other.

So, in light of these things—since Peter is calling us to a spiritual readiness and to a defense that’s nothing more than a faithful accounting for the hope that we have—how could we possibly be surprised to hear what Peter says next?

IV. 1 Peter 3:15c-17 — The fear of them do not fear and do not be dismayed, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord, always being ready to make a defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; **yet do it with meekness and fear,⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.**

Most of verses 16-17, I’m not going to actually comment on this morning because we really did that already last week. Peter knows that when we’re being slandered and mistreated and put on trial because of our Christian faith, the temptation can be to respond with arrogance and in a fleshly way. But if we’re truly spiritually “ready,” and if our defense is nothing more than the proclaiming of the Lordship of Christ, can you see how responding in arrogance and in the flesh becomes a literal impossibility? Instead, even in our bold and fearless defense, we’ll always be characterized by meekness and humility because we ourselves are always bowing before the Lord. In fact, what Peter’s really saying is that it’s precisely this meekness and humility as we ourselves are bowing before the Lord that gives us our real boldness and makes us always ready.

Conclusion

Even the “lowliest” and most “uneducated” Christian can be always fearless and always ready. Have we truly, in our hearts, sanctified Christ as Lord? Peter’s been speaking of “apologetics” – of making a defense to anyone who demands an accounting for the hope that is in us. But all that Peter has said certainly applies equally to our being “always ready” for *any* opportunity to proclaim the deepest and strongest conviction of our hearts – the Lordship of Christ. Through our witness, may God be pleased to bring others—even our persecutors—to a genuine, saving faith in Him.

⁶ As will be seen below, I interpret both of these words first of all in the light of the believer’s relationship to God and secondarily (but also necessarily) in light of the believer’s relationship to his persecutors (“meekness and fear” before God versus “gentleness and respect” toward others). I have argued that throughout Peter’s letter he always speaks of “fear” as the fear of the Lord (see messages on 1 Pet. 1:17; 2:17, 18; 3:2) – otherwise forbidding the fear of men (cf. 1 Pet. 3:6, 14). It then seems arbitrary to say that the second word (“fear”) has to do with our relationship with God while the first word (“gentleness”?) has to do with our relationship with men.

⁷ “Put to shame” does not mean inflicting emotional humiliation on someone. Instead, it refers to the “embarrassment” and “disappointment” of having one’s accusations proved to be groundless. It’s not an emotional humiliation, but rather the natural subjective response to a factual and “fair” defeat. (cf. Luke 13:17; 2 Cor. 7:14)