

1 Peter 3 (14-15) – Honoring Christ in Your Heart

Fear, faith, persecution, suffering, and courage; those words can bring up a host of feelings and ideas. Peter has been saying that your faith can triumph over your fear, most specifically your fears about having to suffer for righteousness' sake. First, he said not to fear people because they cannot harm you in the ultimate sense (vs.13). And now he provides a reassuring promise. He says that even if people do harm you in the immediate sense, you will be blessed.

So how are God's people blessed when they are suffering for righteousness? The Greek word used for blessed here can also be translated as happy. But when we suffer our situation may not be very happy in the moment, and Peter is pointing to something greater than that. He is talking about the fact that believers are privileged and honored.

There is a lot of confusion about suffering for God's sake. There are some who want to simply ignore the reality of suffering. And there are others that say that if you just have enough faith that you won't suffer. But suffering for God's sake doesn't necessarily indicate a lack of faith; it may indicate the presence of faith. It is not as if faith will make the suffering go away, but that faith can make your fear of suffering go away, in a sense. Notice vs.14, 17 and 1 Peter 4:19. Acts 5:40-42 – *and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.* In Philippians 3:10, the Apostle Paul talks about fellowship with Jesus through suffering. In Matthew 5:10-12, Jesus says, *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”* Even if you must suffer, remember whose footsteps you are following. You suffer for righteousness' sake and it brings glory to God. And you will be rewarded in eternity for it. When you suffer for the sake of Christ, it demonstrates that you are privileged in God's purpose and God will honor you.

Now of course this is about suffering for doing what is right, for the sake of Christ. This is not about suffering for doing what is wrong, or for your own sake. But when you are indeed suffering for righteousness' sake, you are to regard it as a privilege to represent God. You are modeling the way, the truth, and the life of your Master. This must be your mindset if you want to know the blessing that Peter is talking about. In the midst of suffering your situation might not be very happy, but you can still be full of joy, knowing God's gracious presence, peace, and power in a special and experiential way (cf. 1 Peter 1:6-9, 2:19, 3:14, 4:12-14, 5:10).

Have no fear of them, nor be troubled – Christians are to fear the Lord, they are not to fear people or be afraid of the things that cause other people to fear. Peter is applying a passage from Isaiah 8:12-13 to his discussion about faith triumphing over the fear of persecution. But this might be lost on some people, because they don't think that they are being ruled by fear when they actually are. The truth is that people often fear this suffering far more than they might believe they do. And you might not think that you fear suffering persecution for righteousness' sake. But perhaps that is because you are looking at persecution in terms of beatings,

imprisonment, or martyrdom. You need to remember that while it was going to get worse for some of Peter's original audience, he was talking in the immediate sense about harmful words directed to them or said about them (vs.16).

Peter is talking about more than physical abuse. There are other types of persecution that may come about because of living for Christ, and these are what we fear. We fear being excluded, rejected, isolated, and marginalized. We fear being insulted, slandered, held in suspicion, being gossiped about, and mocked. Maybe it's why we don't look for opportunities to evangelize (spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ) or why we don't actively witness (living the truth and testifying to the work of God in our lives). Maybe it's why young believers don't identify with Christ at school. Maybe it's why we might speak of church but we don't actually speak of Christ. Maybe it's been true of all of us. But Peter is going to show us what to do about it.

At the end of vs.14, Peter says, *"Have no fear of them, nor be troubled"*. For the Christian, having to suffer for righteousness' sake is a reality (cf. 2 Timothy 3:12). It will vary in its degree of severity and in its forms, and it will vary from time to time, place to place, and person to person. But there are people who will oppose you because they oppose Christ. Yet you are not to fear them. In John 15:18-21, Jesus says, *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me."* There are troubling situations that will come your way. Yet you are not to be troubled by them. In John 14:27, and 16:33, Jesus said, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."*

What Peter has said so far looks like this: Who is there to harm you? No one, because you are God's (vs.13). How should you feel about it? Blessed, not fearful or troubled (vs.14). Make no mistake about it, Peter, and so therefore God, is commanding you to be courageous. But how can you do that, how can your faith triumph over your fear, when that sort of courage doesn't come automatically? How can you be bold and obedient in the face of intimidation? How can you overcome the fear of being excluded, rejected, isolated, marginalized, insulted, slandered, held in suspicion, being gossiped about, and mocked? How can you avoid being troubled (which means being stirred up on the inside) by their tactics? How do you obey a command not to be afraid? How can you faithfully face the possibility of suffering, when you know in your heart that you can't possibly do it?

You must begin by submitting yourself to what God says on the subject. It is an act of faith that might not be in line with your current feelings. It is an act of your will, and it is an ongoing act of the will that requires perseverance. You know how it is, you can drive out that fear for a while, but then something else just seems to bring it all right back. You have to "get courageous" all over again, as it were. That is the part that most worries us. Not submitting in general terms, but having to submit in those intense moments, when the immediate pressure is on.

Of course, Peter understood these things too; he knows that you can feel an internal turmoil when you are misrepresented or mistreated. That's why he doesn't leave it there, at "I command you to be courageous"; he gives us an outline for action. This helps the believer to build up their courage in general terms, and also to be able to tap into that in the immediate sense.

So now this is what the passage from vs.13-17 looks like this: Who is there to harm you? No one, because you are God's (vs.13). How should you feel about it? Blessed, not fearful or troubled (vs.14). What should you do about it? Here is the outline for action (vs.15-17). Today, we will look at the first part of that outline, and discuss consecration.

but in your hearts – the inner man guides the whole man. If you want to fulfill the godly goal, to be bold for Christ, courageous in the context of suffering, fearless in the face of opposition, it must start in your heart. And Peter further explains what to do and how to do it.

honor Christ the Lord as holy – to *honor* here means to sanctify, to set Christ apart as the Lord of your life. The greatest need you have when you face fear is in your heart, and it means that you must have only one Lord there, and that is Jesus. Our greatest desire must be to please Him.

This doesn't mean having a callous disregard about how our actions affect others. This is about a holy boldness, not a hard hearted brashness. This is about being under attack for your faith, and instead of striving to placate people, you strive to please God. Jesus Christ is the object of your love and loyalty in those situations where the pressure (or possibility) of persecution is on you.

I honor Christ as my Lord, and therefore I submit myself to Him and His plan. I will honor Him as Lord even in my sufferings. He is Lord over me. He is Lord even in my difficulty. Loyal, confident submission will give you courage, boldness, fortitude in the face of a hostile society. It will secure you and you'll feel that security. The Greek word Peter uses for *honor* here is also the same word that Jesus used in Matthew 6:9 when He starts the model prayer by saying, "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name*". Peter is saying to hallow Christ as Lord in your hearts. He is to be in the supreme and unique place in your inner man. He is to be enthroned and reigning as the Holy One in your heart. Not just sitting at your side for when need you think you need Him, while you still sit on the throne. Too often, our own selfish desires, the opinion of others, worldly wisdom, and the pressure of circumstances are the lords that command us. Christ is to be enthroned and reigning.

Sanctifying Christ as Lord in your heart is the alternative to fearing people and losing courage in troubling times. You don't have fear for people, you fear the Lord, and hallow Him in your heart. You might not be able to be at peace with certain people, but the Prince of Peace can rule in your heart. Circumstances may be beyond my control, but God is still in control. God is sovereign, not situations. Situations aren't the king of my heart; Christ is the king of my heart. The situation doesn't rule, so I won't let it rule me or my actions.

You will begin to obey by first making sure that you are submitted. You can do all that vs.13-17 teach, being zealous for doing good, suffering if necessary for righteousness' sake, being fearless and courageous, being prepared to give an answer for your hope with gentleness and respect, being able to have a good conscience, and good behavior, if you hallow Christ in your heart.

This matter of “*in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy*” points to a one-time act but also an ongoing act. In other words, you’ve made the decision ahead of time, but you must also make the decision in time. Before you suffer under persecution, you need to *honor Christ the Lord as holy* in your heart. And when you are already suffering under persecution, or about to come under persecution, don’t fear, but *honor Christ the Lord as holy* in your heart.

The language suggests that this is something you have either done or not done. But the context suggests that it is something you must continue to do. In other words, this is about hallowing Christ in general terms and in specific situations. Generally speaking, if you want to overcome that fear, whatever you are afraid of, your full submission must be to His truth. Specifically speaking, when you feel the temptation in the moment, you must submit to His truth, being obedient even when you don’t know where obedience may lead you.

Peter is describing the most important factor in overcoming fear. The factor that overcomes fear is faith, yes, but it must be an active, conscious, decision making faith. And the choice that must be made in the moment is to choose Christ the Lord. How can you be courageous? Well, you have to drive out the internal turmoil that is already there. Don’t dwell on mistreatment; turn your heart to Jesus. It is a process, a building up on the inside, but then it is also a crisis, a moment where you respond in faith. You will get better at the latter as you continue to do the former. You develop courage as you hallow Christ in your heart. This is true in the overall sense, but also in the immediate sense. Hallowing Christ in your heart means you stand for Him as trusted, but also bow to Him when tested.

When it comes to the pressure of persecution, there is a sort of continuous pressure and there is also immediate pressure. The continuous pressure might be like a young man who is being constantly harassed at school by his friends because he won’t have sex with someone or he won’t take the drugs they all like. It is an atmosphere of peer pressure. The immediate pressure might be like a young man who is confronted after school by a group and told they will beat him up if he doesn’t take the drugs right now. It is a direct attack. If the young man has continued to hallow Christ in his heart, this is why he can withstand the constant harassment. As he has been built up in this, it is why he can bow his knee even as they break his body. It is only through the Lord that you can develop more courage even as you are becoming physically (and perhaps mentally, financially, or socially) more vulnerable (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Why am I afraid? What am I afraid of? What am I afraid will happen if I am obedient? Am I treating certain people as if they were the lord of my life, instead of Christ? Would I choose obedience over compromise, or will I seek the acceptance and approval of people instead of God? Would I choose loneliness with Him over companionship with sin? Am I more concerned with displeasing people or displeasing God?

Hallowing Christ in my heart means that if everyone leaves me, if everyone hates me, if everyone attacks me, I am depending on Christ as enough. I believe that He is enough to get me out of the situation, but I also trust that He is enough even if I don’t make it out of the situation (cf. Psalm 23 / Daniel 3:8-18). Whenever you are afraid, this is what is being put to the test, whether you realize it or not. Is Jesus really Lord in my life? To what extent is He actually reigning with full authority over my actions? Have I set Him apart as Lord of my heart?