

## 1 PETER 3:13-18

### **MAKE CHRIST YOUR LORD**

If you've watched the news this past week, you've seen a living illustration of the principles we learned last week in 1 Peter 3: 8, 9 not to return evil for evil, but to bless those who would persecute us. The tragic killing of young innocent schoolgirls in the Amish community in Pennsylvania has captured the attention of the nation. It was interesting to note how puzzled the reporters were at the attitudes of the Amish parents who had lost their precious children when the Amish made a point of letting it be known that they forgave the killer. And what really seemed to blow the mind of one reporter was not only that the Amish parents forgave the killer of their children, but also that the elders of the community had set up a trust fund for the three children of the murderer. That is a living illustration of what it means to bless those who have done evil to you.

Last week in 1 Peter 3:8-12, Peter told us that all Christians were to be of one mind and have compassion and love for one another; that we should be courteous, not returning evil for evil, but instead to give a blessing to those who persecute us. In so doing we will receive a blessing from God. We were also told to discipline our tongues from speaking evil against anyone. Peter tells us to turn away from evil and do good. Instead of retaliating, we are to seek peace with everyone. When Christians follow those instructions God will see their good behavior and hear their prayers. But to those who do evil, the Lord will turn away from them and not hear their prayers.

However, in spite of believers' desires to live peacefully and their eagerness to do good, persecution eventually came. Peter encouraged his readers with the fact that the right response to undeserved suffering will also result in blessing,, because when we do the right thing and suffer for it, we can be sure that God intends to use our experience for good. Christ was a perfect example of someone who did the right thing and was punished for it. He tried to bring the gift of eternal life to everyone, and rather than being grateful to Him, they killed Him. Peter presents what we should do here in verses 13-17 and then provides examples in verses 18-22.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1 Peter 3:13, 14 NLT:

*13 Now, who will want to harm you if you are eager to do good?*

*14 But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don't worry or be afraid of their threats.*

Though Satan, through physical suffering or material hardship, will try to harm those

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<sup>1</sup> Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:849

who are eager to do good, no real harm can come to those who belong to Christ. For even if suffering should occur, Christians are blessed and thus should not be frightened. Christians are not to be afraid of what the world can do to them. In fact, listen to Jesus' words in Matthew 10:28-31 NLT:

28 *"Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

29 *What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it.*

30 *And the very hairs on your head are all numbered.*

31 *So don't be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.*

Peter concluded verse 14 with a quotation from Isaiah 8:12 which calls believers to fear God rather than men.<sup>2</sup> Isaiah gave the following advice in Isaiah 8:10-14 NLT:

10 *Call your councils of war, but they will be worthless. Develop your strategies, but they will not succeed. For God is with us!"*

11 *The Lord has given me a strong warning not to think like everyone else does. He said,*

12 ***"Don't call everything a conspiracy,** like they do, and don't live in dread of what frightens them.*

13 *Make the Lord of Heaven's Armies holy in your life. He is the one you should fear. He is the one who should make you tremble.*

14 *He will keep you safe.*

These last few verses from Isaiah introduce the important spiritual principle that the fear of the Lord conquers every other fear. Peter quoted Isaiah 8 to back up his warning to the people: "you must worship Christ as Lord of your life."

As Christians, we are all faced with crises, and we are tempted to give in to our fears and make the wrong decisions. But if we have made Christ Lord in our hearts, we need never fear men or circumstances. Our enemies might *hurt* us, but they cannot *harm* us. We, however, can harm ourselves if we fail to trust God. Generally speaking, people do not oppose us if we do good; but even if they do, it is better to suffer for righteousness' sake than to compromise our testimony. Peter will discuss this in detail in 1 Peter 4:12-19. Instead of experiencing fear as we face the enemy, we can experience blessing, if Jesus Christ is Lord in our hearts. In verse 14 whereas the NLT says, "*God will reward you,*" most of the translations of verse 14 use the word "*blessed*" as for instance the NIV:

1 Peter 3:14:

<sup>2</sup> Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:850

*But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."*

Now the word translated as “*blessed*” can also be translated as “*happy*.” It

is the same word used in Matthew 5:10ff, often referred to as “*The Beatitudes*.” This is part of having unspeakable joy and being filled with glory (1 Peter 1:8).

1 Peter 3:15 NLT:

*15 Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain (answer)<sup>3</sup> it.*

When Christ is Lord in our life, His concerns become our concerns. His ways become the ways we want to live. His values become our values. When Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives, each crisis that we experience becomes an opportunity for sharing our faith in Christ with others. We are always ready to give an answer as to why we believe that Jesus is the Son of God and died for our sins so that we might have eternal life. Our English word apology comes from the Greek word that means “answer” in verse 15, but it does not mean “*to say I’m sorry*.” Rather, it means “*a defense presented in court*.” There is also a branch of study in theology called “Apologetics” which deals with defending why we believe the Bible to be the only true Word from God.

Every Christian should be able to give a carefully thought through reason for his or her hope in Christ, a reasoned defense in other words, especially in “*hopeless*” situations. Suffering unjustly for whatever reason creates the opportunity for witness when a believer behaves with faith and hope, because the unbelievers will then sit up and take notice. Again, just as we’ve seen happen in the Amish community this week.

But our witness must show humility and respect toward unbelievers. We are not to have an arrogant, superior, or know-it-all attitude. We are witnesses, not prosecuting attorneys. It’s our job to testify, not to deal out judgment or condemnation. We must also be sure that our lives are living evidence of our defense, that our lives demonstrate the reasons for our faith.

Peter did not suggest that Christians argue with lost people, but rather that we present to the unsaved an account of what we believe and why we believe it; in a loving manner. The purpose is not to win an argument but to win lost souls to Christ.

What does it mean to “*sanctify Christ as Lord*” in our hearts in verse 15? How do we make Christ the Lord in our hearts? It means we turn everything over to Him, and to live only to please Him and glorify Him. When Christ is Lord in our life, it means we have put Him in charge of every aspect of our lives: our finances, our decisions, where we live, what kind of work we do, our relationships, our families—everything. We consult Him

<sup>3</sup> Parentheses added.

for every decision. We give Him control over our tongues. We put doing the will of God before doing what we want. When Christ is Lord in our hearts, the only thing we fear is displeasing Him; we don't fear what men might do to us. We obey God's Word no matter what the consequences. It means being satisfied with nothing less than the will of God in our lives.

One proof that Jesus Christ is Lord in our lives is the readiness with which we witness to others about Him and seek to win them to Christ.<sup>4</sup>

1 Peter 3:16 NLT:

*16 But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ.*

Peter, who probably learned this the hard way himself, zeroes in on our attitude. When we talk to others about our faith in Christ, we should not be arrogant, that is, we should not act like we are better than they are, or look down our noses at them because they are "sinners." We humbly remember that we are sinners also, although we are sinners who have been saved by God's grace. A believer's testimony should not be given in an arrogant manner but **with gentleness and respect**. Christians who are not afraid of suffering unjustly are able to effectively tell others about their faith and hope in Christ. Peter may have been thinking back to the time when out of fear he refused to admit that he was a follower of Christ, doing so in words that were neither gentle nor respectful. Christians who suffer unjustly and keep a clear conscience put to shame those who ridicule their good behavior as followers of Christ. Peter encouraged his readers by repeatedly telling them that good behavior is their best defense against unjust punishment and persecution.<sup>5</sup>

In verse 16 Peter says, "*Keep your conscience clear.*" You may think of conscience as that little voice inside you that says, "*Uh, uh, uh—you shouldn't have done that*" when you've misbehaved, or "*way to go!*" when you done something right. The conscience is that internal judge that notifies us, with either approval of our actions or disapproval of them. Paul says this clearly in Romans 2:14-15NLT:

*14 Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it.  
15 They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.*

<sup>4</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Pe 3:13

<sup>5</sup> Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:850

Conscience may be compared to a window that lets in the light of God's truth. If we persist in disobeying, the window gets dirtier and dirtier, until the light cannot enter. This leads to a "*defiled conscience*" (Titus 1:15). A "*defiled conscience*" is one that has been so sinned against that it no longer is sensitive to what is right and wrong (1 Timothy. 4:2). It is even possible for the conscience to be so poisoned that it approves things that are bad and rejects what is good. The Bible calls this "*an evil conscience*" (Hebrews 10:22). A criminal may feel guilty if he "*squeals*" on his buddies, but happy if he succeeds in his crime.

Conscience depends on knowledge, which is the "*light*" coming through the window. As a believer studies the Word, he/she better understands the will of God, and his/her conscience becomes more sensitive to right and wrong. A "*good conscience*" is one that accuses when we think or do wrong and approves when we do right. It takes exercise to keep the conscience strong and pure (Acts 24:16). If we do not grow in spiritual knowledge and obedience, we have a "*weak conscience*" that is upset very easily by little things (1 Corinthians 8). That means each of us needs to read and study God's Word, the Bible, for ourselves every day so we will know God's standards for our behavior.

How does a good conscience help believers in times of trial and opposition? For one thing it fortifies them with courage because they know they are right with God and people, so that they need not be afraid. Inscribed on Martin Luther's monument at Worms, Germany are his courageous words spoken before the church council on April 18, 1521: "*Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me. Amen.*" His conscience, bound to God's Word, gave him the courage to defy the whole established church.

A good conscience also gives us peace in our hearts; and when we have peace in our hearts, we can face the battles all around us. The restlessness of an uneasy conscience can cause a person a great deal of stress so that they are unable to function at their best. How can we boldly witness for Christ if our conscience is telling us we're living outside of the will of God?

When we have a good conscience, we don't have to be afraid of what other people may know about us, say against us, or do to us. When Christ is Lord and we fear only God, we need not fear the threats, opinions, or actions of our enemies. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 118:6: "*The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?*" That's where Peter failed when he feared the enemy and denied knowing Jesus when Jesus was arrested.

In these verses Peter also made it clear that our conscience is not the only thing that helps us know what is right and what is wrong. Our words and actions must also be consistent with what the Bible teaches. A person can be involved in either doing good or doing evil. For a person to disobey God's Word and claim it is right simply because their conscience does not convict them, is to admit that something is radically wrong with their conscience. Conscience is a safe guide only when the Word of God, the Bible, is the teacher.

More and more, Christians in today's society are going to be accused and lied about. So many TV commentators and newspaper writers today condemn Christians who take a stand for morality. But you see our personal standards are not those of the unsaved world. As a rule, Christians do not create problems; they reveal them. Let a born-again person start to work in an office, or move into a secular college dormitory, and in a short time there will be problems. Christians are lights in this dark world (Philippians 2:15), and they reveal "*The unfruitful works of darkness*" (Ephesians 5:11).

Do you remember the story of Joseph and his coat of many colors in the Old Testament? After Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt, he became the steward (or the supervisor) in a governor's (Potiphar's) home. Joseph was always careful to live as God wanted him to and he refused to sin. But even so he was falsely accused and thrown in to prison. Then, also in the Old Testament, there was Daniel who was very godly and prayed three times every day. The government officials in Babylon schemed to get Daniel in trouble because his life and work were a witness against them. Our Lord Jesus Christ by His very life on earth revealed the sinful hearts and deeds of people, and this is why they crucified Him (John 15:18-25). "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*" (2 Timothy 3:12).

If we are to maintain a good conscience and keep Christ as Lord in our hearts, we must deal with sin in our lives and confess it immediately (1 John 1:9). We must "*keep the window clean.*" We must also spend time in the Word of God and "*let in the light.*" A strong conscience is the result of obedience based on knowledge, and a strong conscience makes for a strong Christian witness to the lost. It also gives us strength in times of persecution and difficulty.

No Christian should be surprised if they suffer for doing good. Our world is so mixed up that people call evil good and good evil, and claim darkness to be light and light darkness (Isaiah 5:20). The religious leaders of Jesus' day called Him "*a malefactor,*" which means "*a person who does evil things*" (John 18:29-30). How wrong people can be! Today, many of them are also calling Christians "*intolerant,*" "*narrow minded,*" and "*opposed to scientific advances*" when we assert there is right and wrong and we take a stand that respects all human life.

As difficult times come to the church, we must show Christian love. We will need one another's help and encouragement as never before. We must also maintain a good conscience, because a good conscience makes for a strong backbone and a courageous witness. The secret is to practice the lordship of Jesus Christ. If we fear God, we need not fear men. Samuel Johnson said: "*Shame arises from the fear of men; Conscience, from the fear of God.*"<sup>6</sup>

1Peter 3:17 NLT:

*17 Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong!*

<sup>6</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Pe 3:16

None of us, if we're honest, really wants to suffer. But suffering does come in life. Peter pointed out that it may be God's will<sup>7</sup> for Christians to suffer for doing good.<sup>8</sup> This, as he had told them earlier in chapter 2, verse 20, "*is commendable before God*" and so is better than deserved suffering for doing things we know are wrong (1 Peter 2:14). First Peter 3:17 is a good summary of the content of chapter 2:15, 19-20.<sup>9</sup>

These verses should change our lives if Jesus is Lord of our lives. We should never again lash out in anger and rage, never again gossip, or cheat or steal or lie, or be sexually immoral. Do you think you can handle that task? If you will, you'll glorify God and be in line for a blessing far beyond what you are capable of imagining. Now let's find out how we get the ability and strength to live like this.

1 Peter 3:18 NLT:

*18 Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.*

This verse presents three different ministries. Christ suffered, He died, and He was raised again. If we understand these ministries, we will be better able to handle suffering by remaining in the will of God and thereby glorifying Christ.<sup>10</sup> This is similar to what Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:21ff. Peter presented Jesus Christ as the perfect example of one who suffered unjustly, and yet obeyed God.<sup>11</sup>

In the previous verse, verse 17, Peter wrote about suffering for doing good rather than suffering for doing evil; and then he gave the example of Jesus Christ. Jesus was the "*just One*" (Acts 3:14), and yet He was treated unjustly. Why? Because it was God's plan that Jesus die for the unjust ones and bring them back into a relationship with God that they could not have without the perfect sacrifice by someone who had never committed a sin. He died as a substitute (1 Peter 2:24), and He died only once. Note that: He died only once—for all our sins— for all time. Now let's look at Hebrews 9:11-28 NLT which will give us a more detailed explanation of just what all this means to us:

*11 So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world.*

*12 With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.*

<sup>7</sup> 1 Peter 2:15; 4:2, 19.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Peter 1:6; 2:15; 4:16, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:850

<sup>10</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Pe 3:18

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

13 *Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a young cow could cleanse people's bodies from ceremonial impurity.*

14 *Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins.*

15 *That is why he is the one who mediates a new covenant between God and people, so that all who are called can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed under that first covenant.<sup>12</sup>*

16 *Now when someone leaves a will, it is necessary to prove that the person who made it is dead.*

17 *The will goes into effect only after the person's death. While the person who made it is still alive, the will cannot be put into effect.*

18 *That is why even the first covenant was put into effect with the blood of an animal.*

19 *For after Moses had read each of God's commandments to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, along with water, and sprinkled both the book of God's law and all the people, using hyssop branches and scarlet wool.*

20 *Then he said, "This blood confirms the covenant God has made with you."*

21 *And in the same way, he sprinkled blood on the Tabernacle and on everything used for worship.*

22 *In fact, according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.*

23 *That is why the Tabernacle and everything in it, which were copies of things in heaven, had to be purified by the blood of animals. But the real things in heaven had to be purified with far better sacrifices than the blood of animals.*

24 *For Christ did not enter into a holy place made with human hands, which was only a copy of the true one in heaven. He entered into heaven itself to appear now before God on our behalf.*

25 *And he did not enter heaven to offer himself again and again, like the high priest here on earth who enters the Most Holy Place year after year with the blood of an animal.*

26 *If that had been necessary, Christ would have had to die again and again, ever since the world began. But now, once for all time, he has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice.*

27 *And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment,*

28 *so also Christ died once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him.*

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<sup>12</sup> Requiring that they obey every one of God's laws.

In other words, Jesus suffered for being good. In fact, He suffered for being perfect. He did not die because of His own sins, for He had none (1 Peter 2:22).

In 1 Peter 3:18 the phrase “*bring you safely home to God*” means “*gain audience at court.*” Because of the work of Christ on the cross, we now have an open access to God. Paul says it this way in Ephesians 2:18 and 3:12 NLT:

*18 Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.*

Ephesians 3:12, NLT:

*12 Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come fearlessly into God’s presence, assured of his glad welcome.*

Christ’s resurrection accomplishes this for us; He is alive and so we may come boldly to His throne! This is what the writer of Hebrews wrote in Hebrews 10:19-22 NLT:

*19 And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven’s Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus.*

*20 By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place.*

*21 And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God’s house, 22 let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ’s blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.*

We also have access to His marvelous grace to meet our daily needs. Paul makes that and more perfectly clear in Romans 5:1-9 NLT:

*1 Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.*

*2 Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God’s glory.*

*3 We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance.*

*4 And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.*

*5 And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts*

*with his love.*

*6 When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners.*

*7 Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good.*

*8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.*

*9 And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation.*

When the veil of the temple was torn at the moment Christ died, it symbolized the new and open pathway into God's presence that was created by Jesus Christ.

His sinless life enraged those who pursued their own personal lusts and interests above all else. However, He did not fear these evil men but entrusted Himself to God. Christ clearly stated His purpose and committed Himself to the godly course of action. He died in mankind's place. As a result He received tremendous blessing and reward in His own resurrection and exultation.

J.M.E. Ross wrote that verse 18 is "*one of the shortest and simplest, and yet one of the richest summaries given in the New Testament of the meaning of the Cross of Jesus.*"

Next week we'll conclude 1 Peter 3 as we discover where Christ went and what He did during the time from His crucifixion to His ascension. You won't want to miss it.