

1 Peter 3:13-17

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

As we move on in our understanding of the life we must live on this earth as holy priests who have been set apart to build a holy house to offer up spiritual sacrifices, we come to a perspective setting passage that is all too practical; especially given what we will soon have to endure with the “Plan.” To get at this perspective shift, the Spirit deals with it through the seemingly customary example of unjust suffering and persecution. But the Spirit assumes we have taken seriously His prior instruction and are ready to be busy about the application. So this perspective shift comes on the heels of one who has made the decision to live as one who is set apart or holy.

The Spirit starts by asking somewhat of a rhetorical question and it is in the form of a *participle*. Hence, it should read: Who is there to continually harm you if you prove zealous for what is “*agathos*,” or good. The implication is that someone

may harm you and you may suffer, but if your life is described as harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit, and one who does not return evil for evil or insult of insult, but gives a blessing instead in retort, then it is going to be on the rare occasion that you will continually be harmed by any given person. The implication is that a Spirit ruled lifestyle will over time conquer even the nastiest of folks.

But the Spirit speaks of one who proves zealous for what is good—for that which is from God. “Prove” is in the *aorist* tense and *middle* voice. Thus, the Spirit is talking about the person whose life, from beginning to end, can be described in this manner. The Spirit is talking about the person who knows how to dig down deep and make the hard decision to love, cherish, and be passionate about what is good. Clearly, the Spirit is talking about the person who has decided to turn from evil.

But even if you should happen to suffer for the sake of righteousness, and the odds are good that you will, you are blessed. This word “blessed” however is not from the same Greek word which we studied when the Lord said we were called to inherit a (“*eulogia*”) blessing. This word (“*makarios*”) does not mean that a good word is spoken over your life; rather, it means that you are supremely fortunate, well off, and happy to the point of being elated. It seems strange that one can be supremely fortunate or elated if they are treated so unjustly; but “blessed” is an *adjective*, so it inherently describes one who suffers unjustly for doing good. Thus, I think we can understand this supernatural phenomenon as follows: if you truly turn from evil, if you are zealous for what is good, you will have such a dramatic perspective shift on this life and your experiences in this

world that by definition you will be happy, supremely fortunate, regardless of what you are practically experiencing. You will be so enthralled with the reality that you are the Lord's **beloved**, and all that it entails, that it will consume you. Nothing in this world will even truly matter anymore. You can be free from its hold; free to truly enjoy your experience here no matter what happens to you. This world will completely lose its luster in light of the glory of being a child of God who, with Jesus, will be raised up above all creation.

This may seem a little extreme and a reality that is hard for us to truly imagine; but there is a secret to this way of living which we will find in **3:15**. This secret comes from seeing as Christ sees, feeling as He feels, and knowing as He knows; it comes from the design point.

AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED. This sounds like a command from a boot camp sergeant. Come on you sissies, do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled; suck it up, keep going. You will live. Or maybe it is just the natural type of exhortation you want to give someone who has to endure unjust suffering at the hands of others when you are not the one going through living hell but you desperately want to find something to say. But I want to make note of the fact that these are not commands and this is not spoken to just "pump you up." Rather, both "do not fear" and "do not be troubled" are in the *arist passive subjunctive* which changes the whole nature of how we are to read this phrase.

The *arist* indicates that as the **beloved** this should be our way of life. We should not fear any man nor should we be troubled by what man can do to us. That sounds like a very tall order. But do you remember one of our theme verses

from **Hebrews 13:5-6**: "He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What can man do to me?" This is not just a promise; this is far beyond a promise. This is our reality. "What can man do to me?" If the Lord our God Almighty is always with us and is our helper, then we truly have nothing to be afraid of. The Lord our God Almighty makes us safe, makes us secure, and controls everything that happens in our lives. Man can do nothing against us which our Lord does not allow. Likewise, the satanic forces of wickedness can do nothing against us that our Lord does not allow. Therefore, I want you to understand that our entire lives are in His hands, which is why we should not fear their intimidation or be troubled. He has complete mastery over our lives; thus, everything, all the time, is in control. Again, this is not just a promise, this not just an experience, this is not a feeling; it is the reality of the **beloved**.

Isaiah 51:7-8; 12-15

Listen to me, you who know right from wrong, you who cherish my law in your hearts. Do not be afraid of people's scorn, nor fear their insults. For the moth will devour them as it devours clothing. The worm will eat at them as it eats wool. But my righteousness will last forever. My salvation will continue from generation to generation.

I, yes I, am the one who comforts you. So why are you afraid of mere humans, who wither like the grass and disappear? Yet you have forgotten the Lord, your Creator, the one who stretched out the sky like a canopy and laid the foundations of the earth. Will you remain in constant dread of human

oppressors? Will you continue to fear the anger of your enemies? Where is their fury and anger now? It is gone! Soon all you captives will be released! Imprisonment, starvation, and death will not be your fate! For I am the Lord your God, who stirs up the sea, causing its waves to roar. My name is the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

When we truly know who our God is and who we are to Him (the **beloved**), we will not live in fear of man or the forces of darkness, and we will not be troubled by the scorn and slander of others. What they do and say really will not matter. We will find that we live in confidence absolutely assured of the fact that the Lord of Heaven's Armies (which is of both the good and bad angels) is our helper and it is He who will continually bring salvation to our lives.

Besides, the use of the *passive* voice indicates that God is the one who will give us courage and God is the one who will give us the ability to live in confidence rather than fear. I don't know about you, but to me that is a big relief. I don't have to read this and psyche myself up to be tough and fearless. No He will be that in me and through me. So this is not a pep talk, this is actually a statement of what should be and what can be if we embrace our true identity as the **beloved** and choose to live like aliens in this world. This is a marvelous description of our living the design point: I will not fear because He does not fear. I will not be troubled because He is not troubled in the least by anything, much less by His perfect plans for our lives.

The *subjunctive* mood indicates, however, that this way of living may or may not happen; or better yet that this being your reality is contingent upon

something else. And what could that something else be? This reality, I believe, is contingent upon your owning your identity, turning from the evil in your life; being zealous for that which comes from God—that which is good; and being willing to pursue true peace at all costs. In other words, the *subjunctive* brings in the relational need for reciprocity. But please don't get confused thinking this is one big "if-then" which God holds over our heads: "If you do it right then I will do you right." Not that is not what is being communicated here. We are not to ever live in fear of doing wrong; rather, we are to live in jubilant expectation of what can be. This is a structural and relational reality that can only be properly understood through the design point: "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me."

If we put to death our flesh, if we turn from evil, if we reject our attachments to this world, if we turn from our rebellion and fight, then Jesus will practically abide in our lives as we will abide in Him. It is a relational and structural reality that is contingent upon our choices: the more I die the more He lives. But please keep in mind that He is the one who is working in you to give you both the desire to obey Him and the power to do what pleases Him. However, we are responsible to make the choice to leverage or access the desire and the power which has been freely given to us. And if we do, then there will be, by definition, more room in our soul to experience His life in ours. We will have crucified more and more of our flesh and as a consequence His Spirit will spread out and dominate more and more of territory within our soul. And since He is not afraid of their intimidation and is not troubled in the least by His own perfect plans for our lives (even if those plans include suffering and persecution), then neither will that be our

experience.

“And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled.” This is actually pulled from the book of *Isaiah*, and given what we have studied about this house that the Lord is building into a holy Sanctuary, it find it very fascinating the passage from which this quote comes.

Isaiah 8:11-14

For the Lord spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary."

The truth is that we have no reason to fear man nor the plans of man. Likewise, we have no reason to fear the enemy nor the plans of the enemy. The Lord of hosts, the Lord of heaven's armies will never leave us nor forsake us, so we can confidently say (and need to confidently say) the Lord is my helper, I shall not fear, what can man do to me. Jesus is our love and we are to regard Him as holy or as set apart; and if we truly fear the Lord, or said another way, if we truly hate evil and all that is not of God, then He will be a sanctuary. And I think this is why He is really pushing on us to be the holy priests that He has called us to be. He wants us to know Him as our only safe place, our only refuge—our sanctuary. We must keep in mind He has commissioned us, He has chosen us, to build Him a

temple as a sanctuary to honor His name. How is that for a purpose to live? Wow!

And the secret to this way of living is found in the following command: but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Now “sanctify” is in the *aorist active imperative*. Given that sanctify means to make holy, we can read this command as follows: always live as one who sets apart Christ as Lord in your heart. We must set this truth apart from all the lies and all the wrong belief and anything that might compete with this truth. He is the Lord. He is our Lord. He is my Lord. He is supreme in authority and He is the master over the details of our lives. Nothing or no one can compete with this reality. He is it; Jesus is it. And Jesus being our Lord does not change whether or not we do it right, wrong, or even if we refuse to believe Him to be so. He is the Lord! What is impacted by our understanding and acceptance of this reality is our attitude and our ability to live in this world with His supernatural provision. The person who does not truly understand and accept this truth has no peace; but they have fear and they are troubled and they do not know their blessing. It is a tragedy that the Lord wants us to avoid.

Furthermore, we are Jesus’ **beloved**; therefore, everything He plans for our lives is in accord with our relationship (that of the **beloved**) and with His nature which is love (after all, God is love, **1 John 4:16**). Therefore, we can be confident that His plans for our lives, in every last teeny, tiny detail are inherently “*agathos*” or good and are more than beautiful. For example, we tend to shudder under this threat of unjust persecution and suffering, but we can be confident that it will only happen if He allows it; and if He allows it, we can be confident that it is good, pleasing, and perfect. And this perspective shift needs to be applied to everything He approves for our lives; even the “Plan” that has been approved which we

discussed on Thursday night. It is good, pleasing, and perfect.

I love **Romans 12:2**. We are all familiar with it but we need to revisit this passage in connection with this command to set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts. It is critical that we let the implications of this verse settle all the way deep down in our hearts. We need to be transformed into our identity as aliens and strangers (we must not let the world conform us into its image). And this transformation will naturally occur by God when we let our minds be completely renewed with the truth. For if we do, then it says we will have understanding and we will know how good, pleasing, and perfect the will of God truly is. Yes, the will of God for our lives, whatever it may entail, is good, pleasing, and perfect. And if we truly understand and accept this truth, then I believe we will know what it is like to be supremely blessed, extremely well off and happy to the point of elation. How could we not be? When we experience this perspective shift, blessed will define our lives.

You see, if we let the design point be realized in our lives we will have His mind and we will see as He sees and we will be at rest. We will know without a doubt that what He has approved for our lives is good and pleasing and perfect, whether that is in life or death, suffering or even great success in this world. Think about how much stress and emotional churning we experience simply because we don't see as He sees; and, quite often, refuse to see as He sees. It is so unnecessary. And this is part of the evil from which He asks us to turn. This is most definitely a plea by the Holy Spirit for us to set down our own emotions and our own ways of thinking and live as one who is holy—completely set apart in all things.

Imagine the breadth of what is being communicated in this phrase “sanctify

Christ as Lord of your life.” We must let our souls (our mind and emotions) be transformed with the truth that as our Lord, our master, our God, His will for our lives is **good**. It is without any malice, evil, deceit, deception, and is always intended to bring life in Him. His goal is that, as His **beloved**, we become like Him and fully share His nature and embrace His wisdom for our lives. Besides, He knows us better than we could ever know ourselves; He knows how we are wired; He knows what will bring us life; He knows what will truly satisfy. And I believe He wants to bless us; He wants us to be full and content and satisfied in Him all the time. Thus, everything He plans and approves for our lives is toward these aims.

His plans for our lives are also **pleasing**. I don’t know about you, but I have fought the will of God for my life over and over again. I can say however that I have decided that I am sick of the fight. Yes, I have fought His will and I have determined, in my own glorious wisdom, that what He had planned for me was simply not good. And guess who was miserable? Me. I know I grieved the Spirit during the time that He was lovingly waiting for me to see things from His perspective; but I was absolutely miserable and without any true peace. Yet, when I dug down deep in my soul and chose to set aside my emotions and yield to His Lordship over my life and go along with His plan, I was not only ok, I learned how pleasing it is to be in His will, regardless of my circumstances. I learned how to have joy even in the midst of tragedy. In fact, being convinced that His plan is good—for me—enabled me to endure His plan all the while trusting that He would fulfill every single promise He has ever made to me. Thus, for now I can wait on the Lord believing. This perspective shift is life giving.

Similarly, you can fight His will, you can resent His will, you can even “submit”

to His will with an attitude that it is something you have to do. But that makes your experience in this life absolutely miserable. There is another way. You can embrace His plan for your life, and by faith adopt it knowing that God is fulfilling His good plan for your life trusting that His ways are always pleasing. Consider **Isaiah 26:3**, “You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!” Perfect peace sounds extremely pleasing to me. Yet, this reality is found only in trusting that His plan for your life is good and pleasing.

And lastly, His will for our lives is **perfect**. Wow that is a powerful word. What our Lord ordains for our lives is flawless, unadulterated, impeccable, and true. That means there could be no other way than what He has allowed. There could be no plan B, or C or D and there could be nothing better. He is the Lord. He knows all. He understands all. He sees all. He feels all. And He determines all things. I know it sounds extremely radical but it is true. He determines **all** things. That is why He is the “Lord.” Please understand, “Lord” is not just a title, it is a reality.

For instance, we know from **Ephesians 1:4** that He chose us before the foundations of the world that we would be set apart or holy and blameless before Him in love. Then in **Romans 8:29** we are told that those He foreknew (those He chose before time) He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son. Therefore, we can be confident that all that He have endured—even from in the womb—was ordained by God to accomplish this very purpose. That means everything in the life of a **beloved** (past, present and future) is under the loving direction of our Lord and is for the purpose of causing us to be like Him. And His plans, all of them, were, are, and always will be perfect. His plan is the best

pathway for our lives all the time.

We need to set this truth apart in our hearts and truly sanctify Christ as Lord, for all that He determines is good, pleasing and perfect. We need to make this perspective shift and subject our thoughts and emotions to this truth. We even need to honor Him for this kind of involvement in our lives; for with this truth in our souls, what do we ever truly have to worry about? Everything in our lives is to fulfill us and complete us in Him. And we know that in Him we experience the fullness of His agape love, joy, peace, and power beyond imagination—a power to live like an alien in this world. I want you to consider the following string of verses. These verses are so powerful, comforting, and mind altering.

1 Corinthians 8:6

Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, **by whom are all things**, and we exist through Him.

Acts 17:28

In Him we live and move and exist.

Romans 11:34

For **from Him** and through Him and to Him **are all things**.

All things are from Him and through Him—all things. He determines everything. That means there is not one exception. It all happens according to His plan which, as God, He has declared is good, pleasing, and perfect. So why should we fear. Nothing is ever out of control. He is so big that His plan even enfolds all the choices that He knows we are going to make (both good and bad). That is what it means when it says “In Him we live and move and exist.” We can rest in this truth and put Jesus in His proper place in our hearts. We can rest and put what He approves in the proper place in our hearts. We can rest and put our every moment in the proper place in our hearts because Jesus is the Lord. He is our Lord. He is my Lord. This is why we can (and will) sing: "Great and marvelous are your works, O Lord God, the Almighty. Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations. Who will not fear you, Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your *righteous deeds* have been revealed" (*Revelation 15:3-4*).

If you want to know peace and rest; if you want to be done with stress, worry, anxiety and the terrors that haunt your mind in the night; if you want to be done with the sting of always wondering what could have been and the futility of wishing things could have or should have been done a different way; then it is time to dig down deep into your soul and obey this command to sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart knowing always that as the Lord's **beloved** His plans for your life have been, are, and will be, good, pleasing, and perfect. I have to tell you, having the Lord's heavenly perspective is the only way to navigate the ins-and-outs of this life and experience His joy. And since it is a command, this is something we can obey. This will not be done to us; this is something we have to

choose. He has enabled us to choose, He has fully provisioned us to choose, we just need to accept this truth and go to war—all out bloody war—against anything in our soul that fights against this truth.

If you truly sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart, then the Spirit will cause you to not fear the intimidation of those who come against you and He will cause you to not be troubled by anything really. Such strength and confidence will be a fruit of your truly trusting yourself to Him and obeying the command to sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart. Please do not be fooled or deceived, if you fear and find that you are troubled by the plans which the Lord has laid out for your life, then this is an issue. Christ is not yet fully sanctified as Lord in your heart. Be strong and get to work!

Next, the Spirit gives a description of the person who has sanctified Christ as Lord in their hearts. This is not so much telling us what we must do but what we should be. I know the translation we are using says “being ready” and “to make a defense” but that is not the Greek. The verbs simply are not there. The Greek reads more as follows: but sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart always ready to answer every man who asks you for a reason for your hope, yet with gentleness and reverence. Interestingly, “always ready” is an adjective, again a description that captures one who has sanctified Christ as Lord in their heart.

I have seen this passage pulled out of context so many times and used as a catch phrase for those who study apologetics. But this is not telling you to go and learn how to argue creationism or anything like that so you can be ready just in case you run into an evolutionist. No. this is a phrase, a description, that comes off the command to sanctify Christ as Lord ready to answer the reasons for your

hope. You see in the context of suffering and unjust persecution people are not going to understand why you are not retaliating back at them; that is simply not normal. The contextual implication is that you will get the opportunity to explain to them why you don't feel the need to react with hostility just because they did it wrong. You will get the opportunity to tell them that Jesus ordained everything for your life and it is good, pleasing, and perfect; so, in reality, even though the situation may be miserable, you are ok. In other words, being ready to answer is a fruit of sanctifying Christ as Lord in your heart.

This idea of Christ truly being set apart as Lord in our heart is so powerful. It is our answer, it is our reason, it is our motivation, it is our truth, and it is our comfort. This is the testimony that needs to be given when we are questioned by others. And it says "always ready" meaning that no matter what we are going through we must not get caught off guard focusing once again on the "Me" and obsessing on our self-pity. No; we have to always be obeying the command to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts—always. And, if we do, then by definition we will be always ready to answer anyone who asks why we have hope.

And our answer should be with gentleness and reverence in accord with one who is harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit. You see we might otherwise, in our flesh, succumb to the temptation to stick it to them. Jesus is my Lord and I am His **beloved**, but you....you....you are a plague from hell itself and you will get your comeuppance. Nasty little men like you always get their comeuppance. That is probably not how the conversation should go; just saying.

You are to keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are

slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. Shame is in the *passive* which means that God will shame them for their injustice to you. You don't need to try and shame them yourself; He will take care of it. That is why you can be gentle and reverent and keep a good conscience. Your Lord God Almighty has your back and He will not let any injustice go unpunished.

But for our part, we need to keep a good conscience so our behavior will be in Christ. Thus, if they revile us for our "good" behavior, they are reviling Christ Himself. Again, this goes to the design point. And this makes it a personal fight and for their part a very dumb one to pick. Picking a fight with the Lord God Almighty is not a fight they will ever win. They may think they will win this battle if nothing happens to them right away; but even then the Lord is just biding His time. He will always prevail. This is why it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. If we are persecuted and attacked for doing what is wrong, then shame on us, but if it is for Christ living in and through our lives, then shame on them. They will be judged, they will be sealed in their consequences, and we will be blessed.

We will stop there for tonight and pick up in **3:18**.

Let's Pray