

Live Well Together

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0:00] Now can we return to 1 Peter chapter 3 and this next section of this letter of God's word, we believe that God is speaking to us through the letter that Paul writes to the Christians who are scattered around the part of the world that the gospel has spread to.

And I like us to remind ourselves as we look at the scripture passage of the verse that I read when we began the service, which is that the word of God came with power to the church in Thessalonica.

It came the word, it was not just the word but it came in the power of the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. And I would like us to remember that as we look at 1 Peter chapter 3.

The word of God is all very well preaching and teaching from the word and that could just go over our heads or we could just fall asleep or it can just be an irrelevance to our lives but we are looking for the word to come with the power of God's presence and with deep conviction.

In other words, it is moving us right deep down inside and challenging us in making us think so that you will hear the word of God today and think, God knows about my heart.

[1:21] God knows about my heart as we look at His word and as we hear what it says to us. And I think as we look at this section today, there is a key verse that really is the core verse for the whole section.

Well, I hope it is. I have taken it as the core verse. It certainly is. It is a good summary in many ways of the whole section. Peter has been speaking about living the Christian life as God's people together.

He has done it generally earlier on in chapter 2. And he has given more specific advice to people who are in employment, people who are at home, wives and husbands. We have seen all of that.

And now he comes back finally, he says, and gives more general advice to all Christians. Not that the other stuff is not relevant to all Christians anyway. But that is what we have in this section.

And verse 15 is really the key verse for the whole section where he says, but in your heart set apart Christ as Lord, not even the whole verse, but just that first sentence that we have there in your heart, set apart Christ as Lord.

[2:23] So that is really the anthem. That is the theme. That is the message of the whole of this section. And that is the spectacles through which we will be looking at this section.

In your heart set apart Christ as Lord. So that he is saying here that as Christians that is what we have done and that is what we do and that is what we are doing. We are setting apart Christ as Lord in our hearts.

His sovereignty, His authority, His, the relationship with Him is something that is at the very core of our beings. Sometimes when we think about setting something apart in our heart we think it is, well, that is just a secret between myself and myself.

It is just deep in my heart. Nobody else needs to know about it. Something just very personal to me. Now there is truth in that with our relationship with God. But that is not what Paul Peter is speaking about here.

He is speaking about here the heart, setting apart Christ as Lord of our heart, which is our very self, our very identity, our ego, our person, what we are as characters.

[3 : 32] We set apart Christ as Lord. In other words, he is saying we do not compartmentalise Him. We do not, we are not Christians some of the time and some places but wherever we are, whatever our personality is, whatever our being is, whatever our thoughts are and our character is, Christ is Lord there.

In our will, in our emotions, in our thinking, in our privacy, probably that is the best way of making challenges about it, is Christ Lord in your thought life and in my thought life, when there is nobody else around.

Are we Christians with the scaffold of everyone around us but when they go and we are on our own, is Christ Lord of our being, of our hearts, of our mind, of our thinking?

Are we in relationship with Him there? Can we speak with Him through our minds? I know it is a spiritual relationship we are speaking about there but is He in that place so that church is very significant but it is not our one hour of God a week.

It is a place where we gather together and worship and praise and fells with one another and learn but it is not that we switch Him on when we come into the building and switch Him off when we leave but He is Christ's Lord of our hearts.

[4 : 54] What is interesting here is the consciousness with which Peter is encouraging us. God is encouraging us to do that but in your heart set apart Christ's Lord.

It is a deliberate conscious act. If you think becoming a Christian which is a gift, which is a grace, which is by the power of God is something then we have no more input into and we are sadly mistaken.

We have this great and conscious responsibility, a deliberate act to set Him apart, to make Him Lord of our lives.

It is not just magic, it does not just happen, God does not zap us so that we have no responsibility but as Christians our mindset, our thinking for our lives, for our days, for our actions are that we set Him apart as Lord and it is a conscious, deliberate thing which is why we come together to look at God's Word because we hope that with the Holy Spirit and with His intervention as He applies the Word we find the Word applying to our lives with deep conviction so that we are convicted to change and convicted to make Him Lord of our hearts and motivated by His grace to do so.

So people say church is very passive, people just sit and listen to a minister rambling on for half an hour, we look, we smell dinner coming on and then we can go home. But it is not really a, spiritually it is not a passive act.

[6 : 25] Now I could have you all up the front, we could all dance a jig, you could all sit back down and we would all be participating but it would not necessarily be spiritual, it would not be spiritual activity but as we sit in our pews there is great spiritual activity as we seek to interact with God and His Holy Spirit and be convicted and be acting through response to His Word.

So as we set apart Christ's Lord, Peter here gives some examples of what it means for us in our lives out of church, away from the pew, what it means to set apart Christ's Lord and I have tried as much as I can to simplify.

There is some really difficult teaching here which I do not pretend to have the answer to but I have tried to simplify it and keep it very relevant to our lives.

What does it look like to set apart Christ's Lord? Well I think primarily it looks like doing good, not doing bad. Yeah that is very simply put, that we do good we do not do bad.

There is a lot in this section about goodness and badness and it is about how we act in our Christian lives and that is a real change. In verse 11, it is quoting from Psalm 34, the believer is someone who must turn from evil and do good, he must seek peace and pursue it.

[7:46] That is a kind of summary, there is goodness and evil spoken of quite a lot in this passage. And that is where the real change comes because we all have a concept of good and evil don't we?

And we all try to do good, that is right and we probably all have a same rough kind of idea about what is evil. But with Christ set apart in our heart as Lord we find that some of our perceptions of what is good and evil changes is redefined.

You know what God regards as evil? Probably a lot of the things that we regard as evil. But you know what he also regards as evil? How we treat him and how we treat one another.

Most of the things that are spoken of as evil by God are about the absence of love. The way we treat in a loveless and graceless way, that is, I mean we always think of what we think of evil, we think of monsters, we think of the guys in trial just now in Norway, we think of their brutality and evil and that is absolutely right.

But there is another evil which is simply, I think the word maybe has strong connotations for it, but evil is simply the absence of good.

[9:05] And the absence of God's good. And we recognise in our rejecting of God and are giving him no worship and no time in disregarding him and in rejecting him then we recognise that as being evil.

And that is distinctive. I want to move away from the idea of goody-goody goodness and move towards God's goodness.

And see that that's what is setting apart Christ's Lord. We will live lives that are good at the very deepest level because God's spirit is in us and we are reflecting the good character of God Himself.

And that will be, if it's not to you, well I can guarantee it is to me a challenge to my conscience. That is where I'm convicted.

I'm convicted because I recognise so often that the goodness that I seek to do for Christ is so poor and my ignorance of Christ is so great and so independent and selfish in so many ways.

[10:18] Now that starts in our heart, doesn't it? That desire and that longing for doing the good that is a reflection of the character of Jesus in verse 11 and 12 there.

Again quoting that, Sam, the eyes of the Lord on the righteous, his ears are attentive to their prayer, the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. And he's really speaking here about the Samus having this personal walk with God, this prayerful relationship where God's face is turned towards him.

And there's this sense of God seeing what we do and knowing our hearts and us relating to that with prayers of repentance as we see how far short we fall.

Goodness is really Godness. It's having God in our lives and God in our hearts and his character of grace at work.

So that relationship must be fundamental to us. If we are to set apart Christ's Lord in our hearts, we must be setting apart Christ's Lord in our hearts.

[11:21] And no one else can do it. It's this relationship that we are to have with God. We do business with the living God. That's what you do. That's what I do. That's what our Christian lives is. We can dress up differently but that's what our responsibility is to be in this relationship with God where we set him apart in relationship and in love, grace then begins to flourish in our lives.

And we live good in the community. It's not very good grammar, I know. But it means that we begin to live good, live God-like in the Christian community and that takes us back, I hope I'm not being disrespectful to change the order of what is there for us.

But I'm trying to focus it round verse 15. But we go back then to see that somebody of Christ's Lord working out in the Christian community verses 8 to 10, finally living harmony with one another, be sympathetic, love his brothers, be compassionate and humble.

Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult but with blessing. To this you were called. Do you feel you have a calling today as a Christian?

To this you were called to live in harmony with one another as he expresses what it means to have Christ as Lord in our hearts. I wonder if there seems to be a lot of people, not in our church but generally I think today who are very disengaged from the Christian community, they're Christian believers but they're disengaged from the community of believers, from church.

[13:00] They're uncommitted to church and to the community of believers that worship together for whatever reason.

They've been let down, they've been treated badly, maybe they feel the church is hypocritical. Lots of different reasons.

But we miss out not only on the obedience that God demands of us but also the goodness that is enjoyed and expressed in worship and in community together.

When you look at this do you think the price of grace is too high? I'm just going to be a loner. I'm just going to do it on my own. Live in harmony with one another, be sympathetic, compassionate.

Don't repay evil with evil. Do we bury his grace in the grounds of our private castle? The gifts that he gives us, the grace that he has gone to the cross to pour out into our hearts.

[14:02] Do we take that and we bury it in our own private castle and don't live it and express it and see the cost of grace in a relationship with one another?

Because if that's where we put it, it will wilt and will become hard hearted and cold. He speaks here about Christ's Lord and grace at work with the community.

He says it's harmonious living, living harmony with one another as Christians. It's a musical term. Living harmony with one another.

We had it physically, example by the parts that were being sung by those who were up the front this morning. It gives our music, it gives singing depth and variety and beauty.

And people who are singing different things sing in harmony with one another. They're not all singing the same thing. It's not singing the melody only, but it's not just singing in unison.

[15:04] It's singing in harmony so that they have different gifts and singing different notes, but it comes together and they submit to the sound towards one another and it comes out as a beautiful symphony.

Most of the time. But isn't that true of what our Christian life should be? He's saying we're not all the same.

We're not all going to take the same steps. We're not going to be exact. We're not robots in our Christian lives. We don't all think the same and act the same. We don't all have the same gifts. We're not all the same level of faith or the same maturity.

He says we're to be in harmony with one another. We're a body. We're not all the bodies, not the same part. I would be grotesque. We're all different, but we're to be in harmony with one another.

Harmonious living. And he says, oh, that sounds lovely. That sounds so beautiful. But I don't want it to sound beautiful. I want it to be beautiful together as we live our lives.

[16:09] What does he say? Don't repay evil with evil or insult with insult. Show compassion in your reactions, be Christ-like, because he's set apart as Lord.

Don't repay people with how they've treated you if they've treated you badly. Isn't that so easy to do? Isn't it what we are great at?

Do we react and respond as Christians in this community, any different as Christians would or as those who aren't Christians would?

Because there should be a specifically Christ-centered response in our lives. And I've heard hundreds of sermons preached on this subject. I've probably preached hundreds.

But I've also walked out of the pulpit and completely ignored the teaching. Oh, it's great theory.

[17:05] It's great theology. It's great reality. But it's a word. That's all it is. The Holy Spirit and deep conviction don't come into it. It's not changing who I am. And I've preached these sermons.

I've gone outside and I've been insulted and abused. I've gone outside and I've heard other people insulting and abusing one another.

Because somehow there's a disengagement, a disconnect between the word and the theory of the word. And yeah, that sounds lovely. Yeah, go back to your study. And the reality of living a Christian life.

Oh, but we like to be insulting. We like to say bad things. We like to be in that position where we are correct and other people are wrong.

And it's this great connect, isn't it, that we find in Thessalonians, how do we get the movement from word to deep conviction and power? And that must be through God's prayer. We need to move from pulpit to pavement, from word to walk.

[18:04] So we need to somehow be applying the truth more effectively in our lives. Because I'm not saying for a moment you're not. I'm saying for lots of moments I'm not.

But often, isn't that the case? That we agree and we give our amen to the truth of Scripture and the grace of God and how it looks in principle.

But when we're asked or when we're challenged and when the situation arises, we show carelessness to our fellow Christians and to others.

We repay evil with evil. See, that's completely counter-cultural, which is revenge so often. But here we've got harmonious living.

And part of the answer is in our ability to speak about Christ and His truth together with one another. That we're accountable to one another. And if we're acting in an un-Christ-like way, that we have the confidence and the love and the closeness with one another that we can say something.

[19:08] I say, well, that's not how we should act. That's not how we should live as Christians. So we have to live good in the world as we set apart Christ as Lord.

And we have to then also respond well in the world. In verse 9, we have these words, do not repay evil with evil.

We've seen that. In verse 16, 15 and 16, but in your heart set apart Christ as Lord, always be prepared to give an answer to the reason for the hope that you have, but do this with gentleness and respect.

So as we set apart Christ as Lord, we live good in the Christian community and also we respond well in the world. Because our lives will be such that people will ask us about our faith in Jesus Christ.

I hope that's the way it is, that our lives are different because we don't respond in the same way. We don't repay evil with evil and insult with insult, but we think about how we live and we think about how we respond and we don't just go with the crowd and Christ is Lord for us.

[20:14] And so we have opportunity to give a reason for the hope that we have that enables us to live like this. I don't have time to go into that. We've looked at this verse lots and lots in the past, but when we have the opportunity, we share our faith with gentleness and with respect.

So we set apart Christ as Lord, we do good and we don't do bad. And that's something that we seek, the Holy Spirit comes and convicts us about as we look at His Word.

If we're never reading the Bible, we'll never find ourselves being modelled towards Christ. We'll never find ourselves being moulded or changed or renewed towards Him because that is His Word and His Word is what empowers us as with His Lordship to put Him in the throne of our hearts.

But also we say that life will be good, but we will suffer. And verses 13 and 14 speaks about that. Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? Well, people like people who do good, they're not going to harm you.

But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed, do not fear what they fear, do not be frightened. Again, it's just a reminder to us that for the most part, if we follow Christ, if Christ is our Lord and if we do good, there will be many opportunities to enjoy the blessing of that, but there will also be suffering.

[21:42] Because people like us doing good things, but they don't like our motive, they don't like righteousness, they don't like Christ.

And we have that recognition that people suffer for doing what is right. As He goes on to say, those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

It doesn't matter how much good we do, there's an antagonism toward Jesus Christ and the gospel that's in every one of our hearts. And it's in our own hearts too. As we battle against sin, He must turn from evil and do good.

We must recognise that battle that we face and we turn away from the rebellion that's in our own hearts and that of all suffering.

So as I conclude, Christ is heart, we say apart Christ in our hearts as Lord. It means that we do His good.

[22:42] We don't do bad. It means that therefore we will be blessed, but we will suffer. Why? Why are we willing to suffer?

Why should we set Christ apart as Lord in our hearts? Three things very quickly that come towards the end of this passage. The first is a great verse, verse 18.

For Christ died for sins once for all, righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God. For Christ is done on the cross and His great love opens the door to God.

That's a fantastic verse, isn't it? Isn't that just a huge verse for us? Because it says the way to God is through what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

He died once for all and He's righteous, we're unrighteous, but He dies for us. And as we trust and put our faith and trust in Him and confess our need of salvation to Him, the door to God is opened.

[23:46] That is a phenomenal truth. It's a great truth and we thank Him for that. Because He opens the door not just to God who made this world and who sustains this world and who is bigger than we can ever imagine, but He opens the door to eternal life and in His presence in His company.

The privilege I had to share that this week with Margaret told her to put her hands in the hand of the man from Galilee. We often can't see that.

We're so grossed with this today and what's happening today. Death immediately just takes away from us, doesn't it? And everything changes, but Christ opens the door to God.

That's why we can set Him apart as Lord. That is why we will suffer for Him for righteousness sake. But we're willing to do that also and it's in the same level I guess, because He is Lord beyond the grave.

He's Lord beyond the grave. In verse 19 we have that which is a pretty contentious, difficult verse for many people that Christ went.

[24:58] He was put to death in the body, made alive in the spirit through whom He also went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah. And then it goes on to speak about the resurrection of Jesus in verse 22, who's gone into heaven as God's right hand with angels, authorities and powers and submission to Him.

Again we can't go into kind of a deep discussion about this today. There's many questions about this passage, but it would seem to be that Jesus Christ, who we make as Lord of our ordinary hearts, is the Christ who between His death and resurrection in His spirit as His body was broken and dead in His living spirit went and proclaimed victory within the spiritual world.

Within that spiritual world that we can't see, but we believe in no exists. He went particularly to those spirits of darkness who may well have been responsible for being complicit and involved in the darkness and rebellion in the world before Noah's flood, for whom they are imprisoned because of that.

And Christ went and proclaimed His victory, proclaimed His victory and judgment over the grave and over death, sealing as it were their destruction and their fate.

And that victory is reminded as in His resurrection angels, authorities and powers are in submission to Him.

[26:35] Victory over the grave, victory over the spiritual darkness that is reflected in death and in all that death signifies. So He's Lord beyond the grave and when someone has passed from life to death, you know, you see that, don't you?

You see that so quickly? You see that dead body? It's a shell, the spirit's not there. And immediately everything, all the tangible things, all the things that matter, all the flesh and blood, all the matter that is around us, is of no significance anymore.

It's gone forever. We go into a different realm. And Christ, we're told here in His resurrection, is the one who's sovereign over that realm, realm that we will all enter.

There's Lord over that realm, their lives are so short. And it's a place where, in His Lordship He says, if you trust in Me, there are no more tears. There will be no more tears.

I will wipe them all away. I will do it. He says, I will do it personally. So we see He is worthy of being Lord of our hearts now, and He is worthy of suffering for because we recognize that life is more than just flesh and blood, don't we?

[27:50] Do we? Are we simply living for the day? Are we simply meaningless, gathering together of atoms that come and go and live and die?

Do you think death is natural? I don't. We're told again and again today, death is natural. You've seen someone and been in the presence of someone who's dying.

You recognize it's not natural. Every iota of our bodies reacts against, fights against that process. It's not natural.

It happens. It's the absence of life, isn't it? Death is the absence of life. And God is the author of life. It's the reality of judgment.

And yet, sting is removed from the trust in Jesus. So He is Lord beyond the grave, and that makes Him hugely significant. And thirdly, and lastly, we also recognize through what Peter says here, that He alone is the one that can make us clean, you know, and using the symbolism of the event of the flood and the water that was involved, symbolizing baptism and the pledging of a good conscience towards God.

[29 : 07] The waters of that flood speak of judgment. It speaks of cleansing. It speaks of a new start. It speaks of redemption. It points to all these things. The proof we see in the power of the cross and in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

And He alone is the one who can give us a good conscience. It's a really valuable thing, isn't it? It's very destructive to go about with a bad conscience, an unforgiving conscience.

A conscience that you feel is just weighing you down. And Jesus Christ says, well, I'm the one ultimately who alone can wash you clean, because it's like David says in Psalm 51, against you, you only have a sin.

Of course, other people have been affected by our selfishness and our pride and all that goes with it. But ultimately, it's God. And as the judge, God is the only one who can declare forgiveness.

And in Christ, He does so willingly because the unrighteous are the ones who have been substituted for the righteous one and His death on the cross.

[30 : 18] So Jesus Christ is the one that can make us clean. He can forgive our sins. That's a great truth this morning. A clean conscience to be forgiven, to know that our past doesn't just drag us into miserable life and a guilty eternity, but that we have freedom and hope and peace.

If we put our trust in Jesus and believe that He has paid the price for our sins, that's what makes him worth being set apart as Lord in our hearts.

Everything is more significant if he's not Lord of our hearts, not Lord of your heart, then there's an imposter there that can't provide what he provides, that doesn't love the way he loves and that we were not created to have in that place.

Set apart in your hearts Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you for the reason, for the hope that you have. May that be something that isn't just in word today, but in the power of the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.

And I'd like this evening to say a little bit more about 31 days of prayer in May where we can pray about these things and pray for God's power and presence to be with us as a congregation.

[31 : 40] Let's bow our heads as we pray. Father God, we ask and pray that you would bless your word to us, we thank you for it and we thank you for its abiding relevance, for its clarity and for pointing us towards Jesus Christ who died once for all, whose death is never outdated, old fashioned, irrelevant, impractical, oddly strange, but whose death is a reflection of ultimate truths, of right and wrong, of good and evil, of justice and of accountability.

Above all, of outstanding commitment and grace to a people who had no prior thought to serving or following our loving God.

Help us to repay your grace with gratitude. Help us to fight to set you apart as Lord in our lives.

We know it's difficult for us. We struggle so much. Forgive us when we give up in that struggle. Forgive us when we use things we don't know about as a reason for just rejecting the God who asks us to do this.

Forgive us when we are unsympathetic and uncompassionate towards our brothers and sisters in Jesus. We don't care. We're disinterested. We're self-absorbed.

[33 : 22] And forgive us when we are treated badly. We delight in returning evil for evil, insult for insult, when we like to put the boot in and when we act in ungodly and Christless ways, remind us of the way of grace, the way of love and the blessing that comes from that and leave judgment up to God and in His hands.

So continue with us and bless us today. We ask and pray in Jesus' name. Amen.