

1 Peter 1:17-19

And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

As we look to our text this morning as it follows our previous studies in a fuller context, we can see that there is not only the reminder of the doctrines of grace and the encouragement to live in difficult times because we can endure by faith because of the truth that God has revealed to us, but we also see that we have been given three commands as part of the encouragement in these early verses of this letter. And who else but God could give commands that are meant to be obeyed and yet at the same time they are encouraging us because obedience is so beneficial to us and not only beneficial but as we have already studied, we were sprinkled by the blood unto obedience. We exist as the children of God for obedience unto Christ.

Verses 1-12 were a celebration of what God has done to make us his own for ever and ever. We learned that Peter was giving us the reasons to bless God, in other words to worship Him, to eulogize him or to exalt His name.

In verse 13 came the first command: "Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." So the first encouraging command is HOPE fully in the grace of God.

The second command came last week in verse 15: "Be holy in all your behavior." God says, "Be holy for I am holy" (v. 16). So the first command is be hopeful in the grace of God, and the second command is be holy in the holiness of God.

This morning we see the third command of the Christian life in 1 Peter and again I hear the voice of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount being voiced by Peter.

The third command is: "Conduct yourselves in fear." Verse 17: "And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth."

Three commandments, that are encouragements are given to us:

Live in hope!

Live in holiness!

Live in fear!

With each of these commands we move farther and farther away from the mindset of the modern world. Just as we studied in the Sermon on the Mount, the Christian life is so radically rooted in something different than the world's way of seeing and doing things. The things that Jesus says are a blessing for us are things that the world would designate as that which produces misery.

The world produces and promotes men and women of gigantic self-image. That's the spirit of our age. Feel good about yourself. Make sure that you don't discipline your children lest you destroy their self-esteem. But we're sometimes worried about, well, will they grow up with a poor self-image? Well, no! Here they are, little sinners, lost and undone and completely alienated from God, and we're going to tell them how wonderful and perfect they are. If you are or have been in business, especially in corporate America, you have probably been to one of those seminars at one time or another that has taught you how to gain that good self-esteem. We're told that every woman in the world who does anything wrong does it because she has low self-esteem—that's a lie! If she had low self-esteem, if she hated herself, when she looked in the mirror she's say, "I'm ugly and isn't that great?" That's low self-esteem. You're happy when you do wrong things. You have pride when you look in the mirror and say, "I'm not happy with the way I look." The church has bought the world's version. We've taken their concept and then imported it into the church. We've blended it into our church services. For heaven sakes, don't preach on sin.

So considering the first commandment in Peter, "live in hope," I doubt that anyone had their defenses up thinking, "No way is he going to convince me that hope is a Biblical way to live."

For the second commandment, "live in holiness" I would hope the receptivity was still pretty high because we believe that God is holy, but we're not so sure we know what it means or what is really expected of us. So there's a little wariness about hearing a sermon on the necessity to be holy.

For the third commandment, "live in fear," however there may be some difficulty because a fear of God just isn't what is taught today, for some it is too condemning and robs the preacher and many Christians of their mantra, "God is love, God is love" as if that is all that he is. It's not part of the politically correct church or culture. It is not part of the easy believism and satisfying religious life.

And not only that, but fear simply seems to be incompatible with hope and incompatible with faith and peace and joy. After all, doesn't 1 John 4:18 say, "Perfect love casts out fear." Yes, but the verse goes on, "Fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love." So until we are perfected in love we may not use that verse to say there is no place for fearing punishment.

So for cultural and Biblical reasons I understand that there is resistance to preaching about the fear of God.

So what we really need to grasp this morning is that we recognize that growing deeper and stronger as a Christian comes not by choosing to embrace only those Biblical teachings you are already comfortable with and already easily understand—you don't grow that way. But rather you grow deep and strong by also embracing the teachings you are **not** comfortable with and that are hard to understand with the confidence that God has not taught us anything false or harmful in the Scriptures.

We cannot reject the hard theology of the Scriptures not matter what its subject matter is.

The second thing I want us to grasp is that verses 17-19 need to be taken seriously and we need to strive we live.

Let's look at how Peter sees fearing God in relation to judgment and redemption.

The command to fear is the second half of verse 17: "conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth." There's no special word for "reverence" or "reverent fear" in Greek. Adding that word is an editor's interpretation of what flavor he thinks the word should have. It may be right, or may be too limiting.

On either side of that command to conduct ourselves in fear, is a reason for this fear. On the front side in the first half of verse 17 is this reason: "If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work . . ."

We need to fear living as though our faith were not in God. It is not the way we want to live especially if we call ourselves Christians.

So the first reason for conducting ourselves in fear is that the One we call heavenly Father judges everybody on the same kind of evidence—namely, what do our lives (our deeds) say about our heart? There won't be different rules for different people. There is one thing that saves: faith. And there is one standard of judgment: life (deeds).

If this is true, Peter says, there is a very appropriate fear that we need to have as we live our lives, namely, a fear of living as though our faith (our hope!) were not in God.

We need to be afraid of ever living like this. Here's the link between verse 17 and verse 13, between living in hope and living in fear. What we are to fear, Peter means, is not hoping in God (cf. Rom. 11:20).

When we are tempted to conduct ourselves in a way that would show that our hope is in money rather than God, we should fear. When we are tempted to act in a way that would show that our hope is in the pleasure of pornography instead of God, we should fear. When Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:18, "Flee fornication," he meant, "fear what it would mean about where your hope is if you commit fornication." It was the same spirit that Jesus had when he said, "If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better to enter life with one eye than with to be cast into hell" (cf. Matt. 5:29). Fear living in ways that betray your lack of satisfaction in God and showing that you are the blessed of God.

This is one crucial missing note in modern Christianity, and one of the main reasons why the church is such a carbon copy of the world. We think that grace means there's nothing to fear in our behavior. We have cheapened grace to a mere dictionary term and simple definition of being unmerited favor. Where is the understanding of grace as John Bunyan wrote *in Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* or in Charles Spurgeon's *All of Grace*.

And so the sanction of judgment has no place in our lives. And 1 Peter 1:17 is simply blanked out in our superficial adaptation to culture. But God is gracious and calls us back today to fear the behavior that leads to destruction.

But we are also to fear living as though Jesus' blood is not precious.

And o how our hearts should ache when we see those who call themselves the children of grace making light of the blood of Christ by how they live. By this I do not mean living in the freedom we have in Christ apart from condemning law, but by willful disregard for the things that we must be obedient too whereby we bring disgrace to Christ.

On the other side of verse 17 Peter gives another reason for conducting ourselves in fear. He says,

Conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed (or ransomed) with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

If I said, "Let's not be anxious about our finances, knowing that God will meet all our needs," what I would mean is, "Don't be anxious, because we know God will meet all our needs."

That's the same reasoning we have in these verses: "Conduct yourselves in fear, knowing — because you know your were ransomed not with small temporary values like gold and silver, but with an infinite, eternal value, the blood of Jesus." "Fear, because you've been ransomed at infinite cost."

Here is something about the blood of Christ and its infinite worth that is often

overlooked when we think about the value of the blood and this is not original with me. For one thing, it sounds just like Psalm 130:4, "There is forgiveness with you (O God), that you may be feared." Hear these words! **Forgiveness leads to fear!** In the same way Peter says, "There's an infinite ransom paid, the blood of Jesus, to rescue you from your old ways of life; so conduct yourselves in fear."

In fact what Peter specifically stresses in verses 18 and 19 is the surpassing value and eternal durability of the ransom paid for God's people. He says that gold and silver are "perishable"—they are not durable, they don't last. And he says that the blood of Jesus is "precious"—it's infinitely valuable. So he stresses that the ransom paid for us is permanent and precious.

And the point in connection with verse 17 is: in proportion to the preciousness and the permanence of the ransom we should all the more conduct ourselves with fear.

One of the reasons we should be living for Christ and really demonstrating it is because this is part of what the ransom made available for us. Not just forgiveness from sin but a new way of living apart from the slavery to sin.

You might think it would be just the other way around: The more precious and permanent the ransom paid on our behalf, the less we need to fear.

Yes! Yes! And that is gloriously true in once sense: "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies! Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus who died (who paid the infinitely precious and permanent ransom!)" (Rom. 8:33-34).

But what if Peter means, "Fear conducting yourself as though the ransom were not precious"? I think that's exactly what he means. He says in verse 18 that the design of the ransom—the redemption—is to rescue you from your futile way of life. Do you see that? Verse 18: "You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life. . . but by the precious blood of Christ."

The aim and purpose and design of the ransom in this verse is not forgiveness but transformation. The aim in this verse is victory over the power of sin in your everyday

life, not forgiveness from the guilt of sin (as true as that is). The reason Jesus shed his infinitely precious blood was to change our conduct. And Paul agrees with this,

who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:14, NAS95).

So when Peter says, "Conduct yourselves in fear, knowing that you were ransomed from bad conduct by the blood of Jesus," he means, fear conducting yourself in way that shows that the blood is not precious to you.

If your heart soars with assurance as you meditate on the eternal permanence and infinite preciousness of the ransom Jesus paid with his blood, great! God wants you to soar with assurance. But don't ever misrepresent that assurance into a justification for conduct and poor living that proves you don't think the blood is infinitely precious. Once saved always saved, without proper living is a horrible doctrine and it is heresy. God's purpose in the blood of Jesus is our justification and our sanctification - our pardon and our purity. They cannot be separated from each other. Peter is stressing the purity in verse 18.

I want you to think for a moment about the picture God provides for us in the redemption of Israel from Egypt.

In slavery and about to be delivered, redeemed, or ransomed from their slavery, they were told to put the blood on the doorposts and whoever obeyed would be spared the death of their children. God used this as a sign to Pharoah that he was going to redeem His people. He was going to set them free from the slavery of Egypt.

However, the redemption was not spiritual for Israel. They were a chosen people, they were redeemed, they were loved by God, they were separated for God's purpose and yet almost all of that generation died in the wilderness in unbelief and were condemned for ever. With all that God had provided for them, they were still dead in their trespasses and their sins.

Therefore, if in our conduct we are tempted to act as though the preciousness and the permanence of the blood of Jesus were not able to hold us back from sin, then we

should fear. Because if our lives bear constant witness to the powerlessness of the blood of Jesus not only to forgive us but to cause us to live differently than we once did, then Jesus is not really our hope and joy. And we do not belong to Him. And that is a fearful consideration.

The sum of the matter is this; hope in the grace of God! And fear not hoping in the grace of God! Fear the behavior that would show you don't trust in the all-satisfying preciousness of the love of Jesus.