

# GODLY FEAR

## 1 Peter 1:17

### INTRODUCTION

- We live in a world controlled by fear
- Multitudes spend their lives under the bondage of continual fear
  - ✓ Fear of sickness and pain
  - ✓ Fear of loss of wealth/possessions
  - ✓ Fear of the opinions of others
  - ✓ Fear of climate change
  - ✓ Fear of pandemic
  - ✓ Fear of death
- Governments and the media are intent on keeping people in a state of fear and panic, as fearful people are easily controlled
- People *do* fear that which they ought not, and *don't* fear that which they ought
- The Scriptures repeatedly exhort us to fear God alone (Deuteronomy 10:12; 13:4; Joshua 4:24; 24:14; 1 Chronicles 16:30; 2 Chronicles 19:7; Proverbs 3:7; Ecclesiastes 12:13; Isaiah 8:13; Matthew 10:28; Luke 23:40; 1 Peter 1:17; 2:17; Revelation 14:7)
- But for the unbelievers of this world, "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:18)
- There is a wrong, slavish "fear" of God that some have, which is, and sees God as an angry tyrant, not a loving Father (Luke 19:20-21)
- Such fear is condemned in Scripture and is not to be found in the believer (Romans 8:15; 2 Timothy 1:7; 1 John 4:18)
- By the blood of Christ, this slavish fear is removed and is replaced by another fear – a loving, filial, humble, reverential fear, based upon the knowledge of God's holiness and justice, as well as the knowledge of our own remaining sin, and is manifest in a holy fear of offending him through sin, thereby grieving his love and provoking his disfavour
- Other words that describe this fear are *reverence*, *piety* and *awe*

- The fear (*phobos*) that Peter writes of in this verse is not merely fear towards God (cf. 2:17), but a fear that extends to the whole life, directing behaviour, and instilling an attitude of holy sobriety, solemnity, reverence, vigilance and carefulness (Philippians 2:12)
  - ✓ It is a holy fear (2 Corinthians 7:1)
  - ✓ It is a humble fear (Romans 11:20; 1 Peter 3:15)
  - ✓ It is a fear that recognises our own weakness (Hebrews 4:1; Romans 7:18; Philippians 3:3; 2 Corinthians 1:9)
  - ✓ It is a fear that leads to service (Psalm 2:11; Hebrews 12:28)
- It may seem strange to some that Peter, after encouraging the saints concerning their eternal salvation in Christ, and the strong confidence they have in it, that he would then call upon them to live in a state of fear
- But when we understand the nature of this fear, we realise there is no contradiction between “great rejoicing” in God (v.6), and our holy fear of God – the two actually go together: “Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief” (Proverbs 28:14)
- The overriding thought in vv.13-25 is a call to believers for a pure and holy conversation in the world, and a vital aspect of a holy life is a godly fear in the heart

Consider three reasons we are exhorted to godly fear:

## **I. BECAUSE OF OUR FILIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (17)**

### **A. God is Father of the believer**

1. The “if” does indicate any doubt, but certainty, in the sense of “since”
2. Through the second birth (John 1:12-13) and adoption (Romans 8:15) we have the privilege and right to cry “Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6)
  - a. Abba is a Syriac word for Father and indicates a tenderness, familiarity and love
  - b. We call on the Father in prayer, as the Lord Jesus taught his disciples (and us) to pray: “Our Father” (Matthew 6:9)
3. As in verse 14, the Father-child relationship that the Christian now enjoys with God is a strong motivation to obedience, holiness and fear, as children of God

4. Children love their parents, obey their parents, reverence their parents, honour their parents, learn from their parents, and receive chastening from their parents
5. A good child fears to disobey his parents, and so too the Christian fears to sin against his Father, marring fellowship, and invoking chastening (Genesis 39:9)
6. The chastening of God, while for our good, is grievous and may be severe, resulting in sickness and even death (1 Corinthians 11:28-30; 1 John 5:16-17)

B. God is the Judge of the believer

1. He is the “Judge of all the earth” (Genesis 18:25) and will “he will judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:31)
2. But he especially “shall judge his people” (Hebrews 10:30)
3. While the believer is justified and delivered from the penalty of sin, there yet remains consequences for our disobedience in this life
4. We ought to be examining and judging ourselves, identifying and repenting of our sin, but if we fail to do that, we are then judged and chastened of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:31-32)
  - a. The consequences of sin in the believer’s life can be dire, affecting not just ourselves, but those around us (2 Samuel 12:7-14)
5. There will be a future judgment for believers at the judgment seat of Christ (Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10)
  - a. This is not a judgment for sin, but a judgment of works
  - b. It is not a judgment of punishment for wrong, but of reward for good
  - c. Our works will be tried on that day to manifest those that were done for the glory of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11-15)
  - d. The judgment will examine not merely the outward acts of our service, but the inner *motives* that drove them – the Lord “will make manifest the counsels of the hearts” (1 Corinthians 4:5)
  - e. The purpose of this judgment is God’s glory in our lives and service – “then shall every man have praise of God” (1 Corinthians 4:5)

6. God's judgment is unlike ours – it is entirely impartial, and perfectly just (Deuteronomy 10:17; 2 Chronicles 19:7; Acts 10:34-35; Romans 2:10-11; Galatians 2:6; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25)

## II. BECAUSE OF OUR FLEETING RESIDENCE IN THIS WORLD (17)

### A. Consider the brevity of this life

1. Our lives are summed up by the words, “time of your sojourning”
2. One of the greatest deceptions that plagues mankind is that “there is always more time” (Luke 12:19-20)
3. We need the Lord to “make me to know mine end” (Psalm 39:4-5) and to “teach us to number our days” (Psalm 90:12)
4. It is a solemn reality that what we do in the brief span of our lives will determine how we spend eternity
5. We must live in with the constant thought that today may be my last day upon earth, whether God calls me home in death, or Christ catches me up in the Rapture
6. A proper view of time and eternity will move us to “redeem the time” (Ephesians 5:16-17), using every moment and opportunity to serve God

### B. Consider the hostility of the world

1. “Sojourning” (*paroika*) is derived from two words meaning “near” (*para*) and “dwell” (*oikos*) and describes one living alongside people – a foreigner dwelling in a foreign land among foreign people
2. It shows the temporary nature of our dwelling upon this earth
3. In contrast, unbelievers are described as “them that dwell on the earth” (Revelation 3:10; 6:10; 11:10; 12:12; 13:8,12,14; 14:6; 17:8) – they are natives of the world and its lusts
4. Since we are not of the world, the world hates us (John 15:19)
5. Our lives should give evidence that we do not regard this world as our permanent residence

6. The pilgrim who knows he is in enemy territory walks with fear, treading carefully and deliberately, constantly watching for any dangers (Hebrews 11:13)

C. Consider our activity for the Lord

1. Note the word order of this clause in the Greek swaps the “pass” and the “fear” – “in fear, the time of your sojourning, pass ye”
2. The word for “pass” (*anastrepho*) literally means to “turn again”, describing a person going back and forth in a place
3. Here it means the whole manner of life, behaviour, conduct
4. We are to conduct ourselves continually with a spirit of fear, awe, reverence in the sight of God
5. Those who have this spirit will live for God, not self; and will walk in holiness, not sin
6. Right now, the “pass” is in the present tense, but the day is coming when the “pass” will be “passed”
7. *Only one life, twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

### III. BECAUSE OF OUR FULL REDEMPTION BY THE BLOOD (18-19)

#### CONCLUSION

1. In the second century, an aged Christian named Polycarp was arrested and tried for his faith at Smyrna. He was given an opportunity to save his own life if he would reproach Christ
2. His reply demonstrated his fear of God: “86 years have I have served him and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?”
3. A true fear of God is necessary for salvation (Revelation 14:7)
4. An *absence* of godly fear is manifest in carelessness, presumption, self-confidence and disobedience
5. The *presence* of godly fear is manifest in watchfulness, humility, trust in God and obedience
6. Many call God “Father”, but their lives testify otherwise (John 8:41-44)

7. As children resemble their father, so the believer shows he is a child of God by his holy life
8. What is your relationship to this present world?
9. Do you feel at home here, and comfortable with all it has to offer?
10. Or do you feel like a foreigner, in enemy territory, looking and longing for your true home in the world to come?
11. The definition of a wasted life is one lived for anything but the glory of God
12. When I consider my use of the precious hours God has given me  
stewardship over, am I wasting them, or am I redeeming the time?
13. *I want a godly fear,  
A quick-discerning eye,  
That looks to thee when sin is near,  
And sees the tempter fly;  
A spirit still prepared  
And armed with jealous care,  
For ever standing on its guard,  
And watching unto prayer.*  
(Charles Wesley)