

Dear Friends,

If I were to number the various questions people ask me and other pastors, questions that reflect confusion regarding the meaning of the "Fear of God" would rank high on that list. In our study verses for this week, Peter imbeds this topic in a context of profound and comforting assurances of who the Lord is and what He has done for us.

Peter also emphasizes that our understanding of salvation all of God and His gracious mercy through Jesus demands a high ethical mindset in every believer. If you talk to folks who do not understand this teaching, two responses commonly occur. 1) "If I believed that Jesus fully paid for my sins and I do nothing for my salvation, I'd live out my sinful desires." 2) That is a wonderful teaching, truly 'good news,' but it is just too good to be true." The first response indicates ignorance of the powerful teaching of Scripture that links our faith with a strong Christian lifestyle. We live for Him, not for our broken sinful appetites. The second response missed the principle idea of the gospel in the New Testament, "Good news." If we understand this teaching in Scripture, the "News" of the gospel couldn't get any better! Praise God. That is what makes it the gospel.

When you admire, respect, and love someone, you long to please them in every way you can. That means--in the language of our study passage--you "Fear" not living up to their expectations of you. Peter teaches us to "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." That means we should live our life constantly focused on living to and for the honor of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Pilgrim, how goes it with you? Let's travel our "Pilgrim pathway" together. When I stumble, please help me return to the path. And when you stumble, I'd do my best to encourage you to find your way back to that path.

What is Godly Fear?

And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. (1 Peter 1:17-21 KJV 1900)

As we read the Bible, we should always take special note of the context of what we read. Instead of thinking of the Bible as a book of mystery, context often removes the mystery and shows us its correct message. Part of the extended context of a passage is to learn who is writing and to whom the message was written. Peter wrote this letter to persecuted Christians to encourage them in their faith. We have been blessed in this country with an exception to the rule of persecution which often accompanies godly faith in Jesus. Can we grasp the experience at all?

And if ye call on the Father. Whatever trouble life brings, the best course always is prayer. Take your problems to the Lord in prayer. Further, Peter reminds his readers that they are not praying to an unfeeling or uncaring supreme being. They are praying to their "**Father**." When life's troubles weigh heavily on our hearts, our human nature tends to doubt. "Where is God when I need Him?" "Why doesn't God intervene?" However, as we study Scripture, we are repeatedly confronted with the reality of the Christian pilgrimage. Job's whole experience nudges us to learn that the Lord doesn't intervene in every trial we face. In the end, He gives us peace and blessing if we face our troubles by looking to Him. At first, Job struggled, as you and I would. But James 5:11 reminds us that, in the end, Job understood the profound care the Lord had for him. Paul prayed three times for his "Thorn in the flesh" to be removed, only to finally hear the Lord's reply, "No, I will not remove the thorn, but you have my sufficient grace." (2 Corinthians 12:9 KJV)

... **who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work.** In this context, Peter was not scolding his readers for their failures. He was building them up by affirming that they were doing their faith in the right way. These words rather reminded them that the same God who is their Father full well knows their persecutors and will judge them in His time and His way.

... **pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.** Peter didn't doubt that his readers were praying as they faced their troubles. He acknowledged that fact. He built his teaching on it, reminding them—and us. Regardless what life brings upon us, knowing the nature of our relationship with God carries a distinct ethical obligation with it. Look back over your life's experiences. Especially ponder those dark seasons when troubles seemed to invade your life from every direction. I confess. I have not always responded to those events in my life as Peter teaches. At my present age and life season, I look back upon those experiences, good and bad. When I reacted to my troubles by looking to the Lord and relying on Him for my "Sufficient grace," I found peace, and things turned out better than I imagined. And when I allowed my troubles to push me into one or another bad reaction, things never turned out well. The Lord's "Fatherly" care and intervention at times may indeed remove the problem, but He also affirms His presence and love when He stands with us in our troubles and gives sufficient grace to enable us to face them.

We too often read the word "Fear" and leap to a bad conclusion. We see the word and think "Shaking in my boots" kind of emotion. Yes, that can be the meaning, but the word can mean other kinds of "Fear." For example, on at least two memorable occasions in my business career, I worked for men who earned my deep respect. I respected them so much that I worked doubly hard to be sure I lived up to their expectations. I "Feared" not measuring up. It seems that Peter's arguments in the context of our study lesson far more suggests this kind of "Fear" than the first. We have a "Father" to whom we pray. He knows and He cares about our troubles, even when we think He doesn't. So, if we keep that knowledge foremost in our minds, what should we do? How should we react to those troubles? Out of love for Him, we strive to do our best—and more—to honor Him. We "Fear" that we might fall short, which urges us to work even harder. I can't think of a better way for Christian pilgrims to "Pass the time of our sojourning" in this world. Can you?

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. "Forasmuch" is a connective word. It links what went before it to what follows to fully explain and justify the Peter's teaching. The Biblical view of the Christian life is here beautifully described. We don't labor to gain eternal salvation and standing with the Lord. We labor, because we understand our standing in Him, and we long to honor Him in our daily lives. We don't labor to live the Christian life to gain eternal salvation. We rather labor because we "...know" the source and security of our eternal salvation. (1 Peter 1:5 KJV) The more we understand the nature of our salvation, all in and by Jesus, the more we are motivated to live selflessly for Him and His glory. To know in this context means to be acquainted with the facts, to have the information and to understand it.

Peter starts with the negative. When we learn the teaching of Scripture, we understand that our redemption from the debt of our sins was not secured by anything material. In recent years, we have heard much in the news about wealthy parents who "Bought" their children's admission into and graduation from a prestigious university. Our God is not influenced by money, by reputation, or by bribery. Out of love He secured our eternity with Him, but, if we keep that eternal security fresh in our minds, we learn that He also provides us a steady flow of blessings and sufficient grace today.

We further know the substance and source of our legal debt of sin. "...**from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers.**" We formerly practiced a lifestyle that was passed on to us from our human ancestors. Here we see the dual weight of sin in our lives. We inherited it, as Paul explains in Romans 5. But we also actively practiced it, so we lived under the dual burden of debt for sin. But we no longer live under that debt. Jesus paid our debt, all of it.

Since Peter was the appointed apostle and messenger of the gospel to Jewish believers, as Paul to Gentile believers, it is likely that his first readers were Jewish believers. They would have a clear understanding of Peter's choice of "redeemed." In the Mosaic code, we learn about a comprehensive procedure of "Redemption." When Israel entered Canaan, they divided the land into regions and assigned each region to a tribe. Each tribe, in turn, subdivided their region and gave portions to each family. Then, as now, human nature occasionally indulged an appetite larger than the person's ability to pay. God provided two things to balance this problem. First, to resolve legal debts, a man might be required to serve his creditor until he paid his debt. Regardless the debt, every fifty years, all debts were forgiven. Everyone started the new cycle debt free. Further, in the interim, while a man was serving his creditor to pay off his debt, the law provided that, if the man had a wealthy relative who wanted to free him, that relative could pay the debt, and the man would go free. The Law carefully defined the family relationships which were allowed to

intercede and pay the man's debt. The relative who volunteered to pay the debt became known as the "Kinsman-redeemer." A good friend was not allowed to pay this debt, only the kinsman.

If we apply this principle to the New Testament's use of the word to refer to Jesus as our "Redeemer," we uncover a rich and comforting truth. Long before Jesus "Paid the debt" of our sins at Calvary, He was our "Near kinsman." In God's eternal covenant-purpose, we were already regarded as members of His family.

But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. In the Old Testament, lambs, spotless lambs, related to Passover and to personal offerings for sin. However, the Day of Atonement sacrifice was a goat, not a lamb. While Paul in Hebrews affirms that the annual Day of Atonement goat symbolized Jesus, in this context, Peter directs our minds to the intimate and personal work of Jesus for you and me individually. As lambs were offered for individual sins, roasted lamb was also eaten by a family on Passover. The same animal, a spotless lamb, that was offered for personal sin was also eaten to celebrate the Lord's "Redemption" of His people from Egyptian bondage. How fitting for New Testament believers. The same Jesus whose offering of Himself for us for the debt of our sins is the same Jesus on whom we "Feed" in the gospel. Jesus taught this truth in John 6 under the symbol of manna. But then He applied that same idea of feeding to His own body or person. No, He did not suggest cannibalism in this lesson. He taught that all the members of His chosen family, His own "Body," are freely fed by that body to keep them healthy in His body. It is this rich personal truth that Peter teaches by his symbolizing Jesus as a "lamb" without spot or blemish rather than as a Day of Atonement goat.

...that your faith and hope might be in God. The Lord gave His people both Scripture and the gospel to lead them from the darkness of ignorance, with all its vain imaginations that deceive, into the bright light of knowledge of Him and of what He did for us. The more we know of Him and His loving gracious care of us, His people, the stronger in faith we become. We learn how to "**...pass the time of our sojourning here**" in the fear of God, not in the fear of everyone and everything else.

Reflect on the life situation Peter's original readers faced. They were established believers who lived their life in the heat of intense persecution. Typical Roman persecution was fierce. Remember, according to historical reports, Paul was beheaded for his faith. When the Romans conquered a people, they were tolerant of existing religion, but they dealt harshly with any hint of a "New religion." No surprise, the unbelieving Jews tried to convince the Romans that the Christians were a new religion. Justin Martyr, second century Christian, wrote his "First Apology" ("Apology" here refers to the defense of one's faith, not "Apologizing" for it) to the Roman authorities to prove to them that Christianity was not a new religion.

It seems that various regional Roman authorities chose to persecute Christians as a new religion, including confiscation of property, personal torture, and even death. Peter's first readers lived under this threat. Although Peter writes much in 1 Peter regarding persecution and how believers should respond to it, his emphasis in the letter teaches those first readers and us how to live a God-honoring life, despite persecution or any other impediment that we might face.

If we faced similar persecution for our faith, how might we react? Like those early believers, we'd need strong reminders of Jesus and what He did for us to secure—and to ensure—our final eternity with Him. And that seems to be Peter's objective. When we place our faith in anything or anyone else than Jesus, life's difficulties devastate us. When we anchor our hope in anyone other than Jesus, we shall eventually find ourselves hopeless. Why? How can we face our troubles and maintain our faith and hope in Jesus? Spend much time in prayer and even more time in Scripture. It is the Lord's handbook for life, for all our life, not just for our "Sunday life."

Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.

Elder Joe Holder