

FIRST PETER

Lesson 7

Motivations for Holiness

1 Peter 1:17-21

Have you been taught that God does not judge the Christian but only deals with him in love? If you have, then you have been taught wrongly. God does judge His people, not with eternal wrath, but with anger which springs from His perfect holiness.

Have you been taught that we Christians do not have to fear God but only love Him? If so, you have been taught wrongly. The Bible does teach that God has a holy anger against sins of Christians, and that Christians are to have a healthy fear of God, not of eternal damnation but of divine discipline.

We pointed out in the previous message that 1 Peter 1:13-15 is a basic unit of thought. In this section there are four commands in the Greek text which deal with four basic products or attitudes which are to be manifested in every true child of God: “*fix your hope*” (1:13), “*be holy*” (1:15), “*conduct yourselves in fear*” (1:17), and “*love one another*” (1:22).

In 1 Peter 1:15 the command is given for the Christian to live a life of progressive holiness, for it says, “. . . *but like the Holy One who called you, he holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘YOU SHALL BE HOLY FOR I AM HOLY.’*”

Now in this third command it is said, “*Conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay (sojourn) upon earth.*” It is obvious that a healthy fear of God is related to a Christian’s progressive life of holiness. There is a progression of thought here. As we fix our hope on our future salvation by faith, we will then begin to become holy in our daily lives; and as we become holy, then we will conduct ourselves in the fear of the Lord.

REVERENCE OF GOD (1:17)**“And if you address as Father”**

The “and” connects this section with the preceding verses. These Asian Christians were children of obedience by the sovereign call of God to salvation. The “if” should be translated “since,” as no doubt is implied. There is no question in Peter’s mind that true Christians (those who have been called) do address the true God as Father. They recognize God as their Father because they have been brought into the family of God.

As children of the Heavenly Father, we Christians are special objects of His special love and care. It is our privilege to show our dependence upon our loving Father through prayer. In fact, Peter says it is our very nature which causes us to call upon the Father.

“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal. 4:6).

“For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Rom. 8:15)

There are no prayerless children; there are no mute members of God's family; all cry out to their Heavenly Father. The "and" also connects the title of "Father" with God's holiness, for it says in verse 16, "*You shall be holy, for I am holy.*" God is not only a loving Father but He is also a holy Father. In this capacity He is concerned about the sins and the flaws He sees in His very own children.

We dare not separate the holiness of God from His fatherhood. In fact, our Lord taught us to pray in a similar manner, "*Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed (holy) be Thy name*" (Matt. 6:9). As our holy Father, God expects holiness in the lives of us His children. Knowing Him as our loving Father does not give us special privileges to sin because He is also our holy Father; therefore, we cannot coast along in our Christian lives. To take the holiness away from God's fatherhood would be like de-oxygenizing the air or taking the salt out of the sea. Holiness in God is essential to holy living. If it is removed, then religion becomes like an opiate to the people.

"the One who impartially judges according to each man's work"

Our loving Father is also our holy Father who is our Judge. This is the first motivation for holy living. In context, Peter is speaking of God's judgment of a true Christian; therefore, this is a judgment for the Christian's works done for Christ at the Judgment Seat of Christ, not the Great White Throne Judgment for sinners which is found in the Book of Revelation. "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*" (2 Cor. 5:10).

This judgment is not for our sins, for they were paid for by Christ, but it is a judgment for the Christian's works which were done either to please self or Christ. It is not for condemnation of the unbeliever but for reward for the believer. This judgment is not what we have done with Christ but for Christ.

God's judgment of the Christian will be fair, just and right because He will do it according to His own perfect holiness and justice. He will make an honest appraisal of the Christian's life. He sees what we do and knows the motives of the heart and whether we have done things out of self-effort, out of self-centered motives or in the flesh. Apparently, all things done in the flesh will be burned and pass away. Only those things done to please Christ will remain, and the Christian will be rewarded for those things.

"For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

Works are an indication of the presence or absence of faith in one's life. We can only see a person's faith by what he does.

We are also told this judgment will be "impartial." God will show no favoritism. Outward appearances, wealth, culture, social position, skin color, family background, education, beauty and intellect—things which more or less sway men—do not count with

God. *“For God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7).*

This verse clearly teaches that every Christian will face a judgment on that great day of Christ’s return for His church. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, we will be judged for ministry, *“Each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work” (1 Cor. 3:13);* for judging a brother, *“But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God” (Rom 14:10);* for witness,

“Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. . Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences” (2 Cor. 5:9-11)

and for conduct, *“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” (1 Pet. 1:17).* These verses clearly tell us that our Father is not a softie; He is no pushover, but He is our Judge, and because we are going to be judged, each Christian is accountable to God.

“conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay (sojourn) upon earth.”

Because God is the holy Father, because He is going to judge Christians in the future, Christians are to conduct themselves in fear. This is the fear of awe or reverence at God’s holy majesty. We are sojourning or on a pilgrimage on this earth, waiting to be taken home to heaven, the inheritance, the eternal country, the New Jerusalem. While on this earth we must live alongside the unsaved, but we are to have conduct before the lost that is becoming of citizens of heaven. We are to have a testimony which rings clear to the lost world.

The Christian represents Christ before the world, and what understanding the lost have of Christ may well depend upon what they actually see in us. Therefore, we are to conduct ourselves in fear. This is not a cowering fear of God’s wrath, but a godly, wholesome fear of the holy Father’s disciplinary hand because he hates sin even in the lives of His own dear children. This is not the cringing fear of the guilty, Christless, Godless soul, but the fear of failing a holy Father who loves us. This is a child’s fear of his father, not the enemy’s fear of God. It is a fear of God’s discipline in our lives and our judgment before the Holy One.

“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1).

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done,

whether good or bad. Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:10-11).

“Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord” (Col. 3:22).

“You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, ‘MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.’ It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Heb. 12:4-11)

The thought of offending our holy Father should strike a note of healthy, godly fear and wholesome reverence in the Christian.

We are exhorted to pass our time here in fear. Time is fleeting, and we only pass this way once. Moreover, there are no repeats. We cannot rewind the film of life to erase the past, and relive that episode. There is a finality about each moment and each act. Yes, for our actions we will be judged by our holy Father, and this should cause us to have a healthy, wholesome, godly fear. A son may love his father and the father the son, but when the son is disobedient, the father must discipline out of love for the child. The child fears this punishment and in a sense fears the father, but he also loves the father. This kind of fear is a deterrent to sin.

“Fear Him ye saints, and you will then
Have nothing else to fear;
Make you His service your delight,
Your wants shall be His care.”

REDEMPTION BY CHRIST (1:18-19)

“knowing that”

Peter is now going to explain why the Christian should conduct himself in godly fear and wholesome reverence.

“you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold”

This is the second motivation for holy living. Christians have been redeemed by Christ. Why must we conduct ourselves in reverence? Because God has redeemed us.

The word “redeem” (*lutrow*) means “to purchase by the paying of a ransom price,” and it was used in New Testament times of paying a high ransom price for slaves out of the slave market. God purchased these Asian Christians out of the slave market of sin (Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:12; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:7; Rom. 3:24). “Silver and gold” refers to small Roman coins used in New Testament times to buy slaves. Christians were not purchased out of slavery to sin by perishable gold and silver, as valuable and durable as they are, but by the precious, invaluable, eternal blood of Jesus Christ.

Did you hear what Peter said? Christ, the Messiah, died for you, Christian! Can you fathom it? The most costly thing in the whole universe, the life of God Himself, was offered up for you and me. This ought to stop us in our tracks when we are stubbornly set on getting our own way, when we are in rebellion to truth we know in our minds but not in our hearts. God Himself paid the price for our sin at the cost of His own precious blood. *“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).*

What Peter is saying to you and me is fantastic. Holiness of life comes not only as we have a godly fear of the Holy One’s judgment of us as we live our lives under the scrutiny and surveillance of God, but holiness of life comes as we contemplate God’s grace, mercy and love in that Christ died for us. Accountability before God and responsibility to God comes as we are taken up with the fact that the most costly thing in the universe was paid for our sins—the eternal blood of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

A familiar hymn helps us to understand this truth:

*“Alas, and did my Savior bleed,
And did my Sovereign die!
Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?
Was it for crimes that I have done,
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! Grace unknown,
And love beyond degree!”*

“from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers”

Peter reminded his Jewish readers of the fact that the majority of their forefathers were slaves to ritual and tradition which brought a futile way of life, for they had religion without regeneration and ritual without redemption. Those who were Gentiles before conversion also had a vain or empty existence received from their forefathers. They had a life empty of purpose because the concepts of idolatry were passed down to sons through fathers, through channels of heredity, teaching, example and environment. They were victims of unbelief.

A life without Jesus Christ is a life empty of purpose and real meaning, for it is endless activity without ever knowing the one true God of the universe through Jesus Christ the Lord.

“but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.”

The cost of our redemption came at a very high price. The Lamb of God shed His precious blood for us. He was the perfect sacrifice for sin and without the shredding of blood there can be no forgiveness (Heb. 9:22).

Christian, if the Holy Father did so much for us by paying the highest price in the universe to save us, cannot we do good works and live holy lives since He commands us to do so? Does not this profound thought stir our hearts and motivate us for holy living? If it does not, then something is drastically wrong with our understanding of the death of Christ.

“For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world”

Peter says Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world. Foreknowledge here speaks of knowledge beforehand with the idea of choice. The death of Christ was planned in eternity past. “. . . *this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death*” (Acts 2:23).

It is not just passive foresight by God of what would happen in the future but foreordination or predestination. Before the earth was made, before man was formed, before any material universe was brought into being, and even before angels were created, God the Father decided to send God the Son to die for sinners. Christ’s redemption of sinners was no afterthought with God; it was planned in His eternal counsels. Just as His death was planned, so also it was planned for whom Christ would die—the elect of God.

“Who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Pet. 1:1-2).

“Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world “ (Eph. 1:4).

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29).

It is necessary to state a theological premise at this point. Since Christ’s death was planned before the foundation of the world to redeem sinners, then God also knew that sin would be part of His plan or there would have been no need for a Savior. However, God enters into this relationship with sin in such a way that He is never responsible for it and man is always responsible for it. However, sin never takes God by surprise because it is somehow in His plan. This is a mystery to us but it is not a mystery to God. It is best that we not dabble in infinite areas we cannot grasp with our finite minds.

“But has appeared in these last times for the sake of you.”

The death of Christ, which was planned in eternity past, has appeared in these last times for Christians. That which was planned by God and prophesied by the Old Testament prophets has now been made known to Christians in the dispensation of the church or the gospel age. For Peter and all the writers of the New Testament the “last days” began with the First Advent of Christ and will end at the Second Advent of Christ.

“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world” (Heb. 1:1- 2 cf. 1 Pet. 1:5).

Notice for whom Christ appeared. It was for us, for all Christians in this age. Yes, Christian, Christ appeared for you. He died for you. He was raised for you. He ascended for you. What magnificent grace!

RESPONSE OF THE CHRISTIAN 1:21

“Who through Him are believers in God.”

It is through the death of Christ that one becomes a believer in God. In other words, it is because of Christ’s death for elected sinners that one can believe in God. Christ died for His people, not only to forgive the sinner’s unbelief but also to purchase the believer’s faith so he would be saved through faith. Yes, Christian, we owe even our faith to Jesus Christ because every phase of our salvation is by God’s grace.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

“For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil. 1:29).

Christ is the author, encourager, supporter and finisher of our faith.

“Who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory”

God the Father raised the Lord Jesus from the dead and gave Him ascended glory. But for what purpose! Why did He do this?

“So that your faith and hope are in God.”

He raised the Lord Jesus from the dead and had Him ascend to the Father’s right hand in glory that Christians might believe in Christ and have hope in God. Faith is a living faith in God right now and hope is a living hope, a confident assurance that when we die we shall be delivered from the presence of sin forever when we receive our new, resurrected bodies.

This then is the third motivation for holy living: God gave us our faith. Christ also purchased our faith so we could spiritually live and He rose from the dead so we could have a confident hope that one day we will be perfect with our resurrected bodies. If our salvation is totally caused by the Holy God, then ought we not to live holy lives so as to reflect the holiness of God as members of the family of God? He called us to salvation and He will take us to heaven. *“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect (perform) it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6).*

CONCLUSION

As saved people, what motivates us to holy living? First, godly fear motivates us because we fear God's disciplinary hand on us as His children and know one day we shall be judged by Him for our works. Second, eternal love motivates us because we realize that we have been redeemed by the most costly thing in the whole universe, the blood of God's own dear Son. Third, omnipotent power motivates because we know God was the final cause in our salvation and He will continue to grant us faith to live and will one day take us to glory where we shall receive our new, resurrected bodies. Do these things motivate us to holy living? If they do not, we are in deep spiritual trouble.

If you are not a Christian, please think about this one thing so clearly set down by the Apostle Peter:

“For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER?” (1 Pet. 4:17-18)

The non-Christian will face the wrath of God and eternal damnation at the Great White Throne judgment. Are you prepared to meet the Holy One?