

Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE
EXPOSITION OF
THE EPISTLE OF
FIRST PETER

The Life of Faith and Hope (Part II: Reverence) 1 Peter 1:17-19 (686)

Most of our days are not marked by anything particularly remarkable. Most are regular days, routine days in which no memorable events, sights, tastes or thoughts enter our experience. Every now and then, however, we experience something that stops us dead in our tracks, shuts our mouths, captures our imagination, and burns itself into our memories. Let me give you an example. I worked in downtown Dallas the first two years we were in Texas. One day during the lunch hour a friend of mine and I slipped into the sanctuary of First Baptist Church, Dallas. I was not unaware of the reputation of that great church. The lights were on. It was silent. Mike and I were the only two souls in the house. I marveled as I stood in the middle of that wonderful old sanctuary. My attention was drawn to the platform and its furnishings. I haltingly walked up the steps and stood behind that antique pulpit. Suddenly the fact that the gospel; that Christ crucified had been faithfully and powerfully preached from that very spot for nearly 100 years by George W. Truitt and Wally Amos Criswell hit me like a freight train. I was so deeply moved that I had to step down and take a seat on the front pew to recover. That single thought demanded silence, stillness, and reflection.

In **1 Peter 1:1-12** the Apostle, by the inspiration of the Spirit of God, sets before us such a rich, beautiful, and worthy truth that we are stopped in our tracks. The truth is that the one living and true God, who exists eternally in three Persons, out of His own good pleasure, has chosen, cleansed, and is preserving a people for Himself. At verse 13 Peter begins to explore how we should actually live in light of this grand vision of the grace of God in salvation. **1 Peter 1:13-25** tells us that the glories of the gospel demand the grateful and obedient response of holiness (**1:13-16**), of reverence (**1:17-19**), and of brotherly affection (**1:22-25**). Today we look at the second of those three in verses 17-19. The point of these three verses is this: the price of our redemption demands our profound reverence.

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; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed 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.*

And if you address as Father. Peter is once again making reference to our new status as *obedient children* of God (**v.14**). There are certain obligations that go with such a privileged status. Because that is true, the "if" in this verse is better translated "since." The verb translated "address" in the NASB is the Greek word for "call." The same word is used in **Acts 7:59** of Stephen, *and they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord*. So let's begin verse 17 this way: *Since you call upon as Father.* Now in the next phrase Peter is going to specify who it is we call upon.

He is *the One who judges impartially according to each man's work*. When

Peter mentions judgment he brings us face to face with the justice of God. There is something about the fact that our Father is just that obligates us to respond in a certain way. Theologians speak of divine justice in several ways. **First**, there is the **absolute** justice of God. This means that God is infinitely righteous in His very nature. In answer to the question, What is God? our Confession says, "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, **justice**, goodness, and truth (SC Q.4). Tozer says, "Nothing has entered the being of God from eternity; nothing has been removed and nothing has been changed. Justice, when used of God is a name we give to the way God is, nothing more; and when God acts justly He is not doing so to conform to an independent criterion, but simply acting like Himself in a given situation" (p.93). God is inherently just in His person, His precepts, and His purposes.

Second, there is the **relative** justice of God. This means that God does right by all of His creatures. No man shall ever be able to say that God dealt with him unfairly. Indeed, Abraham confessed in **Genesis 18:25**, "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?*" God is upright in all His dealing with fallen men.

Third, there is the **distributive** justice of God. "His distributive justice," according to R. L. Dabney, "is the quality ... which prompts God to give to everyone his due" (*Lectures in Systematic Theology*, p.166). J. I. Packer calls it "the rendering to men what they have deserved" (p.129). If a man deserves a reward God will surely honor him with it (remunerative). If a man deserves punishment for sin God will surely deal out that punishment (punitive). It is this distributive justice of God that Peter is talking about here in verse 17 because he says,

God judges according to each man's work. Some misguided soul may think, upon hearing the words "according to each man's work" that a chance for acquittal at the judgment has been opened up to him. But this statement of Peter's is not good news. These five words are more troubling than the worse news you may have heard from Peter Jennings or read in the Star-Telegram this past week. That *God judges according to each man's work* is more grievous news than any report of casualties of war, famine and disease, economic collapse, murder or natural disaster. **Deuteronomy 7:10**, [God] *repays those who hate Him to their faces. To destroy them; He will not delay with him who hates Him, He will repay him to his face.* In **Exodus 23:7** God says, "*I will not acquit the guilty.*" **Exodus 34:7**, *He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.*

According to each man's work. I will assure you that these words are not intended for our comfort. They are not designed to give us any encouragement that we might satisfy this impartial Judge by our sincerity or by the precision of our performance in living rightly. Indeed, these words are designed to heighten our despair to such an unbearable degree that we run to Jesus Christ for relief. You see, because judgment is based upon *each man's work* all stand to be condemned. **Romans 3:9-20**, *both Jews and Greeks are all under sin ... There is none righteous, not even one ... There is none who does good ... There is not even one ... by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight.* **Psalms 130:3**, *If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?*

God *judges according to each man's work* and He does so *impartially*. We have no concept of the terror of untainted impartiality - an impartiality that is impervious to any influence outside of itself; that is unmoved by tears, unphased by excuses. Imagine the statue of Lady Justice. There she stands blindfolded with the scales

in the hand of her outstretched arm. The suggestion, of course, is that human justice is blind. That's another way of saying impartial. But the only justice that is truly impartial is the justice of God.

God's justice is administered with unscrupulous exactness. God's justice is administered with absolute strictness. God's justice is administered with unflinching adherence to the letter of the law. The law of God has no eyes that it might see human misery and be moved. The law of God has no ears that it might hear human pleading and be moved. The law of God has no heart that it might resonate with human sympathy and relax its demands. Law is a raw thing. There is no curve. No exceptions of any kind are allowed. No bargains or deals are ever struck. No extenuating circumstances are ever taken into account. This is the God you now address as Father.

Now we are ready for Peter's inference. Now we are ready for the "so what." *Since you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, **conduct yourselves in fear.*** In verses 15-16, the attribute of God's holiness was established as the ground or basis for holy living. "Because God's moral excellence is inherently beautiful and desirable, Christians should delight in imitating Him" (see Grudem, *1 Peter*, p.80). Indeed, the holy conduct of His people is an expression of the character and will of the One who reveals Himself as righteous, merciful, and loving.

So the holiness of God demands holiness in His people. In Peter's thought the justice of God is so arresting that it demands the response of fear. Historically this idea of fear has been understood as a reverential awe. Reverence is that human response to the divine characterized by a dread, respect, and awe that

expresses itself in restraint, affection, deference, submission, and honor. Out of the fear of the Lord did Moses remove his sandals at the burning bush. Out of the fear of the Lord did he hide himself in the cleft of the rock. Out of the fear of the Lord did Abraham raise the knife to plunge it into his son. It was the fear of the Lord that prompted Isaiah to cry, "Woe is me." Out of reverence did the healed leper fall at Jesus' feet. Out of reverence do heavenly hosts sing, "Worthy art Thou." We conduct ourselves in reverence on the basis of two indisputable facts. First, God is absolutely just. We reverence Him purely on the basis of His perfection of justice, recognizing that it is totally within His right and power to condemn utterly and completely. But here in verse 18 is a second reason set forth. Reverence is demanded because we are those who have, by the grace of God alone, escaped His punitive justice.

Conduct yourselves in fear knowing that you were not redeemed. What does it mean to be redeemed? The idea behind the term "redemption" is payment as the basis for release much like the release of prisoners of war when a ransom price has been paid. From what are we released? We have been released *from the curse of the law* (**Gal. 3:13**). We have been released from the bondage of sin (**Rom. 6:18, 22; Titus 2:14**). Here, we have been released, ransomed *from futile way of life inherited from your forefathers*.

Futility describes our lives prior to being born from above mentioned in **1:3**. Futile means empty, meaningless. It is that life, the end of which is death, destruction, separation from God, eternal misery.

In contrast to that glorious eternal inheritance promised in the gospel (**1:4**) this life of emptiness and death is my inheritance from my earthly father. Alton Don

Ferrell loves me. Whether anything material will pass to me by way of inheritance upon his death is yet to be seen. One thing is for sure. I inherited a corrupt nature from him as he did from William Dee Ferrell and as he did from his father all the way back to Adam our first father (**Rom. 5:12**). This is exactly what Question 16 in the catechism is referring to. Did all mankind fall in Adam's first transgression? The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity; all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression. "We were caught, [trapped, enslaved] with no possibility of escape, in a futile way of life that would end in condemnation from the Judge who judges everybody according to their works" (Marshal, *1 Peter*, p.55). But Peter says we have been ransomed. How can this be?

This redemption is not purchased as with money (*silver or gold*). As precious as these are to us they are *perishable* and mean nothing to God. There is nothing He needs that might be purchased with it. He created it and so He can produce as much of it as He pleases. These are as useless in the economy of heaven as Confederate money is in our own economy. Our release was not brokered or bought.

Indeed, the death of Christ accomplished redemption. **Mark 10:45**, "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*" Peter's emphasis here is not on the fact of redemption. His emphasis is on the price of our redemption. The justice of God is so strict that blood was required to satisfy it. ***But with precious blood.*** These four words reveal the extraordinary two-fold essence of redemption. In the first place the redemption price had to be blood.

You see, every violation of God's law is a felony that carries the death penalty with it. **Romans 6:23**, *the wages of sin is death.* **Ezekiel 18:4**, *"behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die."* We can swallow the idea that death in general is the consequence of sin in general. The shock is when we realize that death is attached to any and every sin in particular. **Hebrews 2:2**, *every transgression and disobedience receives a just recompense.* Every sin merits the forfeiture of the life. Such is the justice of God. This article cannot be rescinded or amended. Every word spoken in anger merits forfeiture of the life. Every lustful or uncharitable thought entertained by the mind merits forfeiture of the life. Every deed performed that is contrary to perfection; every deed not done that ought to have been done merits the forfeiture of the life and it is blood that is identified with the life. **Leviticus 17:11, 14** ... *For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement ... For as for the life of all flesh, its blood is identified with its life.* The only thing that could atone for sin is blood. **Hebrews 9:22**, *all things are cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.* The price of our redemption was the forfeiture of the life; the shedding of blood.

But with precious blood. These four words reveal the extraordinary two-fold essence of redemption. In the second place the blood had to be of infinite value. Not just any blood would do. It had to be a certain type of blood; blood approved by God. It couldn't be the blood of sacrificial animals. **Hebrews 10:4**, *for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.* This was demonstrated to the Old Testament people of God so graphically, year after year. **Hebrews 10:2-3**, *otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?*

But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. It couldn't be the blood of sinful men. Rivers of blood from the veins of sinners couldn't atone for a single transgression of God's law. The blood had to be the blood of an infinitely worthy sacrifice. Perfect blood. Unblemished blood. Spotless blood. *Precious blood.* God's own blood. Beloved, this is why Jesus had to take on humanity. The second Person of the Trinity, co-existent and co-equal with the Father, the One in whom all the fullness of deity dwells, had to shed His blood to redeem sinners.

The point that Peter is making is simply this: the price of our redemption demands our profound reverence. *Conduct yourselves in fear ... knowing (1:18).* The Holy Spirit is not suggesting a technique to cultivate reverence in our lives. He is, in no uncertain terms, revealing to us the only way that true, lasting, sincere reverence is worked in us. Reverence is what happens when the gospel hits you like a freight train. Reverence is what happens when you know that you know the answer to this question: "What can wash away my sin? Nothing ... nothing ... nothing but the blood of Jesus."

Some of you here today may be strangers to the redeeming grace of God in Christ. You fully expect to stand before God and argue that you have been a pretty good person and, on that account, ought to be received into heaven. My friend I pray that you, upon hearing the Word of God preached just now, will recognize that only the life and death of Jesus Christ is sufficient to satisfy the demands of infinite justice. Reliance upon yourself is a futile thing; an empty thing that will end in your own demise at the judgment of God. Will you not transfer your trust from yourself to Jesus Christ and be saved this very hour?

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I Peter 1:13 ... At this point Peter begins to explore how we should actually _____ in light of this grand vision of the grace of God in salvation.

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I Peter 1:17-19

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“God’s **distributive justice** is the quality ... which prompts Him to give to everyone his due” (R. L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, p.166).

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Historically this idea of fear has been understood as a *reverential awe*.

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- (1) God is absolutely just
- (2) We are those who have, by the grace of God alone, _____ His punitive justice.

Conduct yourselves in fear knowing that you were not redeemed ... The idea behind the term “redemption” is _____ as the basis for _____.

From your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers ... Futility describes our lives prior to being born from above mentioned in 1:3. Futile means _____ ; meaningless.

Indeed, the death of Christ _____ redemption. Peter’s emphasis is not on the fact of redemption. His emphasis is on the _____ of our redemption.

But with precious blood. These four words reveal the extraordinary two-fold essence of redemption.

In the **first** place the redemption price had to be _____.

In the **second** place the blood had to be of infinite _____.

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