

## 1 Peter 1:17-21 | “Live in Fear?”

*Pastor Matt Brown*

How would you react if I said that you needed to live in fear as a Christian?

I suspect that there would be various responses, but I'll give the two that I believe would be most common. First, probably the most popular response would be to respond by either thinking or saying, “Well, that’s not right at all. How dare he tell me to live in fear?! The Bible says to not fear all over the place.”

So that’s one response, and the other would be this... “That doesn’t sound right, but I want to know exactly what he means by that.”

Now before you think that I’ve lost my mind or think that I’ve become a heretic, I’ll say that the word ‘fear’ here is used differently than what you may be thinking. But whatever your response is this morning to that statement, I would like you to hear me out, not simply because *I’m* saying to live in fear, but because *the Bible* says it.

It’s important as Christians to always be in submission to the Word of God, no matter what it says. It is critical that we always live and think this way. We don’t believe and accept the things that *we want* to believe and accept, but we believe and accept every single thing that it says.

Even when we don’t like what it says, we should listen and obey God’s Word because it is God’s Word. He created the world, and knows how it’s supposed to function. He created us, and knows how we are supposed to function. He is truth, and all truth ultimately comes from him. So that means that Scripture is always true and always authoritative, and therefore, our opinions and thoughts are always trumped by it’s authority. We don’t evaluate Scripture in light of our opinions, we evaluate our opinions in light of Scripture.

So as I speak this morning, I want us to keep going back to the Word. What does God’s Word *actually* say? If it says something, then we must submit to it. So whatever I say, assess it in accordance with what the Bible says. Whatever you think, assess it in accordance with what Scripture says.

Let’s READ OUR PASSAGE for this morning to get it on our minds.

To begin his letter, Peter praised God for his salvation and the salvation blessings in our lives. And then in light of that great salvation, Peter called us to set our hope on the grace to come, as well as to be holy as our Father is holy. Now as he continues, he gives a third command, to live in reverent fear.

If you could summarize our passage in a sentence, what would it be? It would be this: **Live in reverent fear of God.**

In verse 17 he says, “And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.”

The first thing that we need to tackle is the phrase, “conduct yourselves.” The word is pointing to how you behave and your manner of life. And this phrase really makes you stop and examine your own pattern of life, “How do I conduct myself? How do I live?”

We are also told how long we are to live this way - “throughout the time of your exile.” If you remember from the beginning of the letter, Peter was using this language to describe how all Christians are sojourners here on earth. We are each simply temporary residents here, as our permanent address is Heaven.

This reminds us once again that we don’t belong to this world, and we ought not to live according to the world’s way of life. But we belong to God and what matters is what he wants from us.

So essentially Peter is saying, “Live this way for your whole earthly life. As long as you are living in this world, live this way.”

This isn’t just the way we live when we attend church services, or in front of people we know, this is the way we are to live throughout our entire lives. Behind closed doors or not, we ought to conduct ourselves in this way. And what way is that? With fear.

Now what exactly does Peter mean here? Doesn’t this conflict with the Bible’s call to not fear? Well, let me first be clear that this is not extreme terror. We don’t cower in fear, afraid that we are going to be violently hurt. We don’t run away in fear, or become paralyzed with this fear. Instead, it’s more of a reverent fear.

It points to showing honor, respect, reverence, and awe towards someone. We all know that there’s a difference between being fearful of a mass murderer and being fearful of a judge in a courtroom. One is of abject terror and another is of reverential fear.

In fact, commentator Tom Schreiner gave a good illustration of how we can have confidence, and yet also have healthy fear. He said, “A confident driver also possesses a healthy fear of an accident that prevents him from doing anything foolish.”<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the Bible, you’d be surprised at how often the fear of the Lord is brought up. In Acts 9:31, the church has peace, is being built up, and is walking *in the fear of the Lord*. In Acts 5, *great fear* comes upon the people when they hear of how Ananias and Sapphira are struck down, and the church grows like crazy. (See Acts 5:1-11)

And thirdly, Luke 12 is very clear about this. Jesus says, “Do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him

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<sup>1</sup> Schreiner, T. R. (2003). *1, 2 Peter, Jude* (Vol. 37, p. 81). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Luke 12:4-7)

So Jesus says, “Don’t fear man, but fear God!” And then a little later, he says, “Aren’t you more valuable than many sparrows to God? So don’t fear.” You can see the huge contrast between an *unhealthy* fear of people and circumstances that we are called to NOT have, compared to a *healthy* fear of God that we are called TO have. So there is actually a healthy fear, if and only if, it is a reverential fear of God.

If you had a good, godly earthly father, I think you understand what kind of fear is being talked about here. In a sermon by D.A. Carson, he gave an illustration that was so good that I couldn’t help but use it.<sup>2</sup>

He speaks about a conversation that a fellow professor had with his daughter. The dad turned to his 18 year old daughter and said, “Tracy, are you afraid of me?”

“Oh, come on, dad, for goodness sake.”

“No, no, no, before you engage your mouth, put your brain in gear. Is there any sense in which you are afraid of me?”

“Well, yes, sometimes.”

“Tracy, is that a good thing?”

She grinned, and said, “Yeah, probably.”

He said, “Then go and reflect on the fear of God.”

There is a healthy fear of God our Father that we ought to have, and we ought to conduct ourselves in this fear. But why? Why should you live in reverent fear of God? Our text tells us...

### **I. Because of who your Father is! (17)**

Peter says, “If you call on him as Father...conduct yourselves with fear.” That “if” is used to make you say, “Yes, I do! I do call upon God as my Father in prayer! He is my Father, who loves me.”

What about you? Could you say ‘Yes’ to that ‘If’? Do you call upon God as your Father? Is he your Father at all? Do you call out to him in dependence? Do you have a relationship with God the Father because of your belief in Jesus Christ? If so, then He is your loving Heavenly Father,

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<sup>2</sup> Carson, D.A. Sermon entitled, “Part 2: Holiness Without Stuffiness.”

<http://resources.thegospelcoalition.org/library/part-2-holiness-without-stuffiness-1-peter-1-13-2-3>

who you can boldly approach in prayer. But how little we approach the throne of grace! How little we call upon our Father!

Oh, the marvelous truth that God is our *Father*! Think about it! He is not only our God, and not only our Savior, but He is also our Father. We were sinning against Him, and it's one thing to save us, but then on top of that, he desires to call us His children. He saved us *and* adopted us into His family! Now we can cry out, "Abba, Father!"

So Peter's argument here is this: 'If you call on God as Father, then conduct yourselves with fear.'

Peter is helping us to see that a new identity should lead to new conduct. If we are God's children, then we should act like it! 'You say that you call on God as Father, so live like the Almighty God is your Father!' So that means that we should live in ways that please Him, rather than in ways that displease Him. And what is a way that pleases Him? Living in reverent fear of Him. This reverent fear should never push us *away* from Him, but *to* Him because He is a loving Father.

Interestingly, Peter doesn't stop there, for he shows us that our Father is also the Judge.

Often people can't seem to see how God can be a loving Father and also the Judge of all. They think that his love and justice can't go together, but they certainly do go together. They are complementary ideas. He's tender and loving as a Father, but he's also holy and just like a Judge.

Peter says that our Father, "judges impartially according to each one's deeds." This is a very important text of Scripture because it goes against how many view God. Many don't see Him as the Judge, but only as the Father. They treat him as their buddy, rather than as the Judge. So they treat Him like some passive and timid father, who doesn't care how they live. In fact, many treat him as a passive *grandfather*, who is only there to give them presents whenever they ask. But that's not our God!

We don't live how we want, and then only go to our Father when we want things. We live how HE wants, and go to Him in continual dependence. He is our loving Father, but he's not a Father that we treat with disrespect. He is our loving Father, but he's not a Father that we treat in a flippant, cavalier, or indifferent way.

God the Father and Judge cares about how you live, for he will judge all impartially according to our deeds. God demands obedience, as any good parent does. And the more you know God, the more you fear Him, honor Him, and strive to please Him.

Think back to the story in Acts 5 of Ananias and Sapphira. It's the beginning of the church, things are going so well, and what happens? Ananias and Sapphira lie about how much they sold, and God strikes them dead on the spot. This is not a God who can be trifled with! This is not a God who you can think, 'He doesn't care what I do.' No, he is Father *and* Judge.

Like the early church, we must have an understanding of the seriousness of who we worship. We don't worship some distant, weak, and sissy God! We worship the Judge of all!

Our Father takes our character development seriously, and disobedience is not a light matter to Him. 2 Corinthians 7:1 says, "Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion *in the fear of God.*" Philippians 2:12 says, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation *with fear and trembling.*"

You can't trick God. He sees all things and doesn't judge by appearances, but by truth.

In our court system, there can be incorrect judgments that are made, and there can even be partial judgments, but not with God. He judges impartially, and has no 'favorites.' He doesn't have different standards for different people, but each person must stand before the judgment seat of God. Each child is treated *as they deserve*, according to what they do. Your wealth and background doesn't make you go up a few notches above someone else.

Now I must be clear here. This judgement of Christians is not pointing to judgment which determines our salvation. We are not saved by works. In fact, Peter has already declared that Christians are born again to a living hope, to an inheritance reserved for them, and are guarded by God for this salvation. So the judgment here pertains to our rewards in Heaven.

The Bible is clear that we are rewarded according to what we do. We are saved by faith, but we are accountable to God for how we live.

In Hebrews 13:17, the author talks about how church leaders must give an account for how they lead the church. In Jesus' parables, he describes how we are not to squander the gifts God gives us, but we are accountable for how we used his gifts.

In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul shows us how we can have confidence in our faith because the Spirit is given to us as our guarantee of resurrection life, and then he says that we make our aim to please him, "For we all must stand before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." (2 Cor. 5:1-10)

Even in 1 Corinthians 3, Paul speaks about how the Day of the Lord will disclose our work. If it survives the testing of fire, we will receive reward. But if it burns up, we will suffer loss, though we will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Cor. 3:10-15)

God's justifying grace *does not* remove our accountability to God. We are called to live for Him, we are accountable to live for Him, and we will be rewarded for how we live for Him.

Isn't this such a neglected truth in our churches! We seem to minimize the need to live holy lives! We seem to abandon the whole idea of standing before God someday to give an account, but it's all throughout the Bible, if only you would look.

Thankfully, it's not that those works save us or else none of us would be saved, and also thankfully, it's only because of Christ that we *can* bear fruit. Jesus says that when we abide in Him, we will bear much fruit.

To sum this truth up, a commentator named Osborne quotes another commentator named Beare by saying, “‘Our knowledge of Him as Father must not dispel our dread of Him as our Judge. It must not lead to presumption, but to humility; it must not induce moral laxity, as if by our new position we were exempted from rendering an account to Him.’ In short, the Christian life is one of privilege and responsibility. We are called, enabled, and protected; but we are also held responsible to live in accordance with our benefits, to walk in the life of holiness that a loving Father requires of his children.”<sup>3</sup>

We are saved not to live a life of inaction or indifference, but to live a life of holiness in reverent fear of the Father.

So how do you live? Do you live in a way that shows that you know who your Heavenly Father is? Do you live as a child of the Father and Judge of the world? Or do you live as though he were just a timid grandfather, who doesn't care how you live? Do you live as though he were a distant and inattentive father?

How would you live differently remembering who your Father is? How would you live differently remembering that you will have to give account to Him for how you live? Let's seek to please our Father and live how He wants us to live because of who He is, out of love and respect.

Our loving Father is our Judge, but he's also our Redeemer. So the second reason you are to live in reverent fear of God is...

## **II. Because of the price paid to redeem you! (18-21)**

Peter talks about how we should conduct ourselves with fear, *knowing* that we were ransomed with the precious blood of Christ. So this should be something that we remember as we live. This is the reason we should live in reverent fear of God - because of the price paid for our ransom.

Peter says that we were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from our forefathers. To ransom someone is to pay the price for their freedom and deliverance. So Christ has actually paid the price to free us out of our futile ways. We were enslaved to sin, but because Jesus took our place on the Cross, so now we are freed from the slavery of sin. We are forgiven and the righteousness of Christ is credited to our account.

Before Christ, we were each enslaved to the futile ways that are passed down from generation to generation because of sin. These futile ways are empty, meaningless ways of life that lead to no

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<sup>3</sup> Osborne, G. R. (2011) quotes F.W. Beare. 1 Peter. In P. W. Comfort (Ed.), *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: James, 1-2 Peter, Jude, Revelation* (p. 165). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

good results. This is when you live for yourself. This is when you live according to the world's values. It's empty and futile. It brings nothing good that lasts into eternity.

When you live *for* the here and now, you are living a futile way that has no lasting results. But when you are ransomed out of those futile ways, now you can live *in* the here and now *for* lasting results because of Christ.

Christian, you were redeemed from an empty, purposeless way of life to a purposeful and blessed way of life. It's actually our redemption out of those futile ways which makes holiness and reverent fear possible. We can be holy and desire to be holy only because we have been redeemed out of our old ways. We are set free to live for God!

And with what price were we ransomed? Not with perishable things like silver or gold that perishes. No amount of money could redeem you out of sin, it had to be Christ's blood! So if we were ransomed out of the futile ways not with perishable things, why do we often live in those futile ways and focus on the perishable things of life?!

How can we as Christians be so focused on money, money, money and all the perishable things of life when that's not what redeemed us? How can we as Christians be so focused on living for the here and now and living like the world when we were redeemed *out* of that empty life? Doesn't make sense, does it?

When you think, "I need to be liked, I need to be popular." That is a futile way of living. When you think, "I need that clothing, that house, that car, that phone so that people will see me differently." That is an empty way of life. When you live for yourself, that is an empty way of life. You were ransomed out of that way of life with the precious blood of Christ.

It was the precious blood of Christ, who is the Lamb of God, without blemish or spot. He is the perfect substitutionary sacrifice for our sins because he is the perfect Son of God, who became flesh. It was HIS blood that paid the price.

How bad our sin was that the Son of God had to shed his blood for us! How bad our sin was that no amount of money could pay the price, but the very life of Jesus had to pay it! But how great his love that he would do that! How great his grace that he would pay the price for *our* sin!

Your deliverance out of sin was paid for with a high price, so knowing this, live in reverent fear of God. Always remember this as you live - there was a great cost paid to free you out of your old vain way of life. So don't disregard his sacrifice by living in such a disobedient way! Don't treat Christ's precious, shed blood with contempt by going back and living for yourself!

We live reverent and holy lives out of love for what he has done for us. The price paid was so loving and gracious! But we also live reverent and holy lives out of fear of despising such a price paid. The price paid was so sacrificial and high!

When we live a life of irreverence of God after being saved, it's like we are disregarding the high cost of our redemption. We are treating it like it's worthless to us.

Imagine a girl caught in the slavery of human trafficking. To deliver her out of human trafficking, let's say that 30 men died in a mission to free her. Now the girl is free! But let's say it's a year later, you hear about this girl, and you find out that even though she was free, and even though 30 men gave their lives, she voluntarily went back to human trafficking.

How would you respond? You would be like, "How could she treat those men's sacrifice with such contempt and go back to something they died to free her from?!" Yet to an even greater degree, the son of God shed his precious blood for our deliverance and yet we treat his sacrifice with such contempt by going back to living our old ways. Let's live in reverential fear and obedience to God, knowing the price paid to deliver us out of sin.

Peter doesn't stop there, he continues to explain that Christ's precious sacrifice was a pre-creation plan of the Father for you. Verse 20, "He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you."

The sacrifice of Christ wasn't an afterthought or a last moment decision to pay for us, but it was planned before the world was created. The plan was planned before creation and made manifest in Christ's first coming.

So now think of how this adds to Peter's argument here. Not only was the price paid a costly price, but this price paid was a plan made before the founding of the universe. Why would you live such an unholy life when God would do such a thing for you? Why would you live so flippantly when the plan to deliver you out of sin was made before the world even existed?

This wasn't a rash decision made in haste - it was a pre-thought out, pre-planned decision to save, love, and deliver you before you were even born! So live in light of this truth! Live in holiness, obedience, and reverence for your great God, Savior, and Redeemer.

And then in verse 21, Peter wraps up this topic by showing us that this price paid by Christ has led our faith and hope to be in God. Through Christ, we believe in God. Through the Father, Christ was raised from the dead and gave him glory. And all of this was so that our faith and hope would be in God.

We live in reverent fear of God because ultimately he did the work for salvation that led to our belief in Him. We live in reverent fear of God because ultimately he is the one who we trust and hope in. Our whole lives are to revolve around God because he did the work necessary through Christ to accomplish all that was needed.

**Live in reverent fear of God.** That is, live in such a way that shows the honor, respect, and awe that is due to Him. Live in obedience to Him. Live in holiness that reflects His holiness. Live with an aim to please Him in all things. Why? Not to gain standing in his sight or to go to



Heaven, for He has already saved us and promised us a home in Heaven, but because of who our Father is and because of the price paid to redeem us.

If you think about those two points, you could understand it this way - we live in reverent fear of God because of who He is and what He has done. He is our Father and Judge, but he's also our Redeemer, Trust, and Hope.

So this kind of life and thinking looks like this (we think these things):

My Father, who I call upon in prayer, loves me and I love Him, so I want to live in obedience to Him.

My Father loves me and expects me to obey and I'm accountable to Him as he's the Judge, so I want to live keeping this in mind. He's not someone I treat as my buddy, who doesn't care what I do, but as my Father and Judge, who sees all things.

My Father loves me, planned my redemption before Creation, and He redeemed me by the blood of Christ. I want to live in a way that reflects that and doesn't show contempt for the great price that was paid.

Not long ago, an investigation came out about well-known deceased apologist, Ravi Zacharias. He had served the Lord in many ways over the years, defending the faith and seeing people come to faith through his ministry. Yet in the investigation, they had found years upon years of evidence of inappropriate behavior. There was evidence of sexual misconduct on a large scale, spiritual abuse, and financial misuse, among other details. The report shocked the evangelical world, as everyone was baffled as to how someone so admired for their Biblical teaching could do such horrible things.

There's no need to get into the details or speculate about his salvation right now, but I want to ask these questions:

How would Ravi have acted if he lived his life in reverent fear of God? How would he have acted if he remembered that God was his Father and Judge, who sees all things, and who he would have to give an account to at the end of his life? How would he have acted if he remembered the great price paid by Christ for his ransom, out of those futile ways of life? I'm sure differently. Why? Because reverential fear fears treating God's Fatherhood and the blood of Christ like trash.

Reverential fear of God doesn't allow you to use religious ideas as leverage to sin against others. Reverential fear of God doesn't try to explain away sin by saying, "I've done so much work for the Lord that I deserve this." Rather, reverential fear of God says, "I want to please my Father, who loves me so much. I want to conduct myself in such a way that remembers that I am accountable to God for what I do. And I want to live in a way that doesn't treat Christ's sacrifice as worthless."

Now let me ask you, how would *you* live differently in light of these truths? Have you failed in the past? There is forgiveness in Christ! Repent of your sins, and cling to your loving Heavenly Father, whose arms are wide open for you. If you are a Christian, you can be faithful now. You can show reverent fear of God from now on.

And if you have never turned from your futile ways of sin and trusted in Jesus Christ, “today is the day of salvation.” Turn from your sin and trust in Christ’s shed blood for you, and you will be ransomed from slavery to sin, forgiven, given eternal life, and you will be called a child of God.

For us who have recognized our sin and placed our faith in Jesus, we are his children, who were ransomed by Christ’s precious blood, so let’s live like that is true! Let’s live holy and reverent lives motivated by a correct understanding of who our Father is and a correct understanding of the price paid for our sins.