

# “Not All Who Wander Are Lost”

1 Peter 1:17-19

<sup>17</sup> 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, <sup>18</sup> knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

HOPE  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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## 1 Peter 1:17-19

## Introduction

Peter's letter began so pleasantly; it was for twelve verses a truly captivating theological rejoicing, worshiping and declaring all the things God has done for his people. But our last three passages in 1 Peter have gotten far more demanding, in he has given Christians 2 commands so far. Firstly, we have been told to "Hope." Our hoping is not to be pie-in-the-sky, but in Jesus Christ and the revelation that he has come as a gracious savior; secondly, we have been told that we are to "be Holy" as God is Holy, and we make that more than pie-in-the-sky, by looking at Jesus Christ, who as both fully-God and fully-man brought near to us a view of holiness incarnate. Now we are given a third command: Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile (ESV). Some might be saying, "well, this has gone downhill, Hope: that sounds pretty good, hoping is good. Be Holy, that's tough stuff, but hey knowing that it is a journey, a growing, that is being worked in me by the Holy Spirit takes some of that worry away. BUT FEAR GOD, fear, I mean come on now? God's my pal, I mean he saved me, he loves his children, Jesus died for sinners – so I fear him?"

## (Discussing Fear)

Culturally this is a hard pill to swallow. In America we fear lots of things, some of us fear death, some fear job loss, some fear injury, some fear rising oceans, some fear illegal immigration, in short may fear a lot of impersonal concepts and forces – we fear a lot of things we can't control. And then we hear this command: Fear God. Yes, fear him. And our response is, "I fear no man."

To this I will give you two quick pills to treat that symptom, because we can't get make any progress if you are hostile to the core of the command that we are given in the passage. When it comes to the word "fear" particularly as it relates to God, we must hear those words from "The Princess Bride" come to our ears, "I do not think that means what you think it means." John Piper, in a book that is buried in a box somewhere that I couldn't find in time to cite it exactly for you this morning, gives a good way to understand what this fear of God is like in the Christian. Imagine a terrible storm, surging and fierce, the lashing winds and rain brought terror and fear of death – its awesome power could destroy you. Then, you find safety, a place of refuge and the life-threatening terror goes away. You are safe. However the reverence and awe remain, the exposure to awesome power cannot be hidden – the storm deserves your reverence and awe, you are aware of its bigness and your tinyness in the scale of things. What is left when the terror of death is stripped away is Godly fear: reverence and awe before God.

And that is related to the second part, that awareness of order. The storm is beyond our control. God is beyond our control. In a culture that has said on one side: God's there to be the cosmic vending machine, ask and you will get whatever you want; and the other: God's found in an individual's personal experience, you've got your God, I've got mine, so we're all good; those views we must simply say they are false. [Just a brief warning, if your God looks like you, doesn't challenge you, doesn't demand that you bear the discomfort of changing into his likeness—I hate to break it to you, but you're not worshipping the God of the Bible, your worshipping an idol. Anytime we make God in our own image, we are idolatrous. God is, in the cosmic order, above us.

So where does that leave us with this command? We are conduct ourselves with fear in the time of our exile, meaning that we are to live lives that reflect our understanding of this cosmic order – we who have been made elect exiles and saved by Christ, must live lives of reverence and awe of God while we remain, wandering this world as strangers.

So then, we are to Hope in our gracious savior, we are to live Holy lives looking to Christ, and now, we are to live lives in fear, not of death, for that punishment has been born by Christ, but now with reverence and awe, because God has brought us into an awareness of this cosmic order. The same God who created the world has elected for himself a people to live as exiles for a time, but that election is grounded in the perfecting, ransoming, and purifying work, not of themselves, but of Christ. Also, for a moment, let us be clear – without Christ we would be in a storm that could destroy us, God is Holy and Righteous, he does not change. We are the ones who have changed, we have been sheltered by his Grace, but we must not diminish him based on our protected status. No more does the terrifying power of a storm stop when you go into a storm cellar than does God stop being the God who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, but now we've been sheltered from the punishment of our deeds because Christ has born the punishment. So the fear of death is removed, but awe, reverence, and a healthy respect for God's power remain. We fear God now, not simply God's punishment. In a way, Godly fear frees us from our selfish fear of death, to fear not death, but the divine awesomeness of God himself.

We are free from our cultural fears of abstract concepts, death and all that, to fear God – a personal God who has loves us such that he gave his only Son to die to reconcile us, sinners, to him, the all-powerful creator of the universe. If you have a fear of death or punishment or anything that is not really God, I don't think you can handle the first two commands we've encountered. If you have fear of death and not God, hoping in Christ's gracious salvation is a little bit of a joke. Why is it a joke? Because if Christ is your savior, you have been freed from having death being a punishment, but instead it has become a transition into greater glory and perfection. A true hoper in Christ's salvation no longer fears death, but fears God. The call to holiness is one we are brought into by the blood of Christ, we are being made holy by the Holy Spirit – and that holiness is most clearly seen in the image of Christ. If we have a knowledge of holiness that is more than a long series of "don't do this, don't do that's" but has become a holiness being formed in us in light of Christ, then we cannot fear God, because our becoming holy is because he has loved us and prepared us by dwelling with us and in us. The Holy Spirit is God, given to Christians, dwelling with Christians, making Christians holy – if you fear death rather than God you will never be able to seek holiness.

So, there you have it: we are to Hope, we are to be holy, we are to live lives of awe and reverence, fear. Three commands. Now let us turn our attention to unpacking this command in the context of our passage. Hopefully I've been able to redefine Godly fear for you in a way that can, at least in this context, override all of the cultural baggage that can be attached to that word.

### **Who's your Daddy?**

Our opening lines in this passage are: "And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds." Keep in mind that this precedes the command. What is meant by this? Well, this is firstly a declaration that this is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – that is to say, by a negative statement, this is not a god from the Roman or Greek pantheon. This is not a fickle, changing God, but a constant God who is impartial in his judging. There is no buying off this God. Sin has a penalty, the wages of sin is death. However, as this is a God who keeps account of all of the details and doesn't judge in a way that ever lets his judgment get clouded, what hope do we have!? We're doomed, stealing a lustful look, angry with the poor, uncaring towards your parents, unloving towards your neighbor—God is watching. God knows every last one of your transgressions. He's not biased, he's God. There's

no buying him off, no preferential treatment – deeds, that is our actions (the unqualified word “deeds” seems to have a positive connotation, at least in my mind), our actions are judged impartially. So we have the God of the Bible, OT and NT, who demands holiness and love judging impartially – and we are to live lives of fear during this time of our exile. Again, this passage may have resumed its more negative coloring in your mind, I want to promise you, let us look a little deeper at this. This is Good News. What do I mean by that? Well this reminder about God’s nature as the impartial judge occurs within a book that has very early on a reminder that we have been sprinkled by Christ’s blood, and as we are told later his blood is what ransoms us. I’m going to connect the dots for you, because we need this made explicit. God is impartial, he accounts rightly all deeds done, the son’s blood is the perfect payment for that accounting. God is impartial, he is not swayed by anything but justice – and Christ’s death is the ransom, the payment, the atonement for us. If God wasn’t impartial, if he was fickle and capricious like the Roman and Greek gods, this deal could change, because they could change, but this is not that God. This is a God who keeps his promises, this is a God who impartially judges—if this is your God, GOOD NEWS, Christ. If this is your God, a God who would otherwise cause you terror and fear of death, because of Christ’s perfect ransom, that is to say his payment for your sins, you can now fear him with reverence and awe. We are freed to live lives of reverence and awe, and we can count on this because God is impartial, the payment is Christ (it won’t be taken out of your hide, it was paid in full on the cross). The cosmic order has been revealed, we live lives of reverence and awe that manifest in obedience to the order of the universe that the Bible has revealed. We love our neighbors and God rooted not in fear of annihilation, but in reverence and awe, godly fear, because we know that it is godly to love, godly to not lust, or cheat, or steal. This is rooted not in our fear of being kicked out of the covenant, but by our response to the graciousness that has been bestowed upon us.

It might be easy to reduce this to a “better be good for goodness’ sake” kind of message, but that would ignore the fact that the impartial judge who knows each of our deeds has told us the penalty for our misdeeds and in Christ we find that the penalty has been paid. We do not live lives of godly fear because we might be cast away, we live lives of Godly fear to be who we truly are, people who we have been saved from sin, be hopeful, holy, God-fearing people.

### **Who Are You Not?**

We are introduced with a sense of who God is, and because of that we touched on why that is Good News, and what that has to do with godly fear. So, we’ve found out about God. Here we find out about ourselves. Firstly the passage tells us that Christians know who we are not. We know (for the passage isn’t telling us what to know, but telling us what is already known) that the futile ways that were passed down from forefathers (the word ways in v 18 is the same word as conduct in v 17, our conduct in Christ is contrasted with their futile conduct). What does that tell us, well, firstly – unlike any other way that might come down the pike, a Christian’s way of conduct is not futile. All the other ways conceived of by man are futile, there is one non-futile way to conduct your life and that is the Christian way.

It is kind of interesting, there was a Greek word that meant “something handed down from your forefathers” and in every other case this was meant as a good thing. In our culture of ever-changing ideals of morality, beauty and style, the old ways are never a good thing. So we might not bat an eye, and say to ourselves Christianity was new, hip, and cool – the old ways were not. However, that isn’t what our passage means. There’s a tension in our passage. The old ways, normally a good thing – aren’t. They’re futile. They do no good at saving you. This might make some sense in the first century, where Christians had Jesus and pagans had other gods, the old ways were bad and futile at getting eternal life, Jesus was effectual. Now we’ve moved beyond that... right? I would say that our culture has replaced the futility of idolatrous temple

worship with a more decentralized religion. We have cults of entertainment worship, where our altar is the TV, we have cults of personality worship where our holy book is a gossip magazine, we have cults of efficiency worship where streamlining production requires the sacrifice of the emotional, spiritual, or even physical lives of workers. We've found a thousand new futilities, and we're passing them on. These have become the new futilities for those outside of the church. These are the new things we're passing on. New cults, new ultimate things – not God, but created cultural items and values.

In a way we have it harder, we have to seek to identify the new futile cults of our era. No longer do they call themselves religions or distinguish themselves with outfits, but they're there. Demanding sacrifices. Demanding you to waste your time in an ultimately futile trap, because anyway of conduct that does live lives as informed by the reality of Christ is futility. Peter assumes that his audience knows the old ways are futile, let me assure you the new ones are, too.

### **Who Are You?**

So who are the ransomed ones? They're not ransomed with things of worldly value to God. Our impartial judge can't be bribed. The payment due is a known quantity, because God knows all deeds. No, they're ransomed with something far more amazing, they're ransomed with the blood of Jesus Christ, the most perfect offering for sin the world can ever see. In God's economy sin demands punishment, no earthly payment. God is a just God. However God is also a gracious God. He has accepted a payment that does not make him biased, but preserves his impartiality. He has accepted the payment of the Son. The language here, of a lamb without spot or blemish, is clear language of atonement. The Israelites sins had to be regularly purged in a ceremony that portrayed God's pouring out his punishment for their sins upon a lamb. That lamb had to be spotless and without blemish for the sacrifice to be appropriate, because the sacrifice to which that pointed was to be a perfect sacrifice, for it pointed ahead to the coming of Christ whose precious blood was like that of a lamb without spot or blemish. Christians are a people saved by that blood, ransomed, paid in full. No longer strangers to God, but indwelt with the Holy Spirit to lives of Hope, Holiness, and God-fearing.

### **Conclusion**

We started out talking about 1 Peter 1 saying that we were elect exiles, chosen ones who had become strangers in our own homelands. Here we are told about our conduct as wandering sojourners in a strange land. We are given the imperative to live god-fearing lives, that is to say lives in a God-defined fear not of terror but of awe and reverence. We do so because of what has been done for us, we have been ransomed, the judge's penalty for sin has been paid. Now we live lives as though that were the reality. People talk about a world-view, this is a cosmic-view. This is the real world, not as we see it, but as it really is. We don't live God-fearing lives for fear of being sent to hell, we live God-fearing lives because we have been saved.

This wasn't a new concept with Peter or the New Testament, hear these words from the one hundred and thirtieth Psalm:

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!  
 O Lord, hear my voice!  
 Let your ears be attentive  
 to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,

O Lord, who could stand?  
But with you there is forgiveness,  
that you may be feared.

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;  
my soul waits for the Lord  
more than watchmen for the morning,  
more than watchmen for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the LORD!  
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,  
and with him is plentiful redemption.  
And he will redeem Israel  
from all his iniquities.

Forgiveness produces a right kind of fear, a fear that can still hope in the Lord. If you say, "I can't fear and hope in God at the same time" you need to redefine understanding what you mean by fear. If you fail at keeping holiness and fear for your salvation, need redefine your understanding of your relationship with God. Turn your eyes to Jesus. He has borne all your sins away. He has redeemed God's people from all their iniquities. Only in Jesus Christ can take the commands to Hope, to be Holy, and to Fear in a way that makes any sense. Let God redefine your understanding of fear. Christ has ransomed and paid our debt, let us be a God-fearing people in our exile. To Him be glory and dominion unto the ages of ages. Amen.