

A Holy Fear – 1 Peter 1:17
Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis
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INTRODUCTION: A HEALTHY FEAR

A healthy fear...Is there such a thing? Is it ever good to be afraid? When you were growing up did you have a healthy fear of your dad? I'm not talking about fear of an abusive dad, which sadly some of you may have experienced. But I'm talking about fear of a loving dad who was strong and commanded respect and who cared enough about you to provide effective and memorable discipline when you disobeyed or did something harmful. I certainly had a very healthy fear of my own dad and his discipline. I would think twice about whether it was going to be worth it to do something I knew he wouldn't approve of. He was so effective at discipline in fact, that my mom would usually save it for him to take care of when he got home from work. That was some of the worst discipline of all...the stress of waiting all day for the coming discipline of dad.

Well, fear of my dad and his effective discipline had some good effects on my life over time, though it often took me quite a while to thoroughly learn my lessons and change my behavior. And one thing was certain, if I was in the presence of my dad, where I knew he would see everything I was doing, there was no chance I was going to consciously do something he wouldn't approve of. There are definitely some foolish things I've done over the years, that I never would have done had Dad been there with me. And when I did do something discipline-worthy when he wasn't around, I would spend lots of time worrying about him finding out about it and what huge trouble I would be in if he did. A healthy fear of dad can be a really good thing that helps keep us out of trouble. In a similar way a healthy fear of God is a really good thing that too often is neglected these days, though fear of God has some key differences from the fear we have of our dads.

As we return to 1 Peter this morning, Peter is going to draw our attention to the importance of fear in our walk with God, our Father. Today we're going to zero in on verse 17 of 1 Peter chapter 1. Turn there in your Bibles if you would, and we'll begin our study by reading verses 13 through 21 to include a little context.

Remember, Peter's sharing with us now the big picture view of the saved life and how to live it...the life he expects to be the natural result of understanding our great salvation. Here we go:

13 Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

17 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, 18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word. Holy Spirit, please guide us as we study today.

CONDUCT YOURSELVES WITH FEAR

As we focus on verse 17 today, I want you to notice the simple command that's found there and that provides the key takeaway from verses 17 through 21: ***conduct yourselves with fear***. This simple command is related to our conduct, our behavior, our actions; continuing the idea introduced last week that we are to be holy in all of our conduct. In other words, we are to be learning to act like God our Father *everywhere* we go and in everything we do, as his obedient children. And what does that look like? It looks exactly like the way Jesus lived his life while he was on this earth. ***"If you've seen me, you've seen the Father,"*** he said. To be holy in all of our conduct is to become like Christ in our real everyday lives, and that happens as we sign on to be his disciples: *where we "live with him to learn from him how to be like him"* (Dallas Willard).

But notice that as we seek to do this – as we seek to be holy in all our conduct like Christ – FEAR plays an important role. *Conduct yourselves with fear...*and do this throughout the time of your exile. Throughout all the years you live as a sojourner on this earth that's not your home, conduct yourselves with fear. And this fear is not fear of man or anything in this world, but rather fear of God. Remember, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom. We can't be wise without it.

So what does Peter mean by fear? Are we to be cowering in terror and living with dread that God's going to punish us severely for any infraction or snuff us out if we fail in any way? I don't know about you, but I spent some years in my early Christian walk viewing God this way, thinking of him as always disappointed in me and wagging his finger at my mistakes and on the verge of being done with me at any moment. He was the behavior police and I was always falling short. But this is NOT the biblical concept of fear that Peter is talking about. This is NOT how Peter wants us to view our loving Father and relate to him.

So I think what we need here is a little digging into the meaning of the word translated, fear, in this passage. The Greek word is *phobos*, and the meaning here is "reverential fear," or "reverential awe." *Vine's Expository Dictionary* describes it as "...not a mere 'fear' of His power and righteous retribution, but a wholesome dread of displeasing Him...[And interestingly, this is] a 'fear' that banishes the terror that shrinks from his presence...([see] Rom. 8:15)...and which influences the disposition and attitude of one whose circumstances are guided by trust in God, through the indwelling Spirit of God...[this] reverential 'fear' of God will inspire a constant carefulness in dealing with others in His 'fear.'" The central idea is reverence, awe, that inspires carefulness in all we do, remembering that we're living constantly in the presence of and walking with Almighty God.

Through Christ and in him, we have the awesome privilege of being able to live in the very presence of God our Father as his sons and daughters. We can live there without terror and cowering or fearing that we'll be consumed by his holiness, because we live there clothed with Christ...clothed with his robes of righteousness. And yet as we live there, we are never to forget that we're living in the presence of Almighty God...the One before whom people in Scripture fell facedown as though dead when they encountered him...the One whose presence

at Mount Sinai was accompanied by flashes of lightning, peals of thunder, a thick cloud, a trumpet blast, and an earthquake (see Exodus 19:16-20).

The fear of the Lord spoken of here in verse 17 of 1 Peter chapter 1, involves recognizing the awesome majesty, power, purity and holiness of God our good Father. It speaks of not taking him lightly or relating to him casually or flippantly or thinking that sin and living out of step with his character is not that big of a deal to him. It speaks of knowing that God is holy and is committed to growing holiness in his children for their good and for his glory, and that he's committed to providing loving and effective discipline when we get off track from that, doing harmful and destructive things that hurt ourselves and others and bring disrepute to his name. And that were any of his children to totally turn against him, knowingly and continually engaging in false teaching, or giving themselves fully over to unrighteousness, there will be dire consequences that could include sickness or even in extreme cases physical death.

I think one of the best pictures of a healthy fear of the Lord is from a conversation near the end of the movie *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*. As Lucy and Mr. Tumness watched Aslan, the Lion, going away, something like this was said: *He's not a tame lion, you know. He's not safe, but he's good. Never forget he's a wild and powerful lion...not a tame one we can put in a cage or a box. But he's always, always, always good and always fighting for our good because he loves us. And being in his presence and under his protection is the most wonderful place to be in the universe. But always keep a healthy and holy fear of him, remembering that he's God Almighty. Don't try to bring him down to your size. Conduct yourselves always with a healthy fear of him and a wholesome dread of displeasing the One you love and the One who loves you so deeply.*

OUR FATHER IS THE ONE EVALUATING EVERYONE'S DEEDS

Now as Peter presents this command to conduct ourselves with fear, he also provides us with 4 reasons to do so in verses 17 through 21. In the rest of our time today, we'll look at the first reason, and then next week we'll focus on the other three. But the first reason why we should conduct ourselves with fear is this: *Our Father is the One evaluating everyone's deeds.* Peter 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 amazing reality for those of us in Christ is that we have a new Dad. We've been adopted forever as sons and daughters of Almighty God himself. We live in his presence and can come to his throne of grace anytime night or day. Scripture says our prayer is his delight. He loves it when we talk to him and spend time with him and call on him. His Holy Spirit is also dwelling within us, guiding and us and empowering us and communicating everything about us and what we really need to him. This means we have tremendous advantages – to say the least – over those without Christ. But it also means we have no excuse for not pursuing a holy life. He's given us everything we need to do it.

You see, with this amazing new reality – where God Almighty is our Father – we need to realize something sobering. The One who's now our Father, is the same One who's job it is to observe and evaluate how every person in the world lives their lives. Proverbs 15:3 says: ***The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.*** Our Dad is the One keeping an account of every person's life, including ours.

Now for those who haven't come to peace with God through faith in Christ, this accounting will serve as the basis for God's judgment in the last day. And sadly, no one outside of Christ will every measure up to the holiness of God. Thankfully, for those of us in Christ, our salvation and our entrance into heaven is not determined by this accounting. That's only determined by our trust in Christ and his work on the cross as we become his disciples through repentance and faith. ***For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast*** (Ephesians 2:8-9). And yet, make no mistake, there will still be an accounting of how we lived our lives here as God's children, as disciples of Christ, and this accounting will affect our experience and our assignments and our rewards in heaven.

Paul made this very clear in writing to the believers in Corinth, when he wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:9-10:

**9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.
10 For we must all appear 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.**

Remember Paul is writing here to believers and including himself, using the pronoun, “we.” In other words, this is going to be the case for all believers. We will all one day appear before Christ at the judgment seat, where the Father’s evaluation of how we lived our lives on this earth will be laid out. We’ll talk about what the standard of evaluation will be in just a moment. But the question for now is this: Are you living your life right now with consciousness of this coming evaluation before the judgment seat of Christ? Paul definitely was, and in the next verse, verse 11 of 2 Corinthians 5, look at how it affected him. He said:

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.

This coming reality of an accounting of his life in the presence of Christ – an accounting which our Father is keeping daily right now – created a healthy, holy and biblical fear within Paul and his fellow apostles. It kept them sober-minded and diligent about being holy in all of their conduct. And it motivated them to share the good news of Christ with others. Holy fear leads to holy conduct.

OUR FATHER EVALUATES EVERYONE IMPARTIALLY

Now the next truth Peter wants us to realize about the evaluation of our daily lives by the Father is that it is being done *impartially*. Looking at verse 17 again, we see that our Father is the One ***who judges IMPARTIALLY according to each one’s deeds***. The Greek word translated, “impartially,” literally means “without receiving the face” or “without respect to persons.” The idea is that he does it objectively, without favoritism, without accepting bribes, without being a little more lenient with some than others because they’re more attractive or more likable or come from a better family.

The Father’s evaluation is perfect and objective and sees beyond the outward show and the masks. *The Holman New Testament Commentary* puts it this way: “God’s judgment is not determined by outward appearance or pretense. Whatever faces or masks people try to hide behind, they remain transparent to

God. God's judgment deals with a person's character, not simply one's actions, which can be faked. God is concerned with individual actions and the internal motivation behind these actions."

So what is the standard of evaluation the Father is using and that will be used when we come before the judgment seat of Christ? Is it concerned with what WE'RE doing FOR God right now? Is it focused on our church attendance, or how many Bible studies go to, or how many sermons we listen to, or on our outward performance of "Christian" duties and rituals? Well, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, gives us some great insight into what the Father is concerned with as he evaluates our lives. And the picture he gives us is this: *Are we building our lives, our passions, our activities on the foundation of Jesus Christ and are we diligently seek to live the new life Jesus purchased for us at such great cost – loving our God, being filled with his Spirit and accomplishing his will on earth?*

Are we functioning as diligent disciples of Jesus Christ? Because that's the only way the holy life grows and develops and becomes fruitful and effective. It's not about perfection or keeping a list of rules and duties or doing what people expect "good" Christians to do. It's just about diligently walking with Christ and learning to become like him more and more by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is what our gracious Father is evaluating. And in his impartial evaluation, God sees through the busyness, the outward activity, to see the motives and if what we're doing is being done by his strength for his glory out of love for our Savior, or if we're just trying to do things by our own talents and abilities primarily for our own glory. Listen to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15:

11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

This is a sobering picture that invites us again to a healthy fear of the Lord. The Father is the One who impartially evaluates our lives and our walk with him. And

to live in a way that pleases him and produces work that will survive the fire of testing at the judgment seat of Christ, our lives need to be built on and centered around discipleship with Jesus Christ. Out of love for him because of his love for us we become his disciples, learning to live life like he did: loving God's Word and God's will, communicating with him constantly, spreading the good news of the kingdom, and doing everything in dependence on the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

This is not a heavy burden or an impossible task. It's actually the opposite. It's the easy yoke Jesus spoke of. *Come to me all you who labor and heavy laden – all you who have been relying on yourselves and wearing yourselves out trying to clean up your act and do my work in your own strength – Come to me, yoke up with me, and I will give you what you need. I will give you rest. Live with me and learn from me, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Build your life on my foundation and by my Spirit and my truth be changed and learn to powerfully accomplish God's will as I prepare you for your eternal inheritance.*

The invitation is wonderful, it's real, and it will change our lives radically when we accept it. When we truly begin taking seriously the call to the holy life that only comes through discipleship with Christ. He paid the highest of prices to bring us into this new holy and transformed life at peace with God...to free us from the empty ways of the world and purify us to be a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (see Titus 2:14). And we will be held accountable – there will be an assessment one day before the judgment seat of Christ – as to whether or not we walked into the holy life he has in mind for us.

Pursing a holy life as a fully engaged disciple of Christ throughout the time of our sojourning truly does matter, and we would do well to develop a healthy and holy fear and consciousness that we are being evaluated impartially by our Father and will one day give an account of our discipleship with Christ...of whether or not we really followed him into his purposes for our lives and let him change us from the inside out. Take seriously the call to be holy in all your conduct. Conduct yourselves with a holy fear that comes from living every moment of your life in the presence of Almighty God. His Holy Spirit dwells in you if you're a follower of

Christ and your body is meant to be his temple, the place where he is glorified and revealed to the rest of the world. Never forget that.

As I behaved differently when my Dad was around, let's keep an awareness that everywhere we go God is there with us and in us and he doesn't miss a thing. With my Dad there was always a thread of hope that he might not find out about some bad choice I had made. Not so with my heavenly Father. He sees it all and is there with me in it all. That keeps sober-minded and careful about my actions. I don't fear that I'll ever have to bear the eternal punishment that those without Christ will have to face someday. Through Christ I'm saved and forgiven and secure forever. Praise the Lord! But I do keep a reverent fear of displeasing the One I love so much, and of ever hindering my fellowship with him and my access to his wisdom and strength. And this leads me to quick repentance whenever I do get off track. God's abundant mercy is always there, secured and always available because of the work of Christ on the cross. And I know, as I hope you do to, that repentance is always the only path to freedom and restored fellowship with our God when sin crops up. Own up to it, confess it and tell God you want to change. That's how you keep on the path the holy life.

And let's also remember, before we close, that there's a big difference between my earthly Dad and my heavenly Father. That comparison breaks down pretty quickly. My earthly Dad was an imperfect dad who had his own selfishness and impatience and sin struggles clouding his parenting, as I do as well. But my heavenly Father is perfect and loves me perfectly and knows exactly the right amount of discipline I need to keep me on track. He's gracious and he doesn't demand or expect perfection. He's just looking for me and you to be pursuing him, to be loving him, and to be repenting when we do get off track. He's the only One who changes us and brings us to freedom and guides us into the holy life. We don't ever do it alone or in our strength.

Our God is not a tame lion, but he is a good lion...always good and always full of abundant mercy for the children he loves and protects his full power and strength. A holy fear of him will help lead us to the holy conduct he desires for the good of his holy ones – his saints – you and I.