

1 Peter 1:17-21

¹⁷*If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of you stay on earth; ¹⁸knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, ¹⁹but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. ²⁰For he was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you ²¹who 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.*

First Peter is packed full of things to study. Each time I read it, I find something else to consider and research. As we continue through this wonderful book, I encourage you to read and think past what I have presented in these Bible study sessions. The text is rich and has much more to offer than we could possibly cover here. With that said, let's continue to work through 1 Peter by looking at the next passage (1:17-21).

We begin with "If you address as Father the One ...". This is basically saying "if you are truly a child of God". Only a child of God will address Him as Father. I refer you back to Romans 8:15-16 which we looked at in the last session. Immediately following this statement, we find text that gives us another picture of who God is. He is the One who impartially judges according to each one's works. Does this strike you as strange? What does it mean that God will impartially judge each person's works? Is Peter speaking of a works based salvation? Certainly not! This would be inconsistent with scripture. Consider the following references:

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Galatians 2:16 Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we (the Jews) have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

Others to look up: 2 Tim. 1:9; Romans 11:6

What does Peter mean when he says God will judge our works? This is a time where context is going to help us out a lot. We have been talking a lot about being children of God, being bought by the blood of Christ, and finding joy in times of despair by putting our hope in the glory that is to come. We have to let this information influence our interpretation of the verse in question.

We have talked about being holy in all our behavior (good times and bad). We have also talked about finding joy in times of trial or struggle. In other words, by keeping the right focus during times of struggle we will continue to act as God directs and not how our flesh would react to the situation. This is what I believe Peter is talking about.

Certainly all our behavior will be looked at and judged, but I think it is more telling of who a person really is when you see them act during a trying time in their life. Trials are sent to us for two reasons: to refine our faith and to prove our faith. We talked about testing our faith when we talked about verse 7. A time of trial will show who you are really relying on, yourself or God. Who you rely on will be reflected in your actions. If we rely on ourselves we will probably not reflect God's holiness in our actions. The opposite is just as true. If we rely and focus on God, our actions will reflect who He is and His holiness. If we act in the flesh our actions are wrong, sinful and not of God, and for these actions we will be judged. A prime example of keeping the right focus during a time of trial is the life of Job. Go back and read the first two chapters of Job. Take note of what happened to him and how he responded.

Moving on through verse 17, the next phrase says to "conduct yourselves in fear". Peter is telling the children of God to fear the Lord. Have you ever really thought about what it means to fear the Lord? Most can probably quote Proverbs 9:10 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom", but what does it mean to fear the Lord. Let's look at a few passages about fear to get an idea.

1 John 4:15-18 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear...and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

Romans 8:15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again ...

2 Timothy 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of timidity (fear) but of power and love and discipline

So how do we fear the Lord without having fear? The answer is this. To fear the Lord is to be reverentially obedient or to have a deep rooted respect for God that leads to obedience. It is not a fear that is paralyzing or causes anxiety. There are clearly two different types of fear here, and we must be sure we have the correct fear in our lives.

The final portion of the passage for this session speaks of the imperishable payment we were bought with. Peter doesn't leave any mystery to what he is saying here. What our forefathers thought was valuable was indeed perishable and worthless. The blood of Christ that was spilled on our behalf is imperishable and eternal. John 1:1-3,12 affirms what Peter says about Jesus existing before the world. Also, because of His infinite knowledge, God knew that one day He would have to send Jesus to earth to die on our behalf. Our access to God is through Jesus alone, and through the resurrecting work that God did in Jesus' life we believe in God.

Application Questions

- What would God's judgment of your actions look like?
- In times of trial, has your faith proven true or did you begin to rely on yourself?
- If you relied on yourself during that time, did you reflect and let the test refine your faith as fire does with gold?
- Do you act the same way during both the good times and the bad? Do those actions reflect God's holiness?
- Have you let paralyzing, flesh based fear guide your actions? Or was it a proper fear of the Lord that guided yours steps?
- Are you struggling now? Who is guiding you? Fear of the trial or fear of God?

Final Remark

Times of trial are going to come (if they haven't already). We can choose to fear the situation and follow our flesh or have a proper fear of God and let Him guide us. Choosing to fear and trust God will always get us through any situation. Spend some time reflecting on the last time you began to fall to the fear of a trial. Do not be afraid to admit to the times that you fell short. God is a loving and forgiving God. Let Him show you what happened, and let Him remind you of who He is and what He can do in your life.