

Live In Fear

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[0 : 00] 1 Peter chapter 1, 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, knowing that you were ransomed from the feudal ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

Amen. That's where we'll pause. We don't want to open with a question. Should a Christian ever live in fear?

Should a Christian ever live in fear? That's what I want to meditate on here at the beginning of our time in this text.

I actually posted the question on Facebook earlier this week, really just curious to see what kind of responses might come from it. I wasn't trying to trick anybody.

That wasn't what my intent was. I was actually genuinely curious if anyone might provide a thoughtfully nuanced answer to that question. And as you might expect, perhaps some of you saw the post.

[1 : 27] Of course, none of you seemed brave enough to actually reply to the post. That's all right. But perhaps you read what some of the comments were on it. With only one exception, everyone who commented on the question provided this answer.

It was a resolute no. The only exception was the guy that said, well, only those Christians who are married should probably live in fear. Speaking of those men that maybe he knows, maybe he was one of those men.

But really, it was a resolute no for every one of them. No, there's never a reason for a Christian to live in fear. And many of them would quote scripture, important scriptures like 2 Timothy.

God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of love and of a sound mind. Some quoted Isaiah, really, where we could go in a numerous amount of places in the Old Testament, which would echo fear not.

Why? For I am with you. And that answer is a good instinct, isn't it? I want to suggest that it's not the only way to answer the question.

[2 : 31] Because it's not the only way that the Bible tackles this issue of fear or this idea of living in fear. We read just here in our passage in Luke 1 in this Christmas reading.

There is one sense in which the people recognizing around Zechariah and Elizabeth, they're recognizing something unique and of God is there. And fear fell upon them, it says.

We see also a different kind of fear for Zechariah. The angel Gabriel shows up next to the temple and he is overwhelmed with fear. Same word. But clearly different in the way that it's experienced in those moments.

Then Zechariah comes to the prophecy that he gives and he says that this child has come to prepare the way for the Christ so that God would fulfill his promises and we would be able to serve him without fear.

Different ways. Same word that we might experience this. Let me give you a couple other passages. Romans 11. Paul is talking about unbelieving Israel and he's using this illustration of the branch and God pruning the branch.

[3 : 46] He says that unbelieving Jews were broken off because of their unbelief. And then he writes to the Romans, But you stand fast through faith. So, he says, do not become proud, but fear.

Why? For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Now, that sounds a lot like living in fear to me.

But actually as a command. Let me go to another one. How about Philippians chapter 2, verses 12 and 13. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, work out your own salvation with, do you remember?

Fear and trembling. Fear and trembling. Why? For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Sounds a little bit like living in fear, doesn't it?

How about our call to worship this morning? Hebrews chapter 12, verses 28 and 29. Let us offer to God acceptable worship. Why? We are to do this with reverence and awe.

[4 : 57] It's just another way of saying fear and trembling. Why? Why? The writer of Hebrews says, because our God is a consuming fire. Sounds like living in fear, doesn't it?

All three of these texts and others address Christians. They command that we live in fear in some way.

Of course, we need to understand what that means. But they're commanding that we live in fear. And they link this way of life, this fearful way of living to God as a righteous judge.

And then we come to 1 Peter. And Peter gives us the same instruction here in verses 17 to 19. In view of God as the impartial judge and righteous just judge, Peter writes in verse 17 that we are to conduct ourselves with fear.

We're to walk in fear. We're to live in fear throughout the time of our exile. It's the third of three imperatives that he issues here in verses 13 to 21.

[6 : 08] And of course, as we've said over and over, these imperatives are flowing out of the assurances of the believer's salvation. That's a pretty big clue for us here, isn't it? The things that Peter is commanding, even that we live in fear or walk in fear or conduct ourselves in fear, is flowing out of gospel hope and gospel assurance.

God's grace secures that gospel assurance. Christ's return will bring that gospel hope to completion. And Peter's main point in this whole section is that our gospel hope should dramatically affect the way we live practically.

The first one is that we are to focus on God's grace. That's verse 13. The second one is that we are to pursue holiness as God's children. That's verse 15.

And then there's this one here in verse 17, an explicit imperative, that we are to live in fear as we wait for the Lord's return. Okay, well, here's the question. What does it actually mean?

What does it mean to live in fear if there's also an imperative here that says we're to focus all of our hope, set it fully on grace, which sounds a lot like faith and assurance and confidence.

[7 : 31] And how are we to understand these two things together? Well, here's what I want to do. I want to help us to understand how Peter is using fear in this context.

And then I want you to see two ways that Peter says this should work itself out in our lives. If you like grammar and the structure of how this is, we call this a bilateral here.

The primary emphasis is right in the middle, right? Conduct yourselves with fear. The supporting statements for that, there's one before it, and then there's one after it.

Those are the two ways that Peter is telling us that we are to practically live this out. But the imperative, the main emphasis is right in the middle. So we want to understand what that is first, and then we're going to look at how Peter says we're to live this out.

Okay, so let's think about this. What does it actually mean to live in fear? And the thing that we need to understand right away is that Peter is not commanding that we feel fear.

[8 : 32] And this is really important because an anxious Christian is a contradiction. An anxious Christian is a contradiction.

That does not mean that a genuine Christian cannot feel anxiety and will never have anxiety or will never have moments of struggle with mental health or anything like that.

That's not what I mean by that. What I mean is that constant anxiety contradicts the assurance of hope that's at the heart of our faith.

You can't set your hope fully on the grace of God and simultaneously live in the kind of fear that doubts God's faithfulness.

Whether that's in relation to your eternal salvation or perhaps that's the troubling circumstances of your life that maybe causes you to question the significance of God's love and of his sovereign care and providence in your life.

[9 : 40] Those are serious things we wrestle with on a regular basis. All of us do. And the fact that that wrestling takes place is not the problem here. But to live in that kind of anxiety is a contradiction

to what we say is actually at the heart of our faith.

Which is hope. Assurance. Confidence. In God's goodness. This will always be a temptation for us in exile. Won't it?

Which is exactly why later in the letter Peter is going to write that we must cast all of our cares on him. All of our anxieties on him.

For he cares for us. That's chapter 5 verse 7. So we know here right from the beginning Peter doesn't mean that we are to feel fearful. Or be controlled by a sense of fear.

Or never have a sense of confidence and hope in our Christian life. That's not what he's saying. Conduct or conduct is the key word in this case. He's not concerned with how we feel but how we behave.

[10:45] And he insists that our behavior be guided by the principle of fearing God. And the kind of fear that Peter refers to here and that Paul referred to in many passages.

And that we see happening practically in some of those narratives like we've read already this morning. That kind of fear is not abject terror. But it isn't mere respect either.

Sometimes we water it down too much. We don't fear God the way we respect someone who has accomplished greatness in their field.

Or just happens to hold an office that's higher than us. We don't fear God in exactly that way. It's deeper than that. It's more profound than that. We revere him as the holy one.

To whom each of us will give an account of our lives. Thus Peter reminds us that God judges impartially according to each one's deeds.

[11:51] To conduct yourselves with fear then is to live in light of the judgment of God who is a consuming fire. And therefore to live in such a way that we are working out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Literally working it from the inside to the outside. That gospel hope that has overtaken our hearts. That is a work of God's grace. We are to let that work itself out practically in the way we live.

That's what it means to conduct yourselves in fear in light of God as the just judge. So Peter's point is that the fear of God is to be the guiding principle of Christian conduct during our time of exile.

To say it another way. You should govern how you live with a constant and conscientious reverence for God and his gracious work in your life.

And Peter gives us two ways that this works itself out. Two ways. Number one. We are to live in fear of dishonoring God's name.

[13:05] As his people. He's speaking to Christians. We are to live in fear of dishonoring God's name. Look again at verse 17. If you call on him as father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds.

Conduct yourselves with fear. I recently shared with our fellowship group. I'm sure I've said this a number of times even in services on Sundays.

About this routine that my dad always had with us when we were growing up. I assume he did this with my brother and my sister as well. I know that he did it with me and he probably had to do it a little more often with me.

But whenever I was going somewhere without my dad, we went through this thing where he would make me say my name. And he wanted me to put particular emphasis on my last name.

Blankenship. And of course you know why. Wherever I went, whatever I did, he wanted me to remember that everything I did as his son reflected on his name.

[14:15] On our family name. In other words, he wanted me to conduct myself in fear of bringing dishonor to the Blankenship family by acting in a way contrary to our values.

Every once in a while, dad, he would take this illustration. He would take this thing a little bit further in a more profound way. And he would say something to the effect that if I profess to be a Christian, then I need to remember wherever I am that what I do and what I think and how I live reflects on the name of Christ.

That as someone who belongs to God, I should conduct myself in fear of ever bringing dishonor to God by acting in a way contrary to his word.

That's exactly what Peter's saying here. And once again, he's using this family language, isn't he, to describe our relationship to God as his people.

In verse 3, if you want to look back there, he writes that God the Father has caused us to be born again through faith in Christ, making us his children, called by his name.

[15 : 37] It's this new birth into God's family that qualifies us for and guarantees our eternal inheritance. That's his whole point. He's using this illustration again and again.

God the Father has caused you to be born again as his child, therefore giving you his eternal inheritance. He's your Father.

We are his children if we have come to know Christ by faith. And he does it again in verse 14, doesn't he? He writes that our pursuit of holiness is to be grounded in this fact that as we have become God's children through faith and obedience to the gospel message, we are to then be holy and to pursue it.

And he's returning to that again here, the same thing, that if we profess to know God as Father, he is our Father. If we're saying that, if we're claiming to be a Christian, then we need to be careful to live up to the family name.

We should live in fear of doing anything. I would dishonor him. Which leads me to a question. When's the last time that you considered whether or not your life genuinely honors your father?

[17 : 02] Not your earthly father. Not your family name here. That's important. A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, Solomon tells us.

But the blankenship name in the end is insignificant. It doesn't matter. When's the last time you considered whether or not the way that you were living actually honors your heavenly father? Is the guiding principle of your life and of the decisions that you make that this honors God? It brings him glory in my life.

If you call on him as father, if you're professing to be saved by him through faith in Jesus, you have a responsibility then to bring him glory in your time of exile.

And let us not forget the qualification here that Peter makes. If you call on him as father, who judges impartially according to each one's deeds.

[18 : 16] Again, he's speaking to professing Christians here who will stand before their father in judgment. Heaven and hell is not at stake in that judgment for you.

Our future inheritance is secured by him, not by us. We have that hope. And yet, Peter reminds us, you will still stand before him as judge.

And he is a just judge. He is impartial in his judgments. In other words, your life here will not be judged in comparison to the life of another Christian here.

It will stand and fall on its own. Conducting yourself in fear means consciously living to bring honor to God's name, knowing that he will eventually call you to account for your life.

What an immense privilege it is to be God's child, to know him as father. What a tremendous responsibility each of us has to represent him faithfully during our time of exile.

[19 : 31] Are we to live in fear? Well, yeah, in a sense we are. A reverence for God, trembling before him, not wondering whether or not he will be faithful, but seeking to honor his name.

And so we're going to live in fear of dishonoring him. And then there's the second thing. Peter says, live in fear of demeaning or devaluing or degrading Christ's sacrifice.

Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited by your forefathers, not with perishable things like silver and gold.

But with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb, without blemish or spot. Live in fear because you have been set free, he says.

That's what it means to be ransomed. To be ransomed means to be set free or rescued from captivity. And Peter says that conducting ourselves with fear requires consciously bringing to mind the fact that we have been set free from something terrible.

[20 : 47] And what we've been ransomed from is the way of thinking and living that characterized our lives before coming to Christ.

Before he caused us in his great mercy to be born again to a living hope. That way of life, that way of thinking, the worldview that is forced in on us from the moment of our birth in this world.

He's rescued you from that. That way of thinking. He's redeemed you from that. He's ransomed you from that. Again, in verse 14, Peter calls it the passions of our former ignorance.

Here, he calls it the futile ways we inherited from our forefathers. The passions are those particular behaviors that flow out of a godless worldview.

The futile ways is the worldview itself. It has more to do with the way we think. What's governing our lives. And then the passions are the behaviors that flow out of that.

[21 : 52] Now, ignorance, in this case, it's not talking about lacking intelligence, but possessing a worldview that does not comprehend the character and purposes of God.

The way of this world, which is ours by nature. It's empty, Peter says. It's incapable of bringing true fulfillment. It is darkness rather than light, and it leads to God's eternal wrath.

There is this notion. It seems to be ever-present among Christians that while holding on to Jesus, we need also to open ourselves up to what other worldviews and perspectives and religions may have to offer.

That we can find something good in that and therefore be supportive of those things and maybe even be challenged and corrected even in our own thinking. Peter is not friendly to that idea.

We are not to be open to those things. We are not to be open to those perspectives. We are not to open ourselves to those traditions. We've been rescued from that, he says. You were ransomed from that darkness.

[23 : 08] You were ransomed from those ways of thinking. In the final analysis, Peter is saying that these other traditions, they're futile and they're vain since they do not lead to faith and trust in the true God.

He says you've been rescued from that. Redeemed and ransomed from the ignorant and futile way of living. And the cost of your ransom was higher than you could ever imagine.

We just sang about it and come behold the wondrous mystery. See the price of our redemption. The Father's plan unfold. What is the price of our redemption?

It's of infinite value. Ransom demands kidnappings. They almost always involve a significant amount of money.

Which is what the way of this world, this ignorance, and this futile thinking tends to value above everything else, doesn't it? Peter uses that to contrast the value of what has actually ransomed you.

[24 : 18] He thinks of the thing that's most valuable in this life. Silver and gold. And he devalues that to say, remember at the end of the day, that's perishable. It's all going to go away.

It's going to burn up. But what has ransomed you is not perishable at all. Rather, it's the precious blood of Christ.

Like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. Through the shedding of his blood, Jesus poured out his life unto death for you, a sinner.

Not because he had to and not because you asked him to. But because of his great mercy and love. He laid down his life as an atonement in our place.

This is how Jesus fulfilled and surpassed the pictures of redemption that we see all through the Old Testament. Namely in the sacrificial system, which is the other comparison that Peter gives here.

[25 : 23] Not only is Christ's atonement more valuable than anything in this life, like silver and gold. But he compares it then to a lamb without blemish and spot. That old system by which atonement was made.

Shriner says animals were without defect physically. But Peter's point was that Jesus was sinless. He was a perfect sacrifice because of his sinless life.

His precious blood or his blood is precious. Because it is the means by which you are forgiven. By which that future inheritance that Peter earlier said is imperishable and undefiled and unfading.

That God is keeping it in heaven for you while he keeps you and guards you through faith. Now all of that is made possible by one thing. The blood of Christ.

And it is precious. Because the sinless one died in our place. Our sinful souls are then ransomed and counted free.

[26 : 34] 2 Corinthians 5.21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin. So that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

To continue in that ignorant and futile way of the world. Is to demean and devalue the precious blood of Christ.

That was shed to save your soul. That's Peter's point. Live in fear of treating the blood of Christ and what he has done for your salvation like garbage.

Because to consume ourselves with the perishable pleasures of this life like silver and gold. To open ourselves in some kind of seemingly noble way to the traditions and the lies of this world.

Is to look at the cross of Christ as if it's meaningless. To treat it like trash. Knowing what Christ has done to bring us salvation.

[27 : 43] We should fear living in such a way. As to hold that in contempt. I've told you before about riding on the bus in high school and having a friend.

I would imagine he's matured beyond this at this point. But I hope so. He talked about his plan that day when he got off the bus and got home.

He was going to indulge in pornography for the afternoon. Despite the fact that he understood it to be a sinful thing to do. He was acknowledging that.

And yet still saying that. That was his plan. Which is a bizarre thing to admit to. And I guess sensing that the rest of us found his admission or at least his perspective unusual.

He immediately tried to say and make it seem better by saying don't worry. When I'm done I'll just ask Jesus to forgive me. And he wasn't joking.

[28 : 46] In his mind he was associating Christ atonement. With a free pass to essentially do whatever he wanted to do. In his mind he just needed to ask for forgiveness when he was done.

And as long as he did that it was like this magic button that would just make it all okay. Not only did he dishonor God's name as a professing Christian.

But he treated Christ's sacrifice like trash. Now I don't imagine any of you would ever make such a foolish statement.

And I hope that my friend wouldn't make such a foolish statement today. If he still claims to be a Christian. How many of us though are guilty of conducting our lives in such a way.

That this is the message that it sends. That yeah well I'm a Christian that means I'm forgiven. I guess I can kind of do what I want to do.

[29 : 50] Never stopping to think. That not only is this a terrible reflection on the name of your father.

But it is so demeaning. To what you say is the most important thing about your life. Like a prisoner. Returning to his captors after being set free.

How often do we return to the way of life. That Jesus shed his blood to save us from. Thereby treating the cross with contempt.

Peter saying. No Jesus died for that. Don't go back to that. Don't conform to the passions of your former ignorance.

You've been set free from the futile ways that you inherited from your forefathers. Keep in mind what it took to redeem you.

[30 : 55] And live in fear. Of ever demeaning. The atonement that Christ has made. For your salvation. According to this text.

And many others. There is a sense. In which it is right. For Christians to live in fear. Or not to be anxious about life.

Or certainly not to question God's sovereignty. Or faithfulness. I often think of that Spurgeon quote. I rest my head on the pillow of God's sovereignty.

That should be indicative of your life as a believer. Not to live in that kind of anxiety. That's not what I mean to say.

And it's not what Peter means to say here. But we are to live in holy reverence of him. As the one to whom we will give an account for our lives. That begins with obedience to the gospel by faith.

[31 : 55] Because without faith it's impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God. Must believe that he exists. And that he rewards those who seek him.

That's Hebrews 11. But for those of us who call on him as father. We must conduct our lives in such a way. To honor God's name.

And to treasure Christ's sacrifice. And let me tell you. That will come at tremendous cost. It might cost you some silver and gold in this life. Because we want to make sure that we're honoring God's name.

And treasuring Christ's sacrifice. And the way that we go about our business. That our source of gain is a just source of gain. That we don't give in to the basest of vices.

Greed. It's going to affect the way that men you lead your homes. It's going to affect the way that you raise your children.

[33 : 02] Your children may hate you for it. But his name is worth it. And his sacrifice is more valuable than anything we might obtain in this life.

Isn't that what Jesus said? If you will come after me. Deny yourself. Take up your cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it.

But whoever would lose his life for my sake and the gospel's. The same will save it. He says. This is the life that flows out of gospel hope and assurance.
And living in this kind of fear. God. Is how any of us are going to thrive. In this time of exile. Let's pray.