

Be Holy and Fear God

1 Peter 1:10-21

Introduction and Context

One of the keys to understanding Peter's letter is that he is writing to Christians (most likely ethnically Jewish) who are undergoing and trying to understand suffering. They have been grieved by various trials (1:6). They know what it is to suffer unjustly (2:19). They suffer for righteousness' sake (3:14). And, there is more coming (4:12). Their persecutors were likely primarily Jews and then Romans stirred up by the Jews. This means that Judaizing would have been a very real temptation for these Christians.

Peter opens his letter by reminding his readers who they are in Christ. They have been elected and begotten by God to living hope through the resurrection of Jesus, and by this have an inheritance reserved in heaven by God (1:1-4). Peter reminds them that they are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation (v. 5). Nothing can overcome that power. Peter also encourages these saints that their current sufferings are temporary and that God is using them to make their faith shine forth more to the glory of Christ and thereby to their own glory and joy (vs. 6-9).

Summary of the Text

The prophets studied and learned about this salvation. By their teachings, they ministered ultimately, not to themselves, but to those who now have received the revelation that Jesus is the Messiah (vs. 10-12). Because of this, gird up, be watchful, and rest your hope only on Jesus (v. 13). Don't go back to your former lusts, your former ways (v. 14). Instead, be holy like God is holy (vs. 15-16). By implication, your former lusts or ways of living were not truly holy. So now, when you call on God who still judges according to your lives, conduct yourselves also in fear (v. 17). This is fear that is grounded on the fact that you were not redeemed from your aimless traditions by corruptible things (v. 18). Rather, you were redeemed by the precious blood of the holy lamb, Jesus (v. 19). Through the revealed Jesus you believe in God who raised Him up and gave him glory. God did these things so that you might put your faith and hope in Him (vs. 20-21).

Conduct Yourselves in Holiness

Peter calls Christians to be holy, to be as obedient children conducting themselves in holiness in all things. The reason for this is that the God Who called them is Himself holy. Fundamentally, God wants us to become like Him. God says, "Be holy, for I am holy." Become like me. Incidentally, the serpent played off of this when he tempted Eve. He told her that if she skirted God's commands and ate the fruit she would become like a god. And Eve feared for herself, worshipped herself instead of God, and coveted the fruit and the possibility of becoming like a god other than the true God.

One of the places in Leviticus that Peter is quoting from reads this way: "For I am the Lord who brings you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:45). We seek to be holy like God is holy because He has pulled us up out of slavery. When God calls us, He calls us out of slavery to sin, and, like Peter argues at the beginning of the letter, He establishes us as His children and keeps us by His power (1:1-5).

Conduct Yourselves in Fear

Peter also calls his audience to conduct themselves in fear of the Father who judges impartially according to each person's work. This fear of the Father, though, is not, a fear of judgment. Peter is not calling on Christians to be worried about their salvation. Instead, he reminds his readers that they have been purchased, not by corruptible things, but by the precious blood of Jesus. There is no return policy for that.

So, God's people can call on their Father and conduct themselves in fear like any obedient children fearing a good father. This is a fear that motivates children to work hard in obedience in order to please the one who has poured himself out for them. This is reinforced by the situation of the Christians Peter is writing to. First Peter is a letter of comfort, encouragement, and exhortation written to the dispersed Jewish Christians in Asia Minor who were being persecuted. Peter is reminding these suffering Christians where their fear is to be directed.

Worship and Fear

In the Bible, fear is often tied to worship and following God (Deuteronomy 6:13-14; quoted in Matthew 4:10). Psalm 115 contrasts those who make and trust idols and those who fear and trust in the Lord. Notice also what the psalmist says about the idol worshippers: "Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them." It is from this and other places in the Bible where we understand that you become like what you worship. Another way to say this is that you become like what you fear. Whom do you fear? Ultimately, you fear your master. If you fear people or circumstances such that they begin to dictate how you live, they are your master.

When you fear something, whether in the modern sense of terror or the biblical sense of worship, you allow it to control you. And, if you allow something to control you, you begin to be shaped by it and frequently become like it. When you fear someone or something, your life becomes dictated by your desires to placate that thing.

But remember, we are called to be holy because we have been delivered. You are no longer slaves; you are free.

Peter wants his readers to fear God and let Him shape them, let Him conform them into the image of His Son, Jesus (Romans 8:29). God is pleased as we become more and more like His Son. But here is the difference between God and any other master. If you are covered in the blood of Jesus, then God purchased you and is already pleased with you. When you fear God in the way Peter is talking about, we don't fear Him because we are afraid of what He might do to us. We fear and worship Him because we want to be like Him. As our Father, He is pleased with us, and because He is our Father, our greatest fear should be not pleasing Him. And so we seek to obey Him and to be holy like He is holy, not because these things save us, not because these things make us His children. It should be our pleasure and our desire to obey Him and to be holy and to be like Him because He has saved us, because He has made us His children.

Conclusion

We are called to fear God and not man. "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell" (Matthew 10:28). But if we know, as Peter clearly wants his readers to remember, that we have been redeemed with an incorruptible currency, our fear of God is no longer of our destruction, but of not being holy because He is holy. The gospel is the story of God dressing His children to look like Him. And so, as Christians, fear not looking like your Father.

When we come to the communion table, we eat the bread and the wine because we have been and are continually united with Christ. This means that God is pleased with you. We partake of the body and blood of Christ because we have been brought into Christ and because we are being made more and more into His image. And so, as obedient children, conduct yourselves in holiness because God is holy. Conduct yourselves in fear knowing that you have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus.