

FIRST PETER 1:17-21 "Fear The Lord And Live"

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 your stay *on earth*; ¹⁸ knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ. ²⁰ For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these 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.

Peter has been setting the stage for us so that we may understand how we are to live in the world but not be of the world. He also wants us to understand the means by which we grow in our relationship with Christ as we better understand our salvation and learn to appreciate it with lives of commitment to Him.

He identifies real trials believers have in the world, but he never allows us to take our eyes off of the One who paid the ultimate price for our sins and brought us to Himself. And then he brings back into focus our privilege and responsibility to walk obediently in His grace and power.

That obedience is a natural, or supernatural outworking of what we are in Christ, and that is children of obedience with a new nature given us by Christ with new desires to walk after Him.

That obedience is designed to glorify the One who gave us new life and that is what Peter refers to as holiness. And that's what we ended with last week as Peter quoted from the O.T., in Lev.11:44 "... You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Our holiness, or sanctification, comes as a result of God's holiness being placed to our account through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit as our God-given faith is employed in Christ as Lord and Savior.

But there is also a sense in which this new life that is wholly from God and holy because of the One who gave it to us, is worked out practically in the life of the one who has this new life in Christ.

1 Peter 1:17-19 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 your stay *on earth*; ¹⁸ knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ.

There is a sense in which believers can come to the conclusion that if we just live holy lives as we fear our God then He will judge impartially and reward in kind for the works we did here on earth. But the context of verses 17-19 move us away from this perspective.

And here is where there may be a difference of opinion on the good works done in Christ and the rewards of those good works as being a separate class of eternal rewards. And certainly the passage that most people go to for this perspective is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 ¹¹ For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Paul is certainly teaching that Jesus Christ is the foundation of our hope and life in Him. It's when we move forward in this passage that we can construct a teaching that doesn't hold up to sound exegetical scrutiny.

The traditional thinking is that now that I have a foundation in Christ what I do to build on that foundation will determine my standing and my reward in the new earth and heavens with my Savior forever more. If I can serve my God better than the next person then I will have rewards commensurate with my efforts and the next person will have less of a reward based on their meager efforts.

And some of the following verses are often used to support this perspective.

^{NAU} **1 Corinthians 3:8** Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

^{NAU} **1 Corinthians 4:5** Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men's* hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

^{NAU} **1 Corinthians 9:17** For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.

^{NAU} **Galatians 6:4** But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have *reason for* boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another.

It would seem that the above verses, including 1Cor. 3:11-15 are addressing eternal rewards after we have served God in this present world. But if that's the case then there are two things that must be inferred from these verses: 1) that eternal rewards are the focus of these verses, and 2) that the rewards mentioned in these verses are actually addressing something that is earned in this world that carries over to the next.

Since I go into much more detail in the study I did on 1Cor.3:11-15, I will not spend an inordinate amount of time on it here, but will simply comment on it as it does pertain to the whole issue of rewards in heaven that are supposedly earned by believers in this world.

The first thing we must ask ourselves deals with an over-arching truth that will address the above premise; that we earn eternal rewards while here on earth. And that question is this. If we are saved by grace through faith, and our salvation is entirely a gift from God, then is there any aspect of this new life in Christ, either present or future, that we can earn?

This question needs to be answered because if there is any aspect of our salvation that can be earned then is it really grace?

Some will answer that of course it is all of grace, but what we do with that grace does have ramifications. And to that I would answer, amen. The issue is not that our actions in this world have

ramifications for this world, the issue is are there degrees of existence in heaven based on what we do in this world?

Does God give us different positions, (that is different rewards), that will be based on what we do or don't do in this world? And if not then what are the above passages addressing?

Here's the underlying problem with the premise that we can earn rewards. To earn anything makes it a wage instead of grace. If it is God who has freely placed His righteousness to our account to purchase eternal life for His people through His Son, and we have been given the Holy Spirit as a down payment to be a part of God's kingdom, what part of that new life and that eternal inheritance can we earn?

The answer is none. To take credit in any way, shape or form, for a work only the Holy Spirit can accomplish through Christ, is to add to the finished work of Christ. In fact, even the works that we do for Christ are works that God prompts and enables us to do for His glory.

Tony Warren from his website Mountain Retreat deals with this issue in some detail and makes this comment on several passages:

Philippians 1:6 ⁶ *For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*

“God not only began the work in us, but He will perform it unto the end. So what part of that passage is ambiguous? What part do we have in that? It's not that God isn't clear on this subject, it's that man doesn't like what God says. But to be sure, God is the one who deserves the merit for our works and this is the same truth that is put forth by the Apostle Paul all throughout scripture.”

1 Corinthians 15:10 ¹⁰ *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.*

“Paul understood clearly the concept of true Grace in that his works of faith were not because of any goodness of his own, but because of the work of Christ within Him. If only those disdainful of the truth today could grasp that very humble concept, there would be no more glorying in themselves in these ideas of *"rewards for our works."*

Galatians 2:20 ²⁰ "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

“So, what might have seemed a contradiction, is really just a matter of reconciling all of scripture as God intends. What indeed would we merit reward for, when Christ did it all. This historical early church humility is what few Christians of our day possess. Faith without works is dead, and yet no one is saved by his own works. It's not an enigma, the answer is that we are saved by the work of Christ. Faith is not passive, it is a work of God. Man either does the dead works of himself, or He is alive in the work of the faith of Christ, which merits reward.”

Ephesians 2:8-10 ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

“Faith is a gift from God, it does not come from man's so-called good works. For then man could boast that he has faith because He worked harder, longer, better, etc. Faith to labor in this world is by the work of Christ. As this scripture so unambiguously states, "*We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*" The question is not does it say this, the question is, why does man "work" so hard to deny such obvious truths? When we answer that, we have approached to the fear of God and the beginning of wisdom.”

You can go to Tony's website to get an exhaustive teaching on this subject.

http://www.mountainretreatorg.net/bible/do_christians_receive_rewards_in_heaven.shtml

But as we come back to our text we actually see that God is showing us that any work that we do is done in light of His grace in our lives that only He can take credit for.

1 Peter 1:17-19 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 your stay *on earth*; ¹⁸ knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your

forefathers, ¹⁹ but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ.

So, what does it mean when the word of God says that the Father is the One who impartially judges according to each one's work? Is He judging our works with the idea of rewarding according to those works, or is He judging so as to determine the source of where those works are coming from?

Notice the connection between God judging our works and the believer conducting himself with fear during his time of stay on the earth. What fear are we talking about here and to what end?

If we are fearing God, or reverencing God in this world, is it with the purpose or motivation of earning rewards in heaven as God judges our work in this world?

Again, we must go to the Scriptures for the answer and when we do we find that God Himself desires for us to view our salvation from His perspective in light of the fact that we deserve nothing from Him, and when we do this we are humbled and are moved by the Spirit to live a life that pleases Him for no other reason than to thank Him.

^{NAU} **2 Corinthians 7:1** Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Paul is simply placing the promises of God concerning our eternal futures in the context of honoring God based on those promises which leads, again by the power of the Holy Spirit, to a life that perfects holiness in the fear of God.

Are we doing the perfecting of our own holiness? Of course not. But, because we have new life in Christ we have eyes to see and ears to hear what it is that God has done for us and out of appreciation a desire to follow where He leads.

John 10:27-28 ²⁷ "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.

When we grasp this as believers the only appropriate response is to love and fear our God and Savior. And the only reward for that is eternal life where we know we will never perish and that no one can snatch us from our God.

The writer of Hebrews concurs.

^{NAU} **Hebrews 12:28** Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;

And this is the same thing that Peter is addressing in our text. He is saying that when you understand where your salvation comes from there will be an appropriate response. However, he does it in reverse order from Heb.12:28.

1 Peter 1:17-19 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 your stay *on earth*; ¹⁸ knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ.

When you know that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ you will conduct yourself with reverence or fear during your time on earth. Why? So as to earn eternal rewards? No. But rather to show your humble thanks and adoration for so great a salvation that was purchased for you by Christ who gives the **full** inheritance to each of His people.

By the way, when Peter uses the phrase, “who judges impartially according to each one’s work”, the work he is talking about is not a work that works for rewards, but a work that shows itself to be of the nature of God because we were redeemed by Christ’s blood. This is the same language we see in other portions of Scripture.

2 Corinthians 13:5-6 ⁵ Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you-- unless indeed you fail the test? ⁶ But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.

What is inferred here is exactly what Peter is addressing in our text. Someone is judging your works. If that is the case then there is a test going on. What test is Paul talking about? A test to see if the life you claim to have in Christ is demonstrating itself with a life that conforms to Christ’s, a life that is derived from Christ’s

life in you. And the works of that life that can only come from God.

It has nothing to do with earning anything, but simply acknowledging what God has done for you in Christ. You pass the test when you submit to the finished work of Christ by faith and walk in the newness of that life knowing that you were redeemed and are now promised the inheritance, none of which can be earned in any way.

That inheritance is not doled out piece-meal depending on how you do works for God in this world. That inheritance is given in abundance despite how we fail to walk with Christ on a daily basis. In fact, that is actually the beauty of salvation by grace through faith. We may do works in this world, at least from an outward appearance, better than someone else, but they will always be works tainted by sin because we live in a sinful world with the nature of sin always battling with the new life we have in Christ.

And yet despite this we have the promise of the eternal inheritance that has no limitations on it. It is a full reward. Because every sin has been paid for by Christ, even the sins of not doing works to God's glory.

2 John 1:7-9 ⁷ For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. ⁸ Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you **may receive a full reward**. ⁹ Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.

Romans 8:32 ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

To receive a full or complete reward or to be given all things in Christ leaves no room for being given a partial inheritance with us having to fill in the gaps by earning any part of that reward. And we know that the reward is the inheritance in full.

Colossians 3:23-24 ²³ Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

When we understand that it is the Lord Christ whom we serve and that He has redeemed us with His precious blood then we will be able to distinguish the way the world tries to earn their salvation with things like silver and gold and the perishable things of life. By the way, it is interesting, since we've been dealing to some extent with the connection between good works and earning eternal rewards, that Peter uses the phrase that, you were not redeemed with silver or gold. This is the same phrase that Paul used when writing to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 ¹¹ For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

In light of what we've discussed up to this point I hope that you can see that the foundation upon which we build is Christ. Like Peter, Paul is also actually implying that our foundation is not built upon silver, gold, precious stones or any other perishable thing, including wood, hay or straw.

Rather, our foundation is Christ alone, by faith alone to God's glory alone. If we build on the foundation of Christ alone, then each of our works will become evident and the fire or judgment that was placed upon Christ on our behalf will reveal who we are, not how we've added any work, be it silver, gold, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, all of which are perishable.

We may try to build upon the foundation of Christ, but as Paul says, ultimately the fire, that is God's righteous holy judgment will easily differentiate between that which is of God and that which is not. But the beauty of God's grace is that even if any work we do for God may try to include those things that are perishable we who are in Christ will not suffer loss because we are always saved through the fire.

The fire of God's judgment has already been put to our account and nothing can separate us from the love of God through Jesus Christ. He took the penalty, He suffered the wrath of the Father we deserved, He took the judgment we deserved and gave us life eternal as our reward. He passed through the fire for us.

Any work that we do for God is a work that is prepared by Him, prompted by Him, enabled by Him through His Spirit, and ultimately used for His glory.

Philippians 1:6 ⁶ *For I am* confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

It is all about Christ Jesus and that's why Peter says in 1PE 1:19 "but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."

The Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world was perfect in all ways without blemish of any sin and therefore could stand in our place and ransom us with His blood. The shedding of blood necessarily meant His death.

And it is His death and resurrection which is able to redeem us from the path of destruction we were on. This is the choice for all men: Reject this ransom and pay the price yourself, eternally separated from God. Or, repent of your sin and accept Christ's payment on your behalf by faith and be eternally united to God, enjoying Him forever.

Peter wants us to weigh the cost as we consider living in this relationship with God who demands holiness because He is holy, and who wants us to see God as one to be feared reverently because we love the Father and don't want to disappoint Him, because of such love.

To drive the point home of how much the Father loves us Peter continues to put into perspective this One who would be our ransom.

1PE 1:20 "He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake."

Jesus Christ, who is eternal God, was chosen from all eternity past to come into this world and die for our sins. From all of eternity Jesus knew that after He created us we would reject Him. And yet knowing that He chose to take our place and pay the penalty we deserved to pay.

The plan of salvation didn't come into being one day as Jesus and the Father and the Holy Spirit were discussing what a mess the world was in. 'Oh, how our creation of man has failed; how could this be? What can we do to make things right? Who could have known how terrible our plan could have been and now all is out of control. Jesus would you mind going to earth to die for these people and pay their debt?'

No, this is not the way it was. God is Sovereign. He always knew how men would reject Him. The question usually comes up at this point; then why did He create man in the first place if He knew man would reject Him?

That's a hard question. But the only answer is that God is perfect in all ways. Everything He does is only good. Whether we understand the mind of God or not, He has done all things for His glory and we can trust that He knows what He's doing, even as He has planned from all eternity.

The thing that blows my mind is that even though He knew we would reject Him He still chose to redeem a people for Himself. This amazed Paul as well. It was he who was persecuting the Church of Jesus and it was he who had every intention of destroying every Christian. And yet it was he who received mercy from Christ as the Lord met him on the road to Damascus and gave Paul eternal life as he accepted the Lord Jesus as His Savior.

Paul would later put this amazing grace into words as he wrote the Christians in Rome.

ROM 5:8-11 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! 11 Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

This reconciliation is received by believing that what Jesus did for us is true. And what He did was to die and then rise bodily from the dead. That's not a cute Christian story the disciples made up to tuck their kids into bed with each night to make them feel good.

God literally entered into our world in the flesh some 2,000 years ago and He did exactly what He had planned on doing from all eternity. Even secular historians of the time recognize this to be factual.

What's interesting about Christ's resurrection is that we know that His ransom for us was accepted by the Father by the very fact that He was raised bodily from the dead. Dr. Heibert makes the observation: "Without His resurrection we would have no assurance that His ransom had been accepted."

And so Peter says in 1PE 1:21 "Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God."

Your faith and hope are in God, not in the perishable things of life. This life may seem as though it is able to strangle us at times. What Jesus wants us to understand is that the greatest hurdle has already been handled by Him.

Where we spend eternity is no small matter. And what He's trying to show us is that eternal life is the real reality. We get hung up on this earthly reality some times to the degree that our future hope is crowded out of our present experience.

But it's not as though Jesus doesn't recognize this present reality in this world. He knows what we're going through. In fact He understood this even before He went to the cross when praying on behalf of the disciples Jesus came to the Father and prayed.

JOH 17:11,13,15 "I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name - the name you gave me - so that they may be one as we are one. 13 "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one."

It's Jesus' will that we remain in this world with all of its hardships so that we may be able to stand firm in Him and be used to bring this world the same Good news we received. This Good news is that in Christ we are redeemed not with things like silver or gold which are perishable, but with the precious blood, as of a lamb, unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

But Jesus doesn't leave us alone in this world. He gives us a Comforter, the Holy Spirit to indwell us and empower us to live to His honor and glory.

And yet even there it isn't as though Jesus is insensitive to our plight in this world.

HEB 4:14-16 "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are -yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

We all have needs and we all need help, but our Lord wants us to come to Him and rely on Him and His grace. That doesn't negate the means He also uses to bring us help in this world, which includes the Body of Christ. But we must, by faith, trust that He is willing and able to be with us and will never leave us.

This is the kind of relationship He wants with us. A relationship which knows and trusts Him and rejoices in the eternal reward He purchased for us.

This teaching is not a N.T. teaching only. The O.T. had always shown the grace of God and how that grace would work in the lives of people who would encounter various trials in life.

But just as Peter encourages us to keep our eyes on our risen Lord, even O.T. saints like Abraham were encouraged to do the same. Let me close from a passage in Romans. It's a bit lengthy and so you may want to turn there and follow along with me.

ROM 4:18-25 "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead -since he was about a hundred years old - and that Sarah's womb was also dead. 20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. 22 This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." 23 The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, 24 but also for us, to whom God will

credit righteousness - for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."

ROM 5:1-5 "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

God is for us, don't ever forget that. He wants to bring us through so that His life may shine through us. Don't ever give up. Always look to Him and know that we are here for each other to find encouragement when life seems hard. We can always point each other back to the One who loves us with an infinite love.

Peter will touch on this next week as we continue our study. May the peace of the Lord our God and Savior Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.