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WHY BE HOLY?

1 Peter 1:17-21

by

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July 19, 1992

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1 Peter Lesson 6

WHY BE HOLY? 1 Peter 1:17-21

If you're motivated, you can do amazing things. What would motivate a person to get out of bed in the middle of the night and read with avid interest a boring, technical book? Every parent of a sick child who has read Dr. Spock at 3 a.m. knows the answer! What would motivate a person to go sit out in an icy wind for an hour on a Saturday when there are other pressing things to do? The love of our son who was playing soccer has caused Marla and I to do that very thing.

What would make a college student stay up all night banging away at his computer? Surely his body is crying out for sleep! Surely he's not so intrigued by his subject that he just can't quit! He's motivated by a professor who said, "The term paper will count for 25 percent of your grade. No late work will be accepted. No exceptions!"

Why don't we read our Bibles with the consistency and fervency that we should? Why don't we pray as we ought? Why don't we discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness? Why do we get more excited about sports or leisure activities than we do about talking with a neighbor about Christ? Why don't we strive to be holy people in every area of life? Why do our hearts grow cold toward the things of God?

The answer is that, for one reason or another, we lack motivation. If we can kindle the right motivation, we will not fall into lukewarmness (Rev. 3:14-22). We will be fervent in spirit, all-out for the Lord.

In 1 Peter 1:13-16, the apostle calls us to a holy lifestyle in light of the great salvation which God has freely given to us. But, holiness is not an easy thing! It doesn't happen automatically. To be a holy person in a corrupt world, we must live carefully. We must be focused in purpose. We must fight against the lusts of the flesh and the pull of the world. We must be distinct, which often means standing alone in the face of group pressure. To succeed, we've got to be motivated. So Peter

goes on to answer the question, "Why be holy?" In 1:17-21, he gives both a negative threat and a positive incentive which should motivate us to be holy people.

We should be holy because our Father is also our Judge
and because He redeemed us at infinite cost.

Some say that negative threats do not motivate as well as positive incentives. But God includes plenty of negative threats in the Bible as motivators. So we'd best not shrug them off! Peter begins with a threat:

1. We should be holy because our Father is also our Judge.

This is actually a mixed motivator. The fact that we call upon God as our Father is a wonderful thing, picturing the best of any earthly father-child relationship and raising it far above that. It means that we are His children, the objects of His special love. I love kids, but there is a special place in my heart for my own kids. Watch any father at a soccer game or school play and his eyes are on his child. "There he is! Did you see how he did that?" Maybe the thing the child did was unimportant. But that dad's eyes are on him and he blows it all out of proportion, because it is his child.

That God is our Father means that He cares for us more than any earthly father cares for his own children. What father wouldn't pay a million dollars, if he had to, to get adequate medical care for his child? What dad wouldn't risk his own life to save his child from danger? A fierce dog once went after Christa when she was a toddler riding in the seat on the back of my bike. I had enough adrenalin pulsing through me that if I could have gotten a hold of that dog, I would have torn him apart with my bare hands! A father cares for his kids!

That God is our Father means that He is tender with us and that we can be intimate with Him. When my children were infants, I loved holding them on my lap or cuddling with them on my shoulder. When they were a bit older, I welcomed them climbing up on my lap and telling me about their day. Even now I want them to feel my tender concern and to know that they can share any struggles with me and that I'll listen and care. God is far more that kind of Father to us!

But Peter says that the same one we address as Father is also the One who impartially judges according to each one's work. He is our loving Father, but He's also our impartial Judge! We can climb up on His lap and know that He will tenderly welcome us, but we dare not forget that He also scrutinizes our lives and that someday He will judge every motive of our hearts.

That should cause us to conduct ourselves with fear during our stay on earth (1:17). The phrase "the time of your stay" uses the same word root as the word translated "aliens" in 2:11. It is used in Acts 13:17 to refer to Israel's stay in Egypt. It implies a short stay on this earth in light of eternity. Since we're just here temporarily, we shouldn't settle in as if it's permanent. We shouldn't live for this world's rewards, but rather for the eternal rewards which the impartial Judge will hand out when Christ returns.

The phrase "conduct yourselves" is the same word translated "be holy yourselves in all your behavior" (1:15) and translated "way of life" (1:18). It means lifestyle. Thus the "work" God is going to judge is not so much a list of particular good deeds as it is our entire way of life--how we conduct ourselves in thought, word, and deed at home, on the job, in the world, and in the church.

The "fear" of which Peter speaks is not paralyzing dread or terror, but rather the kind of fear you have knowing that you must give an account of your life. It's the kind of fear that motivated you to study in college because you knew that the final exam was coming. I used to see two basic responses to that kind of fear. Some guys would goof off all semester. They'd sit outside the library talking to the girls when they should have been studying. They wouldn't keep up in reading the textbook. They would be hit and miss about attending class. Then, right before the big exam, they'd panic. They'd come around begging for any insights that those who had been diligent studying all semester could give them on how to pass the final exam. That wasn't the way that fear of the final was supposed to work.

Others of us didn't like to put ourselves into a position of stark terror. So we would discipline ourselves. If we had to read a 500 page textbook in 15 weeks, we'd divide up the pages and keep up. We'd get

on the task of writing papers early in the semester so they didn't stack up. We'd never skip class and we'd always take copious notes. There was still some fear about the final, but it wasn't the dread of not being prepared. The fear of giving account on that final motivated us to do what we had to do during the semester to get ready.

That's how the fear of standing before God someday should motivate us as His children. If we have truly put our faith in Christ as Savior, we know that we won't fail: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). But, as Paul tells us (1 Cor. 3:12-14), our works will be tested with fire at the judgment seat of Christ. If our work remains, we will receive a reward. If our work is burned up, we will suffer loss, but we will be saved, although as through fire. I don't know exactly what that means, but the imagery of going through fire is scary enough to motivate me to live in fear of the Lord on a daily basis now.

Alexander Maclaren writes (*Expositions of Holy Scripture* [Baker], "Father and Judge," [1 Pet. 1:17], p. 69):

I suppose in Peter's days, as in our days, there were people that so fell in love with one aspect of the Divine nature that they had no eyes for any other; and who so magnified the thought of the Father that they forgot the thought of the Judge. That error has been committed over and over again in all ages, so that the Church as a whole, one may say, has gone swaying from one extreme to the other, and has rent these two conceptions widely apart, and sometimes has been foolish enough to pit them against each other instead of doing as Peter does here, braiding them together as both conspiring to one result, the production in the Christian heart of a wholesome awe.

He wrote that 100 years ago, but it's no different today. I think the pendulum has swung toward God as all-loving and non-judgmental. Don't throw out His love: He is our tender Heavenly Father. But don't forget the final exam: He is the impartial Judge! Our lifestyle ("conduct") proves the reality of our faith. We must live in holy reverence because our Father is also our Judge.

2. We should be holy because God redeemed us at infinite cost.

This is the positive motivation to a holy life. Peter reminds us of something we know (“knowing,” 1:18) but are prone to forget: That we’ve been bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus told us to partake of communion often in remembrance of Him, because thinking about what He did for us is the greatest motivation to holy living. I keep pictures of my family in my office. As I look at them during the day it stirs my heart because of the love we share. Communion is our picture of the Savior and His love. If your heart is not moved to greater purity and love for Christ when you stop to think of what He did in dying on the cross for you, then there’s something seriously wrong with your relationship with Him.

Redemption means to buy back with the payment of a price. Our text brings out three facets of redemption:

A. Redemption implies previous bondage.

For us redemption sounds like a theological term, but for Peter’s readers, it was an everyday word loaded with emotional meaning. There were millions of slaves in the Roman empire and many of them had become Christians. Some of them had been born slaves. Others had become slaves when Rome conquered their land. Still others had become slaves by falling into debt. But every slave knew that he was not his own man. He could not come and go as he pleased. He wasn’t free to do what he wanted to do. He belonged as property to another person. The slave was in bondage and felt it.

Every person who has not been redeemed by Christ is in bondage to sin and death. Peter describes it here as “the futile way of life inherited from your forefathers.” Life is futile apart from Jesus Christ! You live for yourself, trying to grab all the things that you think will bring you happiness. You work hard, gain a few things, lose a few things, get sick and die. If you’re “lucky,” you stave off death until you’re 80 or 90. If you’re not so lucky, you die sooner. What’s the point of it all? It’s futile!

Only Christ can redeem you from this futile bondage to sin and death. He forgives your sins and gives you power to live a holy life. He

takes the sting out of physical death with the certain promise of being raised up to spend eternity with Him. He gives you the lasting purpose of working for His cause, assuring you that "your toil is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

One of the reasons for the shallow Christianity of our day is that people don't feel deeply enough the bondage of their futile way of life. We enjoy a pretty good life these days. We have the highest standard of living in the world. And along come Christians and say, "Wouldn't you like to receive Jesus as your Savior? He will give you an abundant life! He will help you solve your marriage problems. He will help you deal with your children." And people think, "I have a pretty good life, but I guess I could use a little something extra. Sure, I'll try Jesus."

But that's not the point! The point is, apart from Jesus Christ, you're in bondage to sin and futility, heading for hell! This isn't something that some Fundamentalist preacher dreamed up. Jesus taught this. He said that hell will be an awful place (Mark 9:43-48) and that unless we repent, we will perish (Luke 13:3, 5). Unless we feel the bondage of being enslaved to sin and death and hell, we won't appreciate what Christ did in shedding His blood for us on the cross.

Joseph Parker, a 19th century London pastor, wrote (in *Preaching Through the Bible* [Baker], "The Precious Blood of Christ" [1 Pet. 1:19], p. 294), "Where there is no conviction of sin--conviction amounting to the very anguish of the lost in hell-- there can be no felt need of so extreme a remedy as is offered by the outpouring of the blood of Christ." He goes on to point out that when a man feels that he has not sinned deeply, he is in no mood to receive what he considers the tragic appeals of the gospel. But, when he feels that he has sinned and is deserving of hell--lost, damned-- then his need can be met by nothing other than the "the sacrificial ... personal ... precious blood of Christ." It took nothing less than that precious blood to redeem us from bondage.

B. Redemption involves cost.

A slave in Roman times could be redeemed by the payment of a certain amount of silver or gold. The world values these metals above all else. They are among the most imperishable metals. But Peter calls them

“perishable things” and implies that they are cheap in comparison with “the precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.”

The imagery goes back to the very first people on this earth. God warned Adam and Eve that if they sinned, they would surely die. He meant not only physical death, but also spiritual death, separation from Him. When they did sin, God mercifully did not kill them on the spot. Instead, He killed animals and made skins for them to cover the nakedness which they had tried to cover with their own fig leaves. It must have shocked them to see the death of that animal, to watch its lifeblood soak into the ground! God was showing them that the life is in the blood and without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins.

Years later God told Abraham to offer his beloved son Isaac as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah. By faith Abraham proceeded to obey what had to be the most difficult command God has ever given to a human being (except the cross). At the last moment, God intervened and provided the ram caught in the thicket as the sacrifice, thus illustrating the great cost that He, the Heavenly Father, would pay in giving His own Son for our sins.

Why can't God just forgive sins without the shedding of blood? God could not relax the penalty and still be just and holy. None of us could serve as a substitute for others, because we all have our own sin to pay for. Only Christ, who was without the blemish or spot of sin, could offer Himself in our place--the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world. That's the cost of our redemption!

For us to continue living in sin after such a price was paid would be comparable to a woman whose husband loved her dearly and gave his own life to save her from a rapist and murderer. After the funeral she sought out this vicious murderer and pursued a romance with him. Unthinkable! That is precisely Peter's argument: Because God redeemed us at infinite cost, we dare not cavort with the sin for which Christ shed His precious blood.

Thus Peter wants us to see that redemption implies previous bondage; and, it involved great cost to God. Third,

C. Redemption is of God.

Peter knew the tendency of the proud human heart to boast in its own attainments. We don't want to be humbled into receiving redemption at God's expense; we want to pay for it. We want to work for it. We want to hang on to our pride that says, "I am a self-made man! I am worthy! I pulled myself up by my own bootstraps. Of course, God gave me a little boost, but I helped Him out!" Peter says, "No! No! No! Redemption is totally of God!"

In the first place, *God planned it before we ever sinned*: "He was foreknown before the foundation of the world" (1:20). The cross wasn't God's last-minute plan put into place after man fell into sin. He ordained it well in advance of the creation of the human race. "Foreknowledge" doesn't just refer to God's knowing in advance. It implies His purpose. But just because God predetermined it doesn't absolve sinful man of responsibility. In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Peter said, "This Man [Jesus], delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death" (Acts 2:23).

Second, redemption is of God because *God executed the plan at the proper time*: Christ "has appeared [been manifested] in these last times" (1:20). At the proper time in human history, in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, God sent His Son into this world. We had nothing to do with it. We didn't vote on it and elect Jesus as Messiah. God sent Him and revealed Him as the Savior.

Third, redemption is of God because *God applied it to us*: Christ appeared "for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God" (1:20-21). Christ died for your sake! It wasn't a blanket policy; it was personal. If you believe, it's because God imparted saving faith to you through Christ (Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Tim. 2:25). All you can do is humbly give Him the glory.

Finally, redemption is of God because *God completed it by raising Christ and giving Him glory*. God raised Jesus bodily from the grave, to which Peter and the other apostles and many others were witnesses. The apostles saw the risen Jesus ascend into heaven where He now sits at the

right hand of the Father in glory, awaiting the day of His return. Christ's resurrection proves that God is able to raise the dead. Thus even if we suffer as Christians, even to the point of martyrdom, we can know that He will raise us and fulfill His promises to us. Peter adds the phrase, "gave Him glory," to remind his readers that though, like Jesus, they suffer now, there is glory ahead.

The bottom line is, "You are not your own; you have been bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). In light of our great redemption from the bondage of sin and death; redemption which cost the Son of God His precious blood; redemption which God provided while we were still His enemies, apart from any merit on our part; we must live in holy reverence before Him.

Conclusion

A seminary student told of how, when he was a boy, he fell in love with golf. His parents gave him a club and a harmless whiffle-type golf ball which he could hit around the back yard. But one day, thinking his parents weren't home, he was overcome with the temptation to feel the click of a real golf ball against the club. He teed up and gave it a hard whack. But the ball was not hit properly. It hooked from its intended flight and went directly through one of the windows on the house with a loud crash. Even worse, the crash was followed by a piercing scream.

The boy ran for the house, burst into the living room and, to his horror, saw his mother standing in front of the broken window with blood streaming down her face. He cried out, "Mother, I could have killed you!" His mother hugged him and said reassuringly, "It's all right. I'm okay!"

The seminary student concluded the story by saying, "When I saw my mother bleeding, there were some things I could never do again in the back yard. I could never so much as carry a golf club across the lawn of our back yard. The sight of her standing there with blood flowing down--blood that I had caused--changed my behavior forever."

Peter wants us who are the children of God to see the great price He paid to redeem us from our sins. Seeing the Savior's blood

should motivate us to be holy. As C. T. Studd put it, "If Christ be God and died for me, there is nothing too great that I can do for Him."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is the fear of judgment a proper motivation for believers?
2. Why couldn't God forgive sins without the shedding of blood?
3. How does the fact that redemption is of God fit in with human responsibility?

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