



### 1 Peter 1:17-21

#### *“Whatever Happened to the Fear of God?”*

17 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear;

18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,

19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

20 He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you

21 who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

We get a lot of catalogs sent to the church, some of them are useful, some are just junk, and some of them are downright scary. We were recently sent a catalog filled with page after page of materials for doing things like comic skits and “clown ministry” during Sunday morning worship. That way you can teach the gospel message using jokes and a light-hearted and irreverent approach that lets people know that there’s nothing serious or scary about it.

As I was thinking about that, it occurred to me that clown ministry is being terribly underutilized. I mean think of all of the other places apart from the worship of God where we could use clowns, that we aren’t.

**Funerals for instance;** nothing lightens up a grave-side service like a tiny clown car pulling up behind the hearse and 10 clowns spilling out.

**Meetings with world leaders,** I mean everyone who meets the president has on a suit, imagine the hilarity of showing up with oversize shoes and orange hair, and don’t forget your electric hand-buzzer for the headshake.

**Oncologists offices,** imagine how much better you’d feel about being told you had 6 months to live if it came from a clown

**Or disasters,** if only we’d had more clowns at ground zero instead of just boring old grief counselors and emergency workers.

The problem is that if you made those kind of suggestions, people would respond with outrage. That would be wildly inappropriate, they’d say! Those aren’t times for comedy, those moments are serious, they require people to act with reverence, gravity, and sobriety. We are talking about deadly serious life-changing things, we are talking about matters of life and death. Not things to joke about or be silly around. To do that kind of thing would be infantile and inappropriate and show a serious lack of maturity and understanding.

Well Brothers and Sisters, what do you think the apostles would have said about comedy skits and clown ministry as part of the worship service on Sunday morning? They would have been appalled. Because doing so is just as inappropriate. Clown ministry in the church indicates more than just that the church seems to have absorbed the eternal adolescence of our culture, it indicates that we seem to have forgotten who God is, what He did for us, and what our response to him should be.

What should be the response of God's people to God, those who call upon His name in their prayer and worship. How should you and I who Call upon God as *Our Father* as Jesus taught us to address Him conduct ourselves? Peter says in verse 17 that we should *conduct ourselves with fear*.

Now when he says fear, he doesn't mean slavish terror, the kind of fear you might have towards a tyrant, someone like Sadaam Hussein or Josef Stalin, who might arbitrarily imprison, persecute or kill you. What Peter means is a holy and respectful awe, that flows from the knowledge of who God is and who we are. It's the right kind of fear that a child should have for their father and their mother. A feeling that combines, love, and reverence, and a healthy respect. That is the *fear of the Lord*, and the bible tells us throughout that it is a good thing, in fact a wonderful thing, a great blessing to have that kind of fear:

We are told in Isaiah 33:6 that ***"The fear of the LORD is His treasure."***

The book of Proverbs in particular opens up the beauties of the fear of the Lord -

***"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10)***

***"The fear of the LORD prolongs days" (Prov. 10:27)***

***"In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence" (Prov. 14:26)***

***"The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, To turn one away from the snares of death" (Prov. 14:27)***

***"By humility and the fear of the LORD Are riches and honor and life." (Prov. 22:4)***

The fear of the Lord has always been a mark of the church in its best times, and the lack of it, a sign that the church is in decline. During a time of gross idolatry in Israel the following dire pronouncement was given in Jeremiah 2:19 ***"Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing That you have forsaken the LORD your God, And the fear of Me is not in you," Says the Lord GOD of hosts."***

But during a time when the apostolic church was strong and growing both in grace and numbers, in Acts 9:31 we read ***"Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied."***

But aside from the blessings that it brings, why should the fear of the Lord, reverence and awe be our response to a Holy God?

Well in these verses Peter gives God's people many reasons.

***First that He is our Father, our Creator, and the one who will at the end of time judge us impartially***, not as a respecter of persons. Friends you may be an important person in the world's eyes, a celebrity or politician, but at the end of time you will appear before your creator for judgment, and keep in mind that He is speaking here to Christians, now our final state will not depend upon our conduct as much as Christ's, but our judgment according to rewards will. And what true Christian

wants to appear before Christ at the end of time, having had his works exposed as worthless and thus burned up. To barely creep into heaven having conducted yourself poorly.

***Secondly, Peter uses the phrase time of your stay or sojourning, a reminder that we Christians live her on earth as sojourners, people who dwell in one place for a time, but whose citizenship is held elsewhere.*** Brothers and Sisters, I find that often a reason Christians do not fear the Lord and look to their conduct is that their perspective gets mixed up. I remember once I was sitting in on a conversation between two Christian women, one of them was planning on marrying a nice guy but an unbeliever, because she said she had to or she'd never have a family. The other woman said to her, ***honey, you don't have to. The only things Christians have to do, are the things that prepare for our real life above. You sound like you believe you will spend eternity here on earth!***

***Thirdly, Peter reminds Christians of what it took for God to become their father,*** what was needed for them to no longer be living aimless, and hopeless, and vain lives, what was necessary to save them from eternal death and damnation. To buy our redeem them out of their slavery to sin and death.

Now if the price of their redemption, had been all the money a man could earn during his lifetime, that would have been fairly impressive. Cause for a certain amount of awe. But that wouldn't do it, no amount of money would. If it was the astronomical figures involved in the US budget, it still wouldn't be nearly enough.

***Psalm 49:6 Those who trust in their wealth And boast in the multitude of their riches,  
7 None of them can by any means redeem his brother, Nor give to God a ransom for him --  
8a For the redemption of their souls is costly, cease forever –***

Money wouldn't do it says Peter, corruptible things like gold and silver that pass away. The greatest reason that we should reverence the Lord, love Him and respect Him is that He had to pay for our redemption with the precious blood of His own Son.

How much would you reverence a man who made a snap decision to die to save your life because you were his friend? Say falling on a grenade or pushing you out of the way of an oncoming vehicle. Quite a bit I would imagine, but our reverence for God should be all the greater because he did *not* make a snap decision to save his friends. What the word tells us is that even before He created the world, God, the Father Son and Holy Ghost decided to save you after you had fallen. Jesus didn't die to save his friends, He humbled himself, coming into this world, suffering and dying to redeem His enemies! He came to do all that, Peter tells us, not for the sins of all men – but for YOU who believe. And that brings us to the last reason Peter gives for our reverence.

***Fourthly, Peter reminds us, that we should reverence God because he is the author and finisher of our faith.*** Christ on the cross not only paid for our sins, he secured everything that was necessary for us to believe in Him, Peter says we even believe and have our eternal hope through Him, not ourselves As Paul put it: Eph. 2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

Applications: If we know who God is, How Holy He is, What has done for us, ***Our response to God in worship, when we are in his presence will be full of reverence and awe. It will be serious.***

I am believe it or not funnier than I preach, but I'm not sent to amuse you or distract you. These things beloved are very serious. I would no more preach the gospel in an irreverent fashion than I would tell

how to get off a sinking ocean liner via stand up comedy. Or tell you what you needed to do to be saved from a terminal illness dressed in a clown suit.

Now this seriousness, is not joylessness, it is not the seriousness of the shrill and self-righteous – angry, ascerbic, or boring. There is real joy in redemption, *David you will recall asked that God restore to him the joy of his salvation,* will be laughter in the kingdom I have no doubt of that, tears of joy, happiness beyond compare. One should be joyful, in the presence of one savior, but not inane and irreverent. The Apostles were men who rejoiced in their salvation, but without ever becoming irreverent or inane. Paul did not enter into clown ministry. We need to recover that Apostolic reverence, we need to recover the fear of the Lord.

Secondly remember our hope is not in the things of this world, It is not in politics or money, it is in the God we love, the God who raised Christ from the Dead and who will raise us.

If you will remember that we can endure even suffering Matthew 10:28 “28 "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

*Proconsul: "If you do not repent I shall have you burned at the stake, since you are so contemptuous of the lions."*

*Polycarp: "You threaten me with a fire that burns for an hour and then dies down. But do you know the eternal fire of the justice that is to come? Do you know the punishment that is to devour the ungodly? Come, don't delay! Do what you want with me."*

I am glad in many senses that I was called to minister here in Fayetteville where the suffering is so much more acute in some senses...

**Final application:** Remember also that the fear of the Lord Peter speaks of and all the benefits of it, are something that only comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

**Proverbs 16:6 In mercy and truth Atonement is provided for iniquity; And by the fear of the LORD one departs from evil.**

If we you not have that faith in Christ, then it doesn't matter what philosophy or religion pursue, how fervent you are for the traditions of your fathers as Paul puts it in 18. In the end you will find out what Solomon found out in Ecclesiastes – Vanity. All of them are vanity.

“Human traditions, idolatrous religions offer empty illusion. Hope can only be found in faith, faith in the God who raised Christ from the dead. This was Peter's own experience as he saw first the empty tomb and then the living Lord.”

I Hope your declaration is that of *Jer. 16:19 O LORD, my strength and my fortress, My refuge in the day of affliction, The Gentiles shall come to You From the ends of the earth and say, "Surely our fathers have inherited lies, Worthlessness and unprofitable things."*

*20 Will a man make gods for himself, Which are not gods?*

*21 " Therefore behold, I will this once cause them to know, I will cause them to know My hand and My might; And they shall know that My name is the LORD.*