

SONGS:
CLOSE:

Holy Fear

In Pursuit of Holiness – Part 3 of 10

TEXT: 1 Peter 1:17 << TURN, but DON'T READ

AIM: To show what it means to live in Holy fear means as the child of God

INTRODUCTION:

A. We are into the third message of a series of studies that I've entitled, "In Pursuit of Holiness."

1. In our last study, we defined holiness according to the meaning of *hagios* – the Greek word for "*holy*" – which simply means separated— *separated from sin and consecrated to God*—it is sacred, which distinguishes the person, place or thing as being – *distinctively different*
 - a. We use that word in phrases like holy matrimony to refer to marriage as that distinctive relationship
 - 1) It isn't a perfect relationship, involving perfect people;
 - 2) It is simply different from any other relationship; husbands and wives are uniquely separated from everyone else unto each other, in that relationship.
 - b. You'll see on the cover of a Bible – or in the flyleaf – the words, *Holy Bible* – the word Bible, or *Biblios* – is the Greek word for book – but it's a holy book; which means that it is distinctively different from any other book on earth.
2. As believers, we happen to be holy.
 - a. We didn't get that after reading the Bible through in a year, **OR** attending church every Sunday unless you were sick, **OR** when you came to church, you sat here on the front row – although in my opinion, if you do, you're pretty special ☺
 - b. Every Christian happens to be holy and we happen to be commanded to act like it. In other words, we are required to demonstrate to our world, not that we're sinless, but that we are indeed separated unto God – that we belong – uniquely – to Him.
 - c. Peter writes in **2:9** that we "*are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation*" – **then he adds** – "*a peculiar people...*" i.e.
 - 1) The English "*a peculiar people*" comes from the Gk. Word *peripoiesis*: where *peri* = lit. "A mark around" and *poieo* "to do or make" = "to make a mark around" to denote the act of obtaining a possession.
 - 2) We are God's own particular possession. **Eph. 1:14** translates *peripoiesis* as a "*purchased possession*" waiting to be redeemed.

B. Now, let's admit it, "holiness" is not word found use in the normal day-in and day-out world.

Holiness belongs to stained glass windows – and organ music –and long prayers. To talk to someone about becoming a holy person sounds like you're asking them to start fasting, or to retreat to some monastery where people can't mess things up; or to take a vow of silence or join some austere group of people who never do anything fun or entertaining.

NOTHING could be further from the truth.

- Holiness is lived in the realm of everyday living
- Holiness is the regular everyday business of every Christian.
- Holiness evidences itself in the decisions we make and things we do, hour by hour, day by day.

These definitions fit perfectly with Peter's perspective in his letter written to believers living in the First Century.

Let me invite you to turn there once again to 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 16, where Peter repeats the Old Testament command to be holy.

- Keep in mind, he isn't commanding the Christian to start some pilgrimage toward holy perfection
- He isn't calling believers to leave their world but to engage their world with a demonstration of the gospel in living colour.
- This demonstration will actually involve the simplest decisions and everyday conversations, throughout the most ordinary lifestyles—day in and day out.

This happens to be biblical holiness.

ONCE you clear away the religious myths and misconceptions – *holiness* – our separateness unto God – happens to be **WHO** we are – and it also happens to be **HOW** we act.

Now, in the next verse, Peter **corrects not only** the idea of true holiness, **he adds another thought** that immediately conjures up misconceptions and myths – and we'll need to clear it up.

It's something we'll call in our study today, holy fear—what is holy fear? *Notice vs. 17*

How's that for a favourite thought to memorize? I've never seen this one on a coffee mug – *"pass the time of your sojourning here in fear!"*

That's a great motto! Well, Peter evidently thought so. ☺

But what did he mean? Does the believer have reason to fear – and if so, why?

1. Note that the word *"sojourning"* means "to dwell in a place as a stranger – a foreigner – one who is not native."
2. The word *"pass"* is the same Greek word as *"conversation"* in **vs. 15 & 18** meaning "to conduct oneself or behave oneself in the time you live" referring to lifestyle.
3. So, Peter is to describe the Christian life lived in fear relative to our behaviour, to the family, to the church, to masters and slaves, to the government and to the world.

Let me break **verse 17** down into three defining qualities of holy fear – and, in the process, we're going to visit the judgment seat of Christ.

I. THE FIRST DEFINING QUALITY OF HOLY FEAR IS REMEMBERING YOUR INCREDIBLE PRIVILEGE

A. Notice again just the opening few words:

"And if ye call on the Father [i.e. you are addressing your Father], who without respect of persons judgeth..." (1 Peter 1:17).

1. So right off the bat, keep in mind that Peter **IS NOT** writing this concept of holy fear to unbelievers – who have many reasons to fear God—Peter is he's writing to Christians—to those who truly call God their Father.

2. In the original construction, the word *“if”* is an assumed condition so that you can understand Peter to be writing, *“If, and forasmuch as, you do indeed address Him as Father...”*
3. In fact, Peter, here in this text, moves forward the word *“Father”* to a point of emphasis – you could translate it, *“Since, as Father you are addressing Him.”*

In other words, Peter is highlighting the intimate, family relationship between you, the believer, and this awesome eternal God—who happens to be your Father, by faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

B. But are we supposed to fear God our Father?

Think of it this way; suppose you’re driving down the motorway towards the airport – you have to catch a plane. The speed limit is 100 km/h, BUT the other cars are poking along – can you believe it – they are doing between 95-100 km/h ... you’re weaving in and out of them, trying to get through the blockade, wondering what in the world is wrong with these people.

I’m not speaking from experience; mind you ... I’m speaking from observation of others.

But then, as you are chicaning though the traffic you see the reason for the dilly-dallying – up ahead – a Police Patrol car, driving in the inside lane ... no wonder everyone is conscientiously and obediently driving behind him – he’s doing 100 km/h; and if he slows down to 90, everyone else does too.

They are driving in fear – and it isn’t right – I mean, it’s a good idea – and LISTEN – you know there is no family relationship out there on the roadways.

1. BUT the fear of getting caught doing wrong is not exactly Peter’s idea of fearing God.
2. Fearing God, in a Biblical context is more like getting your driver’s license and driving home and your father is driving behind you.
 - a. Yes, you’re driving *in fear* of your father – BUT NOT because he wants to catch you at doing something wrong, but because you want to show him you can do it right – you want to show him that you can drive well.
 - b. He’s your father ... and you want to make Him proud of your demonstration of all you’ve learned.
 - c. **That’s the idea here ...** so before Peter mentions anything about judgment – or evaluation – he emphasizes that the judge just so happens to be your Father – and that changes everything.

Holy fear begins with remembering your incredible privilege.

II. SECONDLY, HOLY FEAR IS ACCEPTING PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

A. Notice next, [You’re addressing God as] Father, the One

“...Without respect of persons [i.e. impartially] judgeth according to every man’s work...”

1. Paul described this moment of judgment for the believers to the Corinthians in **2 Cor. 5:10** when he wrote, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ...”*
 - a. What is this place – *“the Judgment Seat?”* The original word is *bema* typically referred to “a step.” Like the step you have on your front porch.
 - b. Later on, the word came to refer to a raised platform, a rostrum that was accessed by steps. Some Bema’s were in the open air ... some were in palaces or political offices.
2. What’s happening? Why are we going to be judged?
 - a. For what are we going to be judged?

- b. Why are we to stand before our Triune God who is both our Father and our Redeemer to face a judgement? What's going to happen to us?

B. Let me begin by telling you what isn't going to happen at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

1. **FIRST:** It isn't a place where your eternal destiny is decided and finalized.
 - a. For a truth, the Bible makes it very clear that one day—every single human being will stand before God.
 - b. For those who don't belong to Christ – they will have an appointment with God at what is called "The Great White Throne."
 - c. John the Apostle is given a vision of that final and terrifying judgment in **Revelation chapter 20** – that awful event where every unbeliever will be shown their guilt:
 - They will be shown their suppression of the truth of a Creator God;
 - For others, they will be shown their defiant resistance to their own conscience and the law of God written on their heart;
 - For many of them, they will be shown their refusal to accept the gospel of Christ as presented to them by a believer, or perhaps when they are given some piece of literature, or perhaps even a Bible that they opened one night in a hotel room and then shut back into the drawer with distaste and unbelief.
 - d. God will be the Judge and the Book of Revelation informs us that all who stand there before that "*white throne*" will be given a guilty verdict and cast into an eternal hell – and John writes – "*and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever*" (Revelation 14:1; 19:3).
 - e. So, the "*Great White Throne Judgment*" is for the lost—the unbeliever ONLY. **BUT there is another judgment** – called the "*Judgement Seat of Christ*." And this one is for believers ONLY.
 - 1) In fact, if you're standing there at the one day at the "*Judgement Seat of Christ*," it will be defining proof of your eternal safety and salvation. **BECAUSE the only people standing at the Bema are believers!**
 - 2) So, the Bema Seat isn't an **intersection** – a fork in the road – with God deciding who goes to Heaven and who is going to Hell.
 - a) It isn't an intersection BECAUSE the believer's eternal destiny has already settled.
 - b) And if we understand the biblical doctrine of atonement and the work of Christ on the cross, we can settle the proper view of the Bema Seat – concerning this future judgment for believers.
 - 3) The Bible tells us that sin was judged in Christ on the cross, and because we stand in Christ who was already judged, we will never be judged for our sins >> **LOOK at 1 Peter 2:23-24**. In **Isaiah 53:6** the prophet said that the coming Messiah would bear the iniquity of us all.
 - 4) So, Paul can now write these staggering words to the believer in **Rom 8:1** – "*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.*"
 - 5) I often tell people to turn to **Romans 8:1** and circle the word "*now*." "*There is therefore now no condemnation...*" Paul didn't say, "I sure hope there won't be any condemnation later ... in the future ... that is when I die and stand before Him. **NO ... There is no condemnation now!**"
 - 6) Your eternal destiny has been determined – and even at this very moment – you are eternally freed from condemnation.

So – the Bema seat is not a place where your eternal destiny is decided and finalized.

C. Secondly, it is not a place where your earthly sins are displayed and forgiven.

1. You will stand there at the Bema Seat, not to *be* forgiven, but because you *are* forgiven.
 - a. There's no DVD of your sins that God's going to put on a big screen. In fact, the writer of **Hebrews in 8:12** recorded with confidence, God saying, *"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."*
 - b. But wait, does God forget anything? No.
 - 1) But God is evidently choosing to not hold on to our account – not bring to memory, as it were – to effectively erase from the record Books ... He has acid washed your record – not because He's afraid somebody's going to find them – but because He's already forgiven all of them.
 - 2) In other words, God chooses to forget; He chooses to recall them, no longer. Micah the prophet said of God in **Micah 7:19** – *"...He will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."*
 - 3) The record of your sin has been buried in the deep blue sea and God has effectively promised that He will never dredge that sea and bring up your sin.
 - c. Listen to what God says about your security in His forgiveness – from what Paul writes in **Colossians 2:13-14** – *"And you, being dead in your sins ... he quickened [made you alive] together with him, having forgiven you **ALL** trespasses [not some, by the way, but all of them] 14] Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances [that is, the record of our sin] that was against us, which was contrary [opposed] to us, and took it [that record] out of the way, nailing it to his cross;"*
 - d. The Bema seat is not a place where our future is decided or forgiveness is determined – that has already been decided and determined.
 - e. We are secure ... forever forgiven. We are no longer condemned – at this very moment!
2. So, if the judgment Peter is talking about here isn't about our eternal destiny being finalized or our sins being forgiven—then what is this event about?
 - a. In short, this judgement is a personal one-on-one encounter with the Living Lord, your Chief Shepherd, your Redeemer, where He will **NOT** judge your position in Him, but your priorities for Him.
 - 1) You will stand before the seat of Christ there because you are His bride ... now, what kind of bride have you been.
 - 2) You are before this throne because He's your Father... so, what kind of child have you been?
 - b. Holy fear is accepting personal accountability for behaving as His child – for living as a bride-to-be in light of your Bridegroom's imminent appearing and coming for His own.

D. Peter encourages his readers by telling them that when the Father judges, note vs. 17 again – His evaluation will be impartial *"without respect of persons."*

1. I think Peter is making this point simply because the judicial system in his day was plagued with bribes.
 - a. Judges were often partial to those who could pay them off.

- b. The courts favoured the rich and well-connected. The more status a person had in the community, the more likely the verdict would go in their favour.
- c. Unfortunately, that doesn't just happen in the 1st century, does it?
It happens in every century!
- 2. There is perhaps no greater tragedy than injustice seated on a bench or corruption in a courtroom.
- 3. Peter is reassuring these believers who were being mistreated in the courtroom and culture of their generation.
 - a. He knew they were ever-so-slowly being pushed out of having any rights to jobs, to owning land and houses and property, of having the right to worship the Lord.
 - b. Christianity was slowly becoming illegal in the Roman Empire.
- 4. Peter says, *"Your Father is an impartial judge"* ... His courtroom is just.
 - a. In fact, the word Peter uses for *"without respect of persons"* means, literally – who does not receive faces.
 - b. In other words, He's not impressed with appearances – He doesn't care about status ... he doesn't play favourites ... He can't be bought off by the well-connected!
 - c. The Father's courtroom is holiness and His judgments are right and true.

E. In fact, throughout the New Testament, we're given SEVERAL IMAGES to describe the righteousness and perfection of the Bema seat.

1. One image is that of a smelting furnace >> 1 Cor. 3:11-15
 - a. The *"fire"* mentioned here is used elsewhere in scripture as the symbol of deity – *"For our God – Hebrews 12:29 records – is a consuming fire."* *"Fire"* is a reference to the holiness of God.
 - b. By the way, this is **NOT** a reference to some place of purgatory where we go to have our guilt burned away over time.
 - c. This is a reference to that moment when the believer stands before God and has their life evaluated by means of the fiery purity and holy evaluation of God.
 - d. Evidently there will be those who have nothing left – nothing as it were, but ashes – nothing but their salvation – **SEE vs. 15**
 - e. The Apostle John warns the believer in this regard as he writes in **2 John 1:8** – *"Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward."*
 - f. You can't forfeit your salvation – that is eternally secure.
BUT you can forfeit the fullness of your reward by disobedience.
 - g. So, here's the encouragement in light of the coming evaluation; build your life – all the way to the end of the measuring tape – with the right materials – with valuable intentions and godly motives and Christ-honouring desires to glorify Him even in the mundane things of life ...
 - From washing dishes
 - To cutting the grass
 - To setting up chairs
 - To making coffee
 - To teaching a class

- To serving on a committee
 - To singing or playing specials
 - To praying for the ministry of the gospel
 - To serving in another culture
 - And to cleaning up after everyone else goes home.
- h. God will judge the motive of the heart and reward that which is commendable.
- 1) Which might sound negative; but the positive flip side of that truth is that nothing in life is too small or worthless or trivial or meaningless if it is done for God's pleasure and approval.
 - 2) Everything in life is potentially rewardable!

2. Secondly, Paul also describes the Judgment Seat as an awards ceremony

- a. Those raised *Bema* platforms in the First Century also served as the place where the judges in athletic contests were seated.
 - 1) During the Olympic games, the *Bema* was the place where the victorious athletes would stand to receive their laurel wreaths made of leaves; for them it was the crowning moment of a lifetime of dedication and sacrifice.
 - 2) In **2 Tim. 4:7-8**, Paul speaks with this perspective as he writes, *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 8] Henceforth [in the future] there is laid up for me a crown [Gk. *stephanos* – literally, the laurel wreath of a victorious athlete] of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."*
- b. Paul's excited about it ... it's as if he can't wait until the Bema seat. **And maybe you're thinking**, *"Yea, but no wonder he can't wait – this is the great Apostle Paul, for heaven's sake."*
- c. But wait a second. Paul wasn't perfect either.
 - 1) In fact, Paul was saved just like you and I were – sinners, saved by grace through faith in Christ alone.
 - 2) He was entirely fallen, with a sin nature he battled and fought and failed and succeeded just like you. Just read sometime his testimony in **Romans chapter 7**.
 - 3) In fact, the older Paul got, the more aware he became of his sinfulness.
 - At the beginning of his ministry he commented that he was *"the least of the apostles"* (1 Cor. 15:9). In other words, line up those men, and Paul said, "I'm in last place."
 - Later on, he wrote, *"who am less than the least of all saints"* (Eph. 3:8). In other words, line up all the Christians on earth and I'm in last place.
 - Finally, before his martyrdom, Paul wrote to Timothy, *"that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief"* (1 Tim 1:15).
 - 4) You might think that it sounds like Paul was going in the wrong direction; no, he was actually gaining ground.
 - 5) Paul couldn't wait until the Bema seat. He couldn't wait for the joy of that encounter, which should tell us something about OUR view of that encounter.
- d. Here's the proper picture.

- 1) Just watch the Olympic winners when they mount that simple, small platform – which goes back to the raised platform of the first century the *Bema*
- 2) Just watch their faces and the tears in their eyes as their national anthem is played – look at their joy and their patriotic, honourable pride.
- 3) Paul and all the other Romans had undoubtedly seen the victorious athletes step up to the Bema and receive their crown – and Paul said, “I’m going to be there one day – only this Bema will be the Bema of Living Lord.”

F. The Judgment Seat is like a SMELTING FURNACE; it is like an AWARDS CEREMONY; and finally – it is like a PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Paul wrote to the Corinthians in **2 Cor. 5:10**, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”* You could translate that last phrase, “whether profitable or unprofitable.”

1. At the Bema seat, it is not sin that is judged – it is service.
 - a. And again, the common response in the believer’s mind is, “Well, it’s not going to be that great for me, because I never did anything all that great.”
 - b. “What fruit do I have worthy of getting all that excited about?!”

Some guy in a church sent this story to his pastor – I guess he thought it was funny.

It had something to do with rewards in heaven being related to the impact and influence we had on people while on earth. The more, the better.

A minister died and was waiting in line at the Pearly Gates. Ahead of him was a scruffy looking guy – beat up jacket, worn out jeans. He finally reaches Peter who asks him, “Let’s see, now who are you so that I might assign your position in the Kingdom (please overlook all the theological errors in this story). The guy kind of smirks and says, “Well, I’m Joe Baxter, taxi-driver from New York City.” Peter looks at his list and then smiled and said, “Oh, you’re Joe the taxi driver; well here, take this silk robe and golden staff and enter the Kingdom of Heaven for your great assignment.”

The taxi-driver leisurely strolled into heaven with his robe and solid gold staff – but now it was the minister’s turn. Peter asks, “And who might you be?” He says, “I am Pastor Joe Martin, in ministry for more than 50 years, I might add.” Peter looked and looked at his list and then said, “Oh, so you’re Pastor Martin; well here’s your cotton robe and wooden staff ... you can go on in.”

The minister said, “Now wait a minute; that man ahead of me was a taxi-driver, and he got a silk robe and golden staff – I get a cotton robe and a lousy wooden stick!” Peter said, “It’s all about the results: while you preached, people slept – while he drove, people prayed!”

I didn’t think that was funny either. But I saw two people wake up.

Listen, we’re not going to give an account as to how great our service was, we’re going to give an account as to how God-pleasing – God-serving – God-directed – God-aware – God-glorifying our service was.

Paul can write to the believers living in Corinth about this coming Judgment seat and ends his discussion by saying that we will all end up receiving praise from God.

The judgement described in **1 Cor. 3:11-17** << **READ** is labelled the *Bema* or the *“judgement seat of Christ”* in **Rom. 14:10** & **2 Cor. 5:10** and Paul said it was at that time God would give out His praises >> **SEE 1 Cor. 4:4-5**. Each faithful servant will receive praise.

The subject of that encounter with Christ will not be sin – we don’t fear that – for sin has already been judged and forgotten; the subject of our encounter will not be sin— BUT it will be our service to God.

First, holy fear begins with remembering your INCREDIBLE PRIVILEGE – Your judge is your Father;

Secondly, holy fear is ACCEPTING PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

III. THIRD, HOLY FEAR IS REFUSING TO ACT LIKE SPOILED CHILDREN

Notice, Peter writes next, “[God] who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, [now notice] *pass the time of your sojourning here in fear:*” i.e. your exile as an alien – your brief pilgrimage on earth.

A. Conduct yourselves in fear – create a way of life marked by God-honouring behaviour.

1. That’s really just another way of saying, as children of your Heavenly Father – **BEHAVE!** You’re going to see your Father at any moment!

A pastor told the story...

When my three brothers and I were growing up, our missionary parents often had to go to some meeting in the afternoon.

One afternoon, we were told they had to be away at a meeting for a while – and while they were gone – there was to be no television at all.

As soon as they left, these little missionary kids turned on the TV. It was in the living room – the picture was black and white. The pastor said, “We had to turn the channels with a pair of pliers; but there were only three channels, so it wasn’t a big deal. I remember now that TV had those big glass tubes in the back panel that just glowed as they heated up. That television had been given to us – by people who evidently didn’t have a pair of pliers ... we didn’t care.

Now our parents never told us what time *exactly* they were coming back – it was sort of like the rapture. It could happen at any moment. Even in my childhood, I was a dispensationalist.

So as time went along that afternoon, we propped our little brother up on the windowsill in the dining room so he could see over the bushes and all the way down to the end of the street where our parent’s car would turn. And when it did, he hollered and hopped down ... we had about 45 seconds to scatter.

As soon as my parents walked in the front door, our mother hollered out, ‘Did you boys watch TV?’ We all came into the living room and said, ‘No.’ Mom walked over and felt the back of the TV – it was so hot back there you could’ve fried an egg on it.

All my brothers got what they deserved. Hey, I had spent the afternoon memorizing scripture ... **on my knees** ... my parents didn’t believe me either.”

There is a healthy respect when you realize there is a coming accountability.

- Solomon wrote, “*Happy is the man that feareth* [the Lord] *alway:*”
 - The writer of Hebrews said that Noah “*moved with fear,*” in building the ark (11:7).
 - **Hebrews 12:21** tells us that the sight, which Moses experienced on Mt. Sinai was so frightful and awesome that “*Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake;* [trembled]”
 - On the day of Pentecost when the Jerusalem church experienced the display of Holy Spirit power through signs and wonders, we’re told in **Acts 2:43** that “*fear came upon every soul:*”
2. The child of God who gains the most in their spiritual life is the one who lives with the sense of accountability now ... now – not just later.
 - a. Holy fear is the attitude of someone who is always aware they are in the presence of God.

- b. It isn't just that Mom and Dad are coming around the corner.
It isn't just that Jesus might come back at any moment, so watch out!

B. Fear in the mind of Peter is that reverential submission to the Lord's word and will in the anticipation of having our lives reviewed at any moment.

1. When that day comes it will not be to discover sin, but to deliver rewards for each child of God, for every thought and prayer and plan and act of submission and obedience and reverence – to those who lived with a sense of holy fear.
2. So, there you are one day, beloved—standing at the Bema Seat of God.
 - a. At that time, you will not be able to stop the tears until our precious Lord wipes them away. I can't be sure, but I think that is when He will.
 - b. I think it will be this time for you and I will be more aware than ever of how we should have and could have served Him.
3. But you will not be able to hold back your joyful praise either – for whatever you did in obedience and humility and submission and reverence for the sake of God's pleasure and glory will be seen by you as so clearly the result of His grace and His presence and His Spirit and His power working in your heart and through your life.
4. *So, when the Lord Jesus Christ rewards you with that laurel wreath, what will you do?*
We're told in **Revelation chapter 4** – that you and I will bow and place that wreath at our Saviour's feet, saying with all the redeemed hosts of heaven, *"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."*

This is as if to say, "And you created each of us – and anything good that happens in and through us – you created that as well."

So, to You belong all power and honour and glory – both now and forever, Amen.