

Peter's Epistles #31

Basic Christian Orientation to Life and Eternity

1st Peter 1:17-21

(also available on-line at ichthys.com)

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1st Peter 1:17-21

(17) So if you are calling upon a Father who impartially evaluates everyone's behavior [and you most certainly are], then [you should make it your practice to] live the remaining time of your [temporary] sojourn here [on earth] in [godly] fear. (18) For you know that it was not with perishable things [like] silver or gold that you were ransomed from the futile manner of life passed down to you by your ancestors, (19) but [you were redeemed] with precious blood, like that of a lamb without spot or blemish, [that is, by the blood] of Christ [Jesus, (20) whose coming was] foreknown before the creation of the world, but who appeared [in the flesh] at the end of times because of you (i.e., for your salvation), (21) who through Him are believers in God who raised Him from the dead, having given Him glory, with the result that you have faith and hope in God.

The first thing to notice about this passage is that it constitutes the conclusion to Peter's discussion of sanctification in verses 14-16. Having made the point of the necessity for every believer to refrain from sin and fleshly lusts because of the need to adapt ourselves to the holiness of our heavenly Father, Peter restates that point (v.17) and provides us with a motivational rationale for doing so beyond the fear of divine discipline for sullyng our witness in our Christian walk. That rationale is the most important of all Christian perspectives, one which should be kept constantly and firmly in mind at all times by everyone who belongs to Christ, namely, *the cross*. When we realize what it cost our dear Lord and our heavenly Father to wash away all of our sins, further indulgence in sin – as if it were of no account – is essentially willful ignorance of what Jesus did for us in dying for our sins in Calvary's darkness.

But whoever does not possess these [virtues of vv.5-7] is nearsighted or even blind, having forgotten the cleansing of his previous sins.

2nd Peter 1:9

Simply put, the paragraph above is designed to give us a useful and critical perspective for viewing the world and especially our conduct in it. Everything we do, good or bad, and everything we fail to do is to be measured by the blood of Christ. To the extent that we keep His immense sacrifice for us in mind, we are less likely to profane it through sin, and more likely to respond to Him positively in our daily walk, growing, progressing, and producing in response to Jesus' inestimable love for us displayed on the cross. Just as the cross divides human history in two, just as it divides our lives in two, from disbelief to salvation, so also the cross divides our

hearts and minds like the sharpest sword, for it is the essential truth upon which all others are founded:

(12) For the Word of God is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; [for] it (i.e., the Word when resident in our conscience) acts as a judge of our heart's intentions and emotions. (13) For there is no created thing [which can remain] invisible before Him. Everything is naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Hebrews 4:12-13

Calling upon the Father:

Believers do call upon our heavenly Father, everyday – or we certainly should. We do so when we repeat the Lord's prayer, and most likely whenever we confess or otherwise pray throughout the day. That is absolutely appropriate. He is our heavenly Father, and we are His children in Christ. He promises to hear us when we ask for help (Lk.11:5-13), and we do call upon Him whenever we are in need – or certainly should. Here Peter reminds us of just how much we still need God after salvation, and urges us to draw the appropriate conclusion: if we need His help and forgiveness (and we most certainly do), then how wrong-headed is it to even consider giving into a chronically bad lifestyle that would be offensive to Him? That is the "spiritual myopia" Peter refers to elsewhere (2Pet.1:9), and a very dangerous thing too. It goes without saying that while spiritual growth coupled with the sanctified behavior it engenders brings us closer to God and empowers our prayers (Ps.34:17; Prov.15:29; 1Pet.3:12), the opposite behavior predictably has the opposite effect (1Pet.3:7). Putting sanctification into its proper perspective, therefore, requires that we remember both what Christ did for us to provide the forgiveness we have in Him (so as not to abuse the privilege of confession), and also what is likely to happen if we are not living in a sanctified way: timely help from the Most High in our time of need will indeed come, and cursing will be turned to blessing, *after* confession and true repentance (i.e., turning our backs to the sin we have indulged in instead of embracing it), and will doubtless also be accompanied by the fatherly divine discipline needed to help us regain and retain that proper perspective.

Now no punishment is a cause of rejoicing as it is being experienced, but rather of regret – only later does it bear fruit for those who have been trained through it – the fruit of [personal] righteousness that makes one whole and complete.

Hebrews 12:11

Who impartially evaluates everyone's behavior:

As believers in Jesus Christ, we will not find ourselves standing at the divine bar in the judgment of the Great White Throne. We are saved, and thus not subject to the Last Judgment of condemnation:

The one who believes in Him is not being judged, but the one who does not believe has already been judged on the grounds that he has not put his faith in the Name (i.e., the

Person) of God's only Son.
John 3:18

There are other judgments, however, and it is to these that Peter here refers. To take them in chronologically reverse order, we are all going to be evaluated before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ that we may "receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad":

For we must all stand before Christ's tribunal, so that each of us may receive recompense for what he has accomplished through this body, whether it be good or worthless.
2nd Corinthians 5:10

This judgment of the Church has to do with the assignment of eternal rewards, but it will also entail a life-evaluation from our Lord which we would do well to keep in mind in our step by step walk with Him:

Since then we understand what it means to fear the Lord (i.e., in anticipation of this judgment), we are [trying to] persuade everyone (i.e., to run a good race).
2nd Corinthians 5:11a

The fact that Peter refers the Father as the One evaluating our earthly conduct here and now is also not in conflict at all with what we find in the Gospel of John:

(22) For neither does the Father judge anyone, but he has given all judgment to the Son,
(23) in order that all may honor the Son as they honor the Father.
John 5:22-23a

It should go without saying that the Trinity are One, and that this means that they possess an absolute and absolutely seamless integrity and oneness of purpose in every respect (something human beings cannot even properly fathom). Therefore whatever "judgment" the Father would render, the Son would as well – and will. As our Lord tells us in the verses cited above, the purpose of officially handing over judgment to the Son is so that "all may honor the Son as they honor the Father" – a very important objective inasmuch as our Lord's generation in particular was by and large unwilling to honor Him at all. As sons of God in union with our Lord Jesus Christ who bought us with His blood, we have the right to call upon the Father (Rom.8:15; Gal.4:6), and with these words in 1st Peter 1:17 Peter assures us that the Father's evaluation of our conduct when we do so will be absolutely impartial and just – exactly as when our Lord evaluates our behavior in this world. There is no shadow of difference between the two evaluations. Since the Father has commissioned the Son as the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed One, it was important to point out that when it comes to judgment the Son has received His authority directly from the Father:

Then Jesus came over and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me."
Matthew 28:18

So while Jesus is the One directly judging us, Peter's way of stating this principle heads off any wrongheaded idea that somehow there might be any difference between the two. The godly fear and respect we feel for the Father should be the same for the Son, because all authority flows down from the Father to the Son in His humanity. But in terms of specific judgments, the Trinity are always of one perfect mind, whether it be in terms of evaluating us now or when we stand before Christ's tribunal on that great day to come:

[This examination (of Rom.2:11-15) will take place] on the day when God will judge the secret things of men through Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

Romans 2:16

What this phrasing accomplishes is to shift our focus off of this world and remember that what we see, hear and feel is not nearly as important as how what we think, say and do is being received and evaluated in the heavenly throne room of God the Father. No doubt if we could witness for even a brief moment the multitudes of heaven in the presence of the Father and the Son looking down on the earth and watching us with perfect understanding and evaluation of all we believers do, we would be more inclined to tread the strait and narrow path both in terms of sanctified behavior and also in terms of making every moment count in the spiritual struggle for growth, progress and production which ought to be our top priority. Everyone behaves differently when they have an audience, and if those judging our performance are perfect judges, we are all the more likely to do our very best.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Colossians 3:1 NIV

Live the remaining time of your [temporary] sojourn here [on earth] in [Godly] fear:

(4) Show me, Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is. (5) You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath. *Selah.* (6) Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it.

Psalms 39:4-6 NIV (cf. Ps.89:47)

If we all actually did allow God to "show us" day by day and step by step how short the wait is until we meet with Him (Heb.10:37; cf. Ps.42:2), we would give little thought to the days of our lives as we live this brief life in the glorious light of eternity (Eccl.5:20). Just as Peter had earlier reminded us that we are always on display (and we all do better when observed), so now he reminds us that we are only here for a very short time indeed (Rom.13:11; Phil.4:5; Jas.5:8; 1Pet.4:7; Rev.1:3; 22:10; cf. Lk.21:8), especially when measured by the infinity of the eternity we will spend with our dear Lord Jesus. That being the case, how much better to "wait on the Lord" in everything, especially if we are feeling deprived of what we feel is needful on the one hand or tempted to indulge ourselves in things unnecessary and harmful on the other. Much better than becoming fixated on this world and its ultimate disappointments, therefore, is setting our eyes firmly on the hope which is soon to be revealed (1Pet.1:13), making the most in the

meantime of the opportunities the Lord has given us to produce a good crop resulting in a good reward at His return (Eph.5:16; Col.4:5).

This is the Day which the Lord has made (i.e., the 2nd Advent)! Let us rejoice and delight ourselves in it!
Psalm 118:24

So then, my brothers, just as you have always been obedient [to the truth], not just when I was present [with you] but even more so now in my absence, go to work on your salvation with fear and trembling.
Philippians 2:12

The futile manner of life passed down to you by your ancestors:

"Utter futility! Utter futility!" says the teacher, "Everything is futility!"
Ecclesiastes 1:2

While Peter is addressing specifically the former pagan practices of the gentiles who would receive this encyclical letter, it is the case that *all* tradition divorced from the truth of the Word of God is absolutely futile and vain, including all legalistic observance of the Mosaic Law. The striving of mankind is pointless inasmuch as all die and no one can even be sure who will receive the benefits of our futile efforts under the sun (Ps.39:6; Eccl.2:17-19). Whatever we do and accomplish in this life through the energy of the flesh is as evanescent as we are (Gal.6:8). As the old hymn goes, of a truth we have "only one life, will soon be passed; only what's done for Christ will last". By comparing the complete pointlessness of human effort in this world – all of which taken together since the beginning of humanity cannot save a single person from perdition – to the priceless redemption we believers have through the blood of Christ, Peter drives home the point: these essential spiritual realities should lead us to focus our thoughts and our efforts on what is eternal, what lasts, and not on what is temporal, what will soon fade entirely away.

Do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendor of his house increases; for he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendor will not descend with him.
Psalm 49:16-17 NIV

Don't stock up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and corrosion eat them away and where thieves dig through and steal them. But stock up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor corrosion eat them away and where thieves neither dig through nor steal them. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
Matthew 6:19-21

Redeemed not with perishable things . . . but with [the] precious blood of Christ:

What our Lord Jesus Christ did for us in the darkness of Calvary's cross, dying for all of our sins, is something impossible to overestimate. It is bigger than any potential universe, and more wonderful than all human and angelic imagining from one end of history to the other. God became a man (as well as God), throwing in His lot with us, walking through this world as truly

one of us, suffering beyond human ken – and rising in the flames in darkness on the cross until all human sin had been expiated. No Christian's perspective on this life or this world and our place in them can be complete or even proper without being based on the sacrifice our dear Lord Jesus. To live for Him as we should, we need to appreciate properly what He did for us.¹ Gold, silver, precious stones, money and valuables of every kind may have worth in this sordid and temporary life, but all the wealth of the entire world would not suffice to pay for a single human sin – and would only be an insult to God. To be bought out from under sin, to be "redeemed", a precious price was required that no human being could pay save One – our Lord Jesus Christ. And so He did, bearing the sins of all mankind in His human body on the cross. That is the coin of redemption through which alone we believers have been purchased from the slavery to sin and set free unto life eternal – the blood of Christ Jesus our one and only Savior.²

So we need to recognize that the real debt was owed to the Lord and He is the One who paid it for us.

So we need to remember that worldly things can't save us and so we should not focus on them after salvation.

So we need to appreciate what Jesus did for us so as to live for Him as we should: that is the major lesson of application to take from this passage. We owe our liberation from sin and death to the Lord through His blood, His spiritual death for us on the cross in being judged for all of our sins. How wrong is it then to be fixated on the corrupt treasures of the world which will soon be done away with entirely, when in truth we ought to be focusing on our deliverance from death and judgment that Christ has purchased for us at the cost of His own life?

(6) For not only did Christ die for us while we were helpless – He even did so at the critical time, [dying] on our behalf, ungodly though we were. (7) For scarcely will someone die on behalf of a righteous person; and perhaps someone might also risk death on behalf of a good person. (8) But God commends His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:6-8

A Lamb without spot or blemish:

This title emphasizes the perfection of our Lord's humanity. Born without a sin nature (the reason why the virgin birth was necessary, that is, to avoid the passing down of that genetically carried sin nature), and having lived a perfectly sinless life – the only one in the history of the world to do so (no one else has ever come remotely close) – Jesus was qualified to be the One who bore our sins. Just as the Law required a sacrificial lamb to be outwardly perfect, so our Lord, the Lamb of God, was inwardly perfect and thus qualified to take the world's sins into His

¹ Please see Bible Basics Part 4A: "Christology", section II.5, "The Spiritual Death of Christ".

² Please see Bible Basics Part 4A: "Christology", section II.7, "Redemption".

body in the darkness on the cross and to be judged in our place (1Pet.2:24; cf. 2Cor.5:21).

The next day [John] saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

John 1:29 NASB (cf. Jn.1:36)

[Whose coming was] foreknown before the creation of the world:

Peter adds these words to remind us that the cross, the bedrock upon which the entire plan of God, salvation, and all of history is based, was not an accident or an afterthought, but integral and fundamental to everything that would ever happen since before God decreed creation. This phrase makes clear that God's initiating of creation required the prior commitment of the precious sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the only means by which it might be brought about that creatures could be given free will, and yet still come to live with God forever (because "all sin"; Rom.3:23). Keeping this in mind is essential for all Christians in order to stay oriented to the true purpose and plan of God – of which Jesus Christ and His work on the cross is the lynchpin and foundation.

As it is, once and for all at the conjunction of the ages [Christ] has appeared to remove sin through the sacrifice of Himself.

Hebrews 9:26b

[He who] appeared [in the flesh] at the end of times because of you:

Jesus came into this world *for us*. His coming was sacrificial in every way. God needs nothing. And for God to take on true humanity was an inestimable sacrifice – one we cannot truly appreciate in full this side of heaven. But to come into this world in an unglorified state, to suffer "such opposition by sinners against Himself" throughout His earthly life (Heb.12:3), to accomplish the ministry of ministries in the face of the most intensive satanic opposition the world has ever seen (e.g., Matt.4:1-11), to run a gauntlet of seven human judgments even to get to the cross and be crucified (see BB 4A) – and then to be judged in the darkness for the sins of the world, bearing all sin in His body on that tree (1Pet.2:24) . . . needless to say, the gratitude we ought to show to our dear Lord Jesus for what He suffered for us and to the Father who gave Him up to death that we might be saved is limitless. If He asks from us a sanctified life, and a heart to know Him, to walk with Him, and to help our brothers and sisters do the same, is that really too much?

[You] who through Him are believers in God:

This life is all about free will choice, and the most important choice any creature with the image of God will ever make is whether or not to accept the authority of God. For all human beings after the cross, the revealed person of Jesus Christ who died on the cross for the sins of the world is the *only* object of this choice; our Savior, His person and His work, is received only by putting our faith in Him for salvation. That is how we choose for God and against this world and its evil ruler. By accepting Christ as our Savior, we show that we accept the authority of God the Father. The present tense participle used here in Greek, *pisteuontas*, "[those who are] believing", is the

most common way in the New Testament to express the idea of "believers". The verbal idea which is always there in the participle is of action which is present and which continues. We are, as those who have put our faith in Jesus Christ, "in a state of continual belief in Him", and it is our entrance into this faith relationship with Christ that also gives us an eternal relationship with the Father: "through Him" we are also "those who are believers in God the Father" (cf. Acts 16:34; Rom.4:24).

Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."
John 6:29 NIV

Then Jesus cried out, "Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me."
John 12:44 NIV

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me."
John 14:1 NIV

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
John 14:6 NIV

Who raised Him from the dead having given Him glory:

The resurrection and glorification of Christ constitute both a double proof of His victory over sin and a double guarantee of our own wonderful eternal life to come. For we are one with Christ, and as such, being His Body and His Bride, we shall share His destiny forever.

Beloved, we are already the children of God, but what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He is revealed [in glory], we will be like Him, that we shall see Him exactly like He is.
1st John 3:2

And just as Christ was glorified by the Father after His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God in order to demonstrate the validity of His sacrifice and victory on the cross (Ps.2:7-8; 110:1; Heb.1:13; 12:2; 1Pet.3:22; cf. Jn.13:31-32; 17:5; Acts 2:33; Col.3:1), so also we shall share in that glory (Rom.5:1-2; Col.1:27; Tit.2:13) – not some vague evanescent existence, but a tangible and blessed eternal life in perfect and incorruptible bodies in the presence of our dear Savior forevermore.

(17) Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (18) I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.
Romans 8:17-18 NIV

With the result that you have faith and hope in God:

As a result of Christ's first advent, His spiritual death on our behalf, and His resurrection, ascension and session which followed, we who have believed in Him also "have faith and hope in God [the Father]", because anyone who has put their faith in Christ belongs to the Father as well.

"But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father."

John 10:38 NIV

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

John 14:9 NIV

For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father.

John 16:27 NASB

With this concluding phrase, Peter has brought us full circle in the process of salvation, reassuring us that not only do we belong to Christ through our faith in Him, but to the Father as well – for there is no sliver of daylight between the will of the Father and the will of the Son (Jn.10:30). As a result of being children of God, therefore, equally beloved of Father and Son, we have faith in the Father as well as in the Son, and hope in Him as well as in our dear Lord Jesus, looking forward to the time when we will be with them both in heaven above and, after the end of history, on the new earth below. Confident in our salvation as beloved sons and daughters of the Father and His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and filled with the Spirit He has sent to be within us, we have every encouragement to respond to the appeal to lead a sanctified life as Peter has urged us to do in this section of the Word. Our eternal destiny is secure in the Lord by grace through faith. Let us therefore make every effort to live up to the challenge of living our Christian lives the way our Savior would have us to do, regardless of any opposition or suffering we may face, to the glory our dear Lord Jesus Christ, remembering what He did for us.

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of Heb.11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Keep in mind all the terrible opposition He endured against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as not to grow sick at heart and give up.

Hebrews 12:1-3