

Turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter 1:13-17 as we continue our verse by verse study of this great epistle. I remind you that preaching is God's instrument for saving sinners. It is also God's instrument for equipping the saints. As Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1:21, "God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." When we come together on Sunday morning we do more than just read Scripture or tell stories. We do more than tell jokes or give book reports or facilitate a group discussion. Rather, the Word of God is preached systematically, verse by verse—expositions and applications of the text. I pray that this will help sober the careless and encourage the faint-hearted, especially those within the sound of my voice in other countries such as China and the eastern European countries where there's great oppression. Some of you are listening from Muslim countries where the persecution is great. I pray that the Word will encourage you as well as those of us here, and by the grace of God equip the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ as Paul has said in Ephesians 4, so that we can ultimately have unity of the faith, or doctrinal unity.

We come to this text and we find ourselves in verses 13-17. Before we look at this, may I say that it is crucial that doctrinal truth translates into practical application in your life. When we learn Bible doctrine it should literally cause us to live differently. But right doctrine will only produce right living when we choose to live consistently with what we know to be true. It's a great tragedy to see Christians with great theological acumen whose character is carnal. As a result, you see ungodly living, broken relationships, etc. And certainly Peter was concerned for these dear saints in the first century who were suffering profound persecution. He wanted to make sure that not only did they have the right doctrine, but that they were applying it to their lives.

So, here in 1 Peter, after twelve verses of exhilarating theology describing the source and nature of our salvation, Peter now transitions from edification to exhortation, for the purpose of application. Therefore I've entitled my sermon, "Rightful Obligations," due to the salvation that we have received. Let's read beginning in verse 13. "Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.' And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth."

Here we have three categories of exhortation pertaining to everyday living. These are practical exhortations that I have divided in such a way so that you can remember them and, by God's grace, live them. First of all, we will see how important it is to live in light of eternity. Second, to live separate from the world, and third, to live with reverential awe. I pray that you will write these great truths on your heart and live by them. While these rightful obligations are simple to understand, they require enormous conviction and discipline, and frankly supernatural enablement to live them out. By God's grace we can do this.

Let me prepare your minds a little bit for this text. The Christian life is really all about choices. If we make bad choices, we will reap bad consequences. It's the principle of sowing and reaping. And it's very tragic that habitual bad choices in a person's life will ultimately define their character. When an individual habitually indulges in a particular sin, he or she will eventually become enslaved by that sin, and become the personification of that sin. In fact, in Romans 6:16 we read, "Do you not know that

when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?" And later on in 2 Peter 2:19, Peter is talking about false teachers and he says, "they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved."

For example, if you are a person who persistently malingers and feigns incapacity, and you choose not to be responsible in everyday life, you will eventually be known by that sin, by what the Bible would call a sluggard. If you are a man who continually indulges in pornography, eventually that will take you over and you will become a fornicator and an adulterer. If you are a woman who habitually lies, you will be known as a liar. If you are a teenager who habitually indulges in alcohol, eventually you will be known as a drunkard, and on it goes. Whatever the sin, if it is habitually practiced in your mind, in your fantasies, and even certainly in your behaviors, eventually, like the metastasizing corruption of a malignant tumor, it will take you over. You will be enslaved by it. You will become it. You will become the poster child of that which you practice in your heart.

Solomon tells us in Proverbs 26:11, "Like a dog that returns to its vomit, is a fool who repeats his folly." And what is worse, left unchecked like the corruption of that tumor I just mentioned, that can take over and corrupt your entire life, eventually your life will begin to corrupt your family's life. Many times you will see generations of the same kind of wickedness. How tragic to find that in anybody's life, but especially in the life of one who understands the great truths of salvation and professes faith in Christ. But who, for whatever reason, is lazy and indifferent in living out those truths. These are great commands therefore, that when they are obeyed will help you to live victoriously in your life, rather than experiencing perpetual defeat. I hear this many times from people, "I'm just so disappointed and disgusted in my life. I just seem to commit the same sins over and over and over again." Why is that? It's because you do not understand and you are not living out the things that we will be discussing here.

The first thing that Peter encourages us to do is to live in light of eternity. Notice in verse 13 he says, "Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Grammatically the phrase, "fix your hope completely" is the dominant theme of this text. It's the dominant admonition here. It's a command that literally means to perfectly and unreservedly and utterly live your life in light of eternity. Remember, we've looked at this glorious theme of Peter's doxology in the weeks that have gone by. He has spoken to us about the triumphant hope of our election, that we are chosen, sanctified, sealed and blessed. We have learned about the source of our salvation who is the Father that drew us; the power of our salvation, that we're born again; there's this glorious regeneration, there's the miracle of the new birth; we have learned of the promise of salvation that we have an eternal inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, will not fade away. We've learned of the certainty of our salvation; that we have an inheritance that is reserved or guarded in heaven, and it is protected by the power of God. As a result of that, Peter, in his doxology, has just gotten so excited and encouraged us all to rejoice with inexpressible joy because we have a salvation that is secure, a faith that is proven, a commendation that is inevitable, a love that is unseen, a deliverance that is in progress. Therefore he says I want you to live consistently with these glorious truths.

These are rightful obligations. I want you therefore to, "fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." In other words, I want you to fully trust God to

deliver all the promises He has given to you, when He comes again at His second coming, when you stand in the presence of His glory. I want you to live your life as if you are going to stand in His presence in the next second. I want you to live that way.

Let me give you an example. Imagine if you've been separated from your family for a long period of time. I know some of you have family members that are in Iraq serving in the military. Others have family members in Afghanistan. We've got people that we love and miss, family members that perhaps we haven't seen for a long time. After a while, especially if you're the one separated from your family, you will begin to develop a preoccupation with your family. You will long to be with them. When that happens, everything else in life is secondary, even tertiary, perhaps even nonessential. The only thing you're thinking about is your family. You long to be with them. Everything you think and everything you do is merely a means to that end. Nothing else really even competes. And frankly, when you're in that situation, and I've been there before, you don't even like being distracted with other things because you just want to be with your family because you miss them so much. You're thinking of that glorious reunion. You are having your hope fixed on your family. This is the same principle here. He's saying I want you to fix your hope completely on that ultimate reunion, on the consummation of your salvation, the consummation of divine grace.

How do we do this? Well, we see here that the Spirit of God is very practical. He gives us two very practical admonitions instructing us on how to live in light of eternity. He wants us to prepare our minds for action and to keep sober in spirit, as seen in verse 13. What does that mean, to prepare your mind for action? In the King James it says, "Gird up the loins of your mind." You must understand the ancient Oriental culture and custom. They wore loose flowing robes, as many of them do to this day. If it was time to go to battle, or do some type of work, or run from an enemy, you would have to take those loose flowing robes and tuck them in to a belt so that you were prepared to do whatever you needed to do. The issue here is that of preparedness. We might say in our vernacular, it's time to roll up your sleeves. It's time to get serious about doing what you must do. Metaphorically, what the Holy Spirit is telling us to do is that we must rid ourselves of anything that might distract us or trip us up and prevent us from "fixing our hope completely on the grace to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

In light of the triumphant hope of our salvation, he's saying that he wants us to live in a state of mind that remains ready to discharge the rightful duties for your Master who will one day be unveiled in all His glory. There's a similar exhortation in Ephesians 6:13-14 where we are told to, "take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day...Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness." The soldiers would do this. They would prepare themselves for hand-to-hand combat so they would have to take their robes and tuck them in a large leather belt. That would be girding up their loins. He's saying here to gird up your loins with truth. It goes on to say, "having put on the breastplate of righteousness." That is what the soldiers would do. That big belt would be the foundation for the breastplate they would put on to protect themselves.

That's what we must have. We must have the belt of truth, and upon that foundation, truth and integrity as Christian people. We can have the breastplate of righteousness. If you don't have truth you won't have righteousness. Victory depends upon how sincere we are about knowing and living the truth, and being prepared to live it out. Sadly, all too often, many Christian people are unprepared

spiritually. They're doctrinally illiterate, they're unteachable, undisciplined, very critical. Spurgeon put it well. He said they are, "Tattooed with Christianity...their faith is only skin deep with them, it never gets into their hearts or affects their souls."

Paul reminds us of this in Colossians 3:2. He says, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory." This needs to be the preoccupation of our minds and our daily life—living in light of eternity. When you're around a person like that, it becomes obvious very quickly that there is a holy resoluteness about that person. You listen to them talk for a few minutes and you can see that they're living in the light of eternity. They are unattached to this world. They are in a state of readiness to meet their King. Unlike so many people whose lives remind me of that game that I hate to play, I'm sorry if you like it, Trivial Pursuit. I mean good grief, it's like people that are obsessed with matters that are eternally irrelevant. For a Christian to be preoccupied with some of the things we're preoccupied with in light of eternity is like a man who is proud of his collection of pancakes. What's the deal here? It doesn't make any sense.

Yesterday I was in a conversation with a group of men. As many of you know, it's dove season, and here in the South we go to hunt. It's kind of a ritual in our culture. There's the breakfasts and lunches that are catered in. It's interesting listening to the group of men talk, their conversation. I could tell what the preoccupation of their mind was. It began with politics, and it quickly descended to something of far greater importance—the roster of the Titans. And then from there it went into hockey, and for about an hour I had to hear all of this stuff. I tried to be nice, but you can tell, that's the pancakes that they're collecting. I found myself in the back of my mind thinking, wouldn't it be interesting to ask them, "What do you think God would have us do as people to get more serious about evangelism?" Or to bring up the topic of Bible prophecy. Can you imagine what would have happened? You get the point. Too often we are preoccupied with things that are irrelevant.

It reminds me of one man I remember counseling with a few years ago. His life was a spiritual wreck. His family was in disaster, and every time I talked with him, he would bring in his collection of baseball cards. That was his life. Friends, don't hear me say that collections of baseball cards and hobbies are wrong. What I'm saying is that when it becomes the passion and the obsession of your life, especially for believers, it's wrong. I would ask you, what are the preoccupations of your mind? Are they things above or are they things on earth? The dominant characteristic of someone that's living in light of eternity will be that they will have a passion for spiritual nourishment. They will have a longing for the Word of God, for serious Bible study and prayer combined with a lifestyle of selfless sacrifice, holy living and evangelism.

Too many Christians, I fear, have minds that are preoccupied with matters that are sinful at worst, and eternally inconsequential at best. Therefore their minds are not prepared for action. They are trying to go through the Christian life, fight the battles of the Christian life, and they are tripping over their robes of all the garbage in their life. They wonder why they so frequently stumble, consumed by the cares of the world, consumed by everything that frankly is ultimately, eternally irrelevant. The bottom line is that we cannot live in light of eternity and thus transcend the enormous and inevitable trials of life unless we prepare our minds for action and live in a state of preparedness. Moreover, we cannot have our hope fixed on the glorious revelation of Christ and all that will be ours in our salvation unless we maintain a state of mind of preparedness and anxious anticipation.

First of all we must gird up our minds for action if we're going to live in light of eternity. Secondly, he tells us to, "keep sober in spirit." In other words, don't live carelessly. Later on in chapter 5:8 Peter said this again in a different way. He said, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." That's what Satan wants to do, he wants to tempt you so that you will sin and break fellowship with the Lord, and your life will begin to go downhill. He wants to discourage you. He wants to defeat you. He will try to do that through persecution as well.

What do you have to do? You have to be of sober spirit, you have to be on the alert. Here in this text, in verse 13, he says, "keep sober in spirit." In other words, be spiritually alert, be clearheaded, as opposed to being intoxicated with all of the allurements of the world. There is nothing, at least for me, that is more obnoxious than an out of control, slobbering, blubbery drunk who is incapable of making wise decisions. That's what Peter is saying here. Don't get drunk on the corrupting influences of the world. I want you to keep a clear spiritual head. Don't lose control. I want you to stay sober and alert to the dangers of temptation.

This is essential to gaining victory over life-dominating sins, this living in light of eternity by guarding your mind and keeping a sober spirit. You've got to refuse to become intoxicated by anything in life. When this discipline becomes something that is well honed in your life, the temptations of the world will begin to lose their power. For example, if I have my hope fixed on all that God has given me, and I have my sights set on that day when I stand before Him blameless with great joy in the presence of His glory, if I'm living in light of that and I have therefore been living with a prepared mind and I'm sober in spirit, then when some sordid something comes on television, I don't want that. I don't want to get drunk with that. That's what my flesh wants to drink in, but I don't want that. That has to be the battlefield right there. I'm thinking about something far more profound. Therefore, when something filthy or immoral comes on, some kind of entertainment that Hollywood puts out or some kind of music or whatever, no way. I don't want that junk that makes me drunk with the world. I'm intoxicated by His grace, not by the world. I want to have a sober spirit.

John Piper said something very interesting in light of this. He uses the example of sexual temptation. "If you make that your issue hoping fully in the grace of God and letting nothing come into your mind for long that desensitizes you to the glory of spiritual things or diminishes your passion for God—if that's your battlefield, then you may never have to fight the immediate temptation of adultery or fornication. Sex, of course, is not the only drug that intoxicates and numbs the mind to spiritual reality; the same can be true of money and career and power and romance novels and soap operas and TV advertisements and fishing and coin collecting and computers and rehabbing and gardening...The point is: know what numbs your mind to God and avoid it. Stay sober for the sake of full and passionate hope in God's grace. The great concern of God...is that we not be moderate hopers. That we not be satisfied with half-hoping hearts. But that we engage our minds with the hope-producing truth of scripture, and that we guard our minds from the hope-diminishing causes in the world."

So when we prepare our minds for action and keep sober in spirit we will be able to fix our hope on the grace to come and therefore live in light of eternity. The apostle Paul reminds us in Titus 2:11-14, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed

hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” That’s the focus. That’s how you live in light of eternity.

But Peter tells us something else. He tells us to live separate from the world in verses 14-16. He says, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” Parents and grandparents, and even people who don’t have kids, you know how wonderful it is to have obedient children. It’s a joy to our hearts. Proverbs 10:1 says, “...a wise son makes a glad father.” The opposite does the opposite. Obedience is the hallmark of every true child of God. That will be the pattern of our life, although at times it will be interrupted by seasons of disobedience. That’s why we have so many New Testament admonitions for us to choose to be obedient. But here in verse 14 he’s saying, “do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance.”

The word *conformed* denotes the idea of, do not be fashioned or shaped by something. In Romans 12:2 it says that we should “be not conformed to this world.” Because of the grammar of that text it indicates that it is the world that does the conforming to you without you realizing it. Literally, be careful, don’t let the world squeeze you into its mold, don’t let it fashion you into itself. Don’t let the world shape you into what it wants you to be. Be careful with that. In fact, that text, if you look at it exegetically, you will see that the shaping, the conforming, will cause you to be something on the outside inconsistent with who you are on the inside.

The next phrase in Romans 12:2 says, “but rather than that be transformed.” That word comes from the Greek word *metamorpheo*, which is the word “metamorphosis” in English. In other words, be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Because of the grammar it indicates that this transformation will be something that is the result of the renewing of your mind. When you have the mind of Christ, when you’re filling yourself with the Word of God, there is a transformation that occurs, and it will be something that you do not necessarily choose to do, but it will happen to you by the power of the living God. There will be a transformation.

The point is, you have to be so careful that you don’t put yourself in situations in the world, living consistently with the world, and without you realizing it, that you become like the world. Peter is saying here, as obedient children, “do not be conformed to the former lusts.” So, these were lusts that we see that were yours in ignorance, in other words before you were saved, before you received the knowledge of the truth. Before you were given a new heart and a new mind. Don’t go back and live consistently with that stuff, and allow that stuff to fashion you. How pitiful to see people that call themselves Christians and yet when you look at their lifestyle, you can’t see any difference between them and people that are not saved.

Before we were saved, our whole life centered around self. We were filled with self-gratification, selfishness, we were self-absorbed, self-centered, in search of self-aggrandizement. We blindly pursued anything that the world could offer us to somehow satisfy our fleshly appetites. We had absolutely no regard for the will of God in our lives. We were characterized by unrestrained indulgence. Our world view, our value system and our personalities were images of the society, the

culture that shaped them. Our hearts were a factory of idols. These therefore were all of our lusts in our ignorance.

We don't have to be that way anymore. Some people say, "That's just impossible in the world in which we live. I seem to commit the same sins over and over." Well folks, if that is you, may I humbly say that you're either not born again—you might profess Christ but you don't really possess Him—or maybe you know Christ but you're just undisciplined and carnal in your life, and you're not living consistently with some of the truths that I'm sharing with you. Dealing with sin, especially life-dominating sin, is serious business. You have to get serious about starving your lusts. The old phrase would be to mortify your flesh. As that happens, they begin to lose their power. Biblically we see that the process for change is always a two-factored process: you have got to put off and put on. "I feel so powerless," people say. If you're a believer, you've got power, you're just not tapping into it. You have the indwelling Holy Spirit. Romans 8:9-10 says, "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin," referring to the unregenerate, "yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness." If God's Spirit dwells in you, the human spirit has therefore been made alive and capable of living righteously. You have the power.

Galatians 5:16 says, "Walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." You can't expect to have victory over the flesh if you're not walking, or having intimate fellowship with the Holy Spirit. If you're not, on a moment by moment basis, submitting to the Holy Spirit as He has revealed Himself in His Word, you will not have any power. But when you do, then you will understand what Paul said in Colossians 3:5-10. "...consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him."

Now, back to the text. Peter exhorts us to live lives that are separate from the world. The key to that is to not allow yourself to be conformed to it or by it. We must live consistently with the longings of our new heart. We must starve the former lusts that were ours in ignorance. Unsaved people have absolutely no capacity to live righteously. They have no idea what it even looks like to live for the glory of God. For example, during spring break, go down to the drunken, immoral college students who are utterly enslaved to their lusts, the lusts of their flesh, and ask them, "Won't you choose to honor God in your life? Won't you choose to keep His commandments and live for His glory?" After they stop laughing uncontrollably, you begin to realize that you are asking a person who is spiritually dead in his sin to share a Christian world view and live for the glory of God—something that is utterly impossible apart from the transforming power of the Spirit of God. That's as silly as asking a corpse in a casket to stand up and sing the National Anthem. It's not going to happen.

But not so for those of us who have been transformed by God's grace and mercy. It's not to our credit, it's to Him that all of the glory belongs. Therefore, we can be obedient to Peter's command here in verse 15, "but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy for I am holy.'" Peter is saying on the one hand to stop sinning, but on the other hand to choose instead to be holy. Holiness is the divine standard for which we strive, but we

will never ultimately attain until glory. No person has ever come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ apart from understanding, at least at some minimal level, the holiness of God and therefore the sinfulness of man. In fact Hebrews 12:14 says, “without holiness, no one will see God.” When we look at Scripture, whether it’s in Hebrew, the *kadesh*, or we look at the Greek term *hagios*, words for “holy,” we see that it always means the same. It means separate, other, something of a completely different nature, not to be compared to anything else that is created. This is who our holy God is. The world has only seen one holy person, and by the way it’s not this new guy we’ve seen on television who claims to be Jesus Christ. The only holy person who has ever been on this earth is Christ Jesus.

We read of the holiness of God in Exodus 15:11 in the Song of Moses. He says, “Who is like You among the gods, O Lord? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?” Remember Hannah’s great song of praise in 1 Samuel 2:2. She says, “No one is holy like the Lord, for there is none besides You.” Isaiah reminds us in 57:15 that He says that His “name is Holy.” So here we have holiness being the all-encompassing attribute of God. Holiness stands alone as the defining characteristic of His person. Holiness is the absolute summation of all His attributes, defining His consummate perfection and His eternal glory.

In Isaiah 6 the Seraphim sang the tri-hagion, “Holy, holy, holy.” They didn’t sing, “Love, love, love.” They did not sing, “Faithful, faithful, faithful.” They did not sing, “Omniscient, omniscient, omniscient,” even though all of those things are true. But the dominant attribute of God, the summation of all of His glorious attributes, is His holiness. We are asked to be holy like He is holy. To be separated from sin unto God.

Here is the amazing truth: holiness will be the ultimate characteristic of every child of God in his or her glorified state. Isn’t that an amazing thought? This is “the grace to be brought to us.” This is what we’re to have our eyes and our minds and our hearts fixed upon. But even now we are commanded to come out and be holy, to be separate from the world. I want you to understand that no Christian can possibly fix their hope on the glory to be revealed apart from a determined commitment to live a holy life, to live a life separated from sin unto God. If anything smacks of dishonoring God, we need to run from it, not run towards it. Now that’s not our nature, is it? Too often when we find something that’s tempting to our flesh we’re like a moth going to a flame. We like to see how close we can get to the precipice of temptation rather than how far we can run from it. Therein is the danger.

So, if we’re going to fix our hope, as Peter is commanding us to do here, not only must we live in light of eternity by preparing our minds for action and keeping a sober spirit, and secondly live separate from the world by keeping ourselves separate from sin, but thirdly we must live with reverential awe. Notice verse 17. He says, “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.” Isn’t that a great text? It’s so practical, so pointed. Every child of God addresses Him as Father. He is our Abba Father. He is our Father who is in heaven, as we’re told to address Him, as Jesus said in Matthew 6:9.

How often have we as Christians cried out to our heavenly Father for mercy, grace, protection? Some of you here in the last few weeks have been on your face before the Lord, crying out, “Oh Father, protect me. Oh Father, give me discernment. Oh Father, preserve me in the midst of this great storm.” And without fail, He has been faithful. He has been loving. He has been intimately involved with us. So for all of us who worship God as Father, for all of us who recognize that indeed He is the “One who

impartially judges according to each one's work," if that is you as a Christian, then there are some things that we need to do in the context of our living that manifest these great truths that we claim to understand. To sum it up, I would say that we need to live with reverential awe.

In this age of apostasy, I fear that many Christians mistakenly believe that the dominant attribute of God is some form of sentimental love rather than His holiness. That's why I talk a lot about this newly-invented "god" of neo-evangelicalism, this "smiley-faced God" who winks at sin. That's not the God of the Bible. He is, as we see in verse 17, the "One who impartially judges according to each one's work." That's why he's exhorting us here to "conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth." Conduct yourselves in reverential awe, fearing the Lord. This is the fear that a loving son would have towards a loving father. It's not only a fear of well-deserved discipline when we disobey, but it's a fear of doing anything that might wound that relationship. We must fear the loving discipline of the Lord. We must remember that He is watching. He is attentive to us.

That's why later in chapter 4:17 we are reminded that God chastens and disciplines believers in His church, saying that it begins first with us. "Judgment must begin with the household of God." This is a loving Father. I want you all to sincerely feel the weight of what he is saying here in this text. In order to do so, you must understand what Scripture teaches us about the consequences of sin in a Christian's life. The Scriptures teach us that there are two ways in which God "impartially judges according to each one's work." There are two things that happen when we sin, especially when we sin with impunity. The first is that it will provoke present disciplining. We read this in Hebrews 12:5-11, about how if we're legitimate sons, the Father will discipline us. You can study that on your own. This is divine chastening. It can occur and it can be severe. Many Christians live under constant divine chastening. Many times they don't even realize it or they don't want to recognize it. They are reaping what they have sown.

For example, if you have a husband who refuses to lead his wife and family, what's going to happen? Eventually his family is going to be a disaster. The marriage will begin to disintegrate, the children will be a source of perpetual grief and so on. Or maybe you have a wife that resents her role of lovingly submitting to the leadership of her husband. She's the opposite of a gentle and quiet spirit. She refuses to love her husband and children. She ends up little by little embracing the lies of feminism that we have in our culture. What's going to happen? Her relationship with her husband and children will be strained, and eventually her relationship with the Lord will be strained, and on it goes.

In every area of life, you must understand that if you sow the wind, you're going to reap the whirlwind. God is not going to bless you with power in ministry, He's not going to bless you with joy in relationships, He's not going to bless you with contentment in the midst of tribulations, unless you're living consistently with what He's asked us to do. Therefore, as a result of that, discipline is the forfeiture of divine blessing in your life. When we sin it can provoke present discipline and the consequences of that. Matthew 18 talks about that. When a person, finally, because of their lack of forgiveness and lack of obedience before the Lord, they are given over to the torturers of life, and they can be myriad.

But not only can sin provoke present discipline, but sin can also forfeit future reward. Paul spoke of the importance of remembering that the Lord is constantly keeping a record of our works. A lot of Christians don't want to think about this, but He is. He is watching us. He knows our hearts, He knows

what we do. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 4:5 we read that eventually He “will 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.” God is not passive, He’s not indifferent towards what we do and think in our daily lives. He’s watching. Sin is ultimately going to forfeit future reward. In 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 we read, “Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” This is why it is so important to never forget to live in reverential awe, to live a life of worship. Our loving, holy God is, as Peter tells us here, “the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work...therefore, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth.”

Paul describes the judgment of believers in vivid detail in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. There he’s speaking of the importance of all believers building a life of ministry upon the foundation of the church. Here’s what he says, “Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones,” in other words these are quality materials symbolizing faithful, humble service. If that’s what you’re building on, versus, “wood, hay, straw,” which would be inferior building materials symbolizing mediocre, superficial, lazy spiritual service for your glory, not God’s, “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. If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to suffer loss. I don’t want to forfeit divine blessing in the future. Instead, I want to be, and I hope you want to be, a man—or woman—that lives in reverential awe, that lives a life that fears the discipline of the Lord. We know from Proverbs 9:10 that, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” God is going to judge us according to our true character. I want Him to see our character as the character of those who live lives on a moment by moment basis with reverential awe, as Peter is saying here, “conducting ourselves in fear during the time of our stay on earth.”

What a joy to know, that according to Psalm 147:11, “the Lord favors those who fear Him, those who wait for His lovingkindness.” We will experience the ultimate expression of His lovingkindness when He is revealed to us. This grace that we’ve had all of our hope fixed upon will be ultimately revealed and we will enjoy all of the blessings that can be ours in our salvation if we heed the rightful obligations. I challenge you to live in light of eternity, live separate from the world and live with reverential awe.

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