

1 Peter 1:17-21 (Part II)

Introduction

Remember that we're in a section, now, that Peter builds around five main imperatives – five commands. Two weeks ago, we looked at the first two of these imperatives: “**Set you hope** fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (v. 13) and “as he who called you is holy, you also **be holy** in all your conduct.” (v. 15) Last week, we saw that the third of these imperatives is the command to “conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.” (v. 17)

Now remember that these imperatives and commands are surrounded by other phrases helping us to think more carefully about God's commands and understand more clearly how to obey them. So for the third command that we looked at last week, Peter begins: “And **if** you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's work, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile...”

As Christians, we of all people are the ones who should fear God because *we* aren't ignorant—because *we* of all people know that this is the God who judges impartially according to each person's work. And *why* do we, of all people, know this? Precisely **because** we are the ones who call upon this impartial Judge **as Father!** As long as we are still living our lives here in exile, we are never to be so utterly foolish as to live our lives **presuming upon the verdict** of that final day. Dictionary.com says that to “presume upon” is “to go **too far** in acting **unwarrantably** or in **taking liberties.**” It means “to take **for granted.**” The related adjective is “presumptuous” and Webster's dictionary says that this means “**overstepping** due bounds... : taking liberties.” Instead of presuming on the verdict of that final day, we are to “conduct ourselves in every aspect of our living always with a reverent fear and trembling before the one who *will* judge **impartially** according to each one's work.”

But Peter doesn't stop here. He continues in verse eighteen:

I. 1 Peter 1:18a — ...**knowing** that you were ransomed from the futile conduct of your ancestral family heritage...

There's another one of those “ing's” – another one of those participles. It may be dangerous and wrong for us to live our lives **presuming** on the verdict at the final judgment (and so without the true fear of the Lord), but this doesn't mean that if we've truly called upon God as Father we cannot live with absolute, 100% **confidence** that we have been ransomed and redeemed. So how does this work? How can I **know** that I've been ransomed and redeemed even as I live out the days of my exile with a very real fear and trembling at the thought of the impartial Judge on the Day of Judgment? Though there will always be a tension here that we're **meant** to live in, the answer is really very, *very* simple – and profoundly wonderful.

What does Peter say that we all **know** we've been ransomed **from** – **if** we've called upon him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's work? We were ransomed **from the futile conduct** of our ancestral family heritage. Now, in verse 15 Peter said that we are to be holy in all

our **conduct**. (Gr: *anastrophe*) Just last week in verse 17 Peter said that we are to **conduct** (Gr: *anastrepho*) ourselves with fear. And so now, after telling us how we *are* to conduct ourselves, Peter **grounds** these two commands in this wonderful truth: We are to **conduct** ourselves always with holiness and with fear because we **know** that we've been ransomed and redeemed [*lutroo*]
—we've been ransomed and redeemed **from** the **futile conduct** [Gr: *anastrophe*] of our ancestral family heritage.

When we think of redemption, we often think of deliverance from the **guilt** and **condemnation** of sin; and that's not wrong.

- Ephesians 1:7 (cf. Col. 1:13-14) — In him we have redemption [*apolutrosis*] through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.
- Romans 3:23–25 — All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption [*apolutrosis*] that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

But here in Peter, we're reminded that we were ransomed and redeemed not only from the guilt and the condemnation of sin, but even from the lifestyle and the habits and the ways of sin. Peter is the only New Testament writer who uses this Greek word for “ancestral family heritage,” but outside of the New Testament, it was always used with a very positive meaning. The “ancestral traditions,” or the “way of life” handed down from generation to generation was the key to a healthy and stable and happy society. In the world of Peter's day, the ancestral “family heritage” was the DNA code for acceptably and appropriately living all of life.¹ But now Peter takes what in his day was this positive, exalted word, and he turns it completely on its head by attaching to it that horribly jarring word—“**futile**.” This is a word that in the Old Testament was used to describe the vanity, and the emptiness, and the worthlessness of idols.² What Peter's saying is that every single way of living life that's been handed down from generation to generation—if it's not rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ—is ultimately vain, and worthless. In every culture, and in every society (American and otherwise), this “family heritage” can only be described as a way of living built on idolatry and leading ultimately to condemnation and death.

- Jeremiah 16:19 — O LORD, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge in the day of trouble, to you shall the nations come from the ends of the earth and say: “Our fathers have inherited nothing but lies, worthless things in which there is no profit.”

And so now it's **against this backdrop** that we can fully love and rejoice in what Peter says. It's **FROM** this whole outlook on life and this whole way of living life that *we* have been ransomed and redeemed. Be holy in all **your living** and **live your life** with fear. Why? Because if you have truly called upon God, then you **know** that you have already been ransomed **from** not only the

¹ “Peter describes the liberation of Christians from the traditions of the fathers; not simply from a few mistaken ideas that have been hallowed by time, but from the deepest meaning (or lack of meaning) of cultural tradition. Not just a few customs, but a whole lifestyle has been swept away by God's redemption.” (Clowney)

² Jeremiah 8:19 [LXX] — They have provoked me with their graven images, and with strange **vanities**.
Jeremiah 10:14–15 [LXX] — Every man is deprived of knowledge, every goldsmith is confounded because of his graven images; for he has cast false gods, there is no breath in them. They are **vain works**, wrought in mockery; in the time of their visitation they shall perish.
cf. Lev. 17:7; Acts 14:15

guilt and condemnation of sin, but even the futile **conduct** and **way of living** that characterizes all the culture around you.

We'll come back to this in a moment, but right now let's take a minute to see how Psalm 34 is really the backdrop for these verses in 1 Peter.

II. Psalm 34 as the backdrop for 1 Peter 1:17-21

In Psalm 34, the Psalmist says:

- Psalm 34:8 — Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!

Peter has this in his mind when he writes in chapter two:

- 1 Peter 2:2-3 — Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— **if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.**

1 Peter 3:10-12 is one long quotation from Psalm 34:12-16. And here in chapter one, Peter also seems to have Psalm 34 in the forefront of his thinking.

The title for Psalm 34 says that it's a Psalm "OF DAVID, WHEN HE CHANGED HIS BEHAVIOR BEFORE ABIMELECH, SO THAT HE DROVE HIM OUT, AND HE WENT AWAY." So the backdrop for this Psalm is David's time of exile or sojourning in the land of the Philistines when he was running away from Saul. (cf. 1 Sam. 21:10-15) This helps to explain why the people who translated this chapter from the Hebrew into the Greek made what might at first seem to be a very big and unexpected change. David writes in verse four:

- Psalm 34:4 — I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my **fears**.

But look what happens to this verse in the Greek translation (which Peter used):

- Psalm 33:4 [LXX] — I sought the Lord diligently, and he listened to me, and delivered me from all my **sojournings/exile** [*paroikia*].

In light of the title for this Psalm, the Greek translators understood that David's fears and troubles were all related to his forced exile and sojourning in a foreign land.³ And it's this same word for "sojourning" or "exile" in Psalm 34 that we also find so prominently in 1 Peter. In fact, we just saw this very same word in verse seventeen: "And **if** you call on him as Father who

³ We find this theme also in several other places in the Psalms:

Psalm 119:53-54 [LXX: 118:53-54] — Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked, who forsake your law. Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my sojourning [*paroikia*].

Psalm 120:5-6 [LXX: 119:5-6] — Woe to me, that I sojourn [*paroikia*] in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar! Too long have I had my dwelling among those who hate peace.

Psalm 39:12 [LXX: 38:13] — Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; hold not your peace at my tears! For I am a sojourner [*paroikos*] with you, a guest, like all my fathers.

Cf. Leviticus 25:23 — The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners [*paroikos*] with me.

judges impartially according to each one's work, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your **exile** [*paroikia*]..." (1:17; cf. 2:11; 1:1)

So, Peter looks at all of **our** trials, and griefs, and troubles as Christians, and he sees a parallel with David's experience running from Saul in the land of the Philistines. He sees that just like with David, our griefs and trials are also all related to our own experience of exile and sojourning in a foreign land. Do you see how Peter is reading and applying his Old Testament Scriptures in light of brand new, New Covenant realities? David's exile and sojourning among the Philistines is a picture and a type of the exile and sojourning of all true Christians living now in this world. But there's still more.

Peter says that we are to conduct ourselves with **fear** [*phobos*] during the time of our **exile**. And can you guess what David writes about in Psalm 34 when he's celebrating his deliverance from all the griefs and troubles of his exile?

- Psalm 34:4, 7, 9, 11–14 — I sought the Lord diligently, and he listened to me, and delivered me from all my sojournings [LXX]... The angel of the LORD encamps around those who **fear** [LXX: *phobeo*] him, and delivers them... Oh, **fear** the LORD, you his saints, for those who **fear** him have no lack! ... Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the **fear** of the LORD. What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

But there's still even more. Peter says that we are to conduct ourselves with fear during the time of our exile **because** we call on Him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's work. And what motivation do you think David gives for fearing the Lord and always producing the works that flow from faith?

- Psalm 34:15–16 — The eyes of the LORD are toward **the righteous** and his ears toward their cry. The face of the LORD is against those who **do evil**, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.

Isn't this a vivid picture of the impartial Judge that we see in 1 Peter 1?

Finally, Psalm 34 ends with these wonderful words:

- Psalm 34:22b — ...none of those who take refuge in [the Lord] will be condemned.

The Greek translation of Psalm 34, however (the translation that Peter would have used), paraphrases these words like this:

- Psalm 34:22b [LXX] — ...none of those who **hope** [*elpizo*] in [the Lord] will be condemned.⁴

⁴ The LXX literally reads: "The death of sinners is evil: and they that hate righteousness will **go wrong** [**transgress**]. The Lord will redeem the souls of his servants: and none of those that hope in him shall **go wrong** [**transgress**]." (33:21-22) In light of the context and in light of other places where this word is used and the context

So, can you guess how Peter concludes this particular section of his letter? He ends it in the same way that he began – with the reminder of our **hope**.

- 1 Peter 1:18–19 — Through [Christ you] are believers in God, the one who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and **hope** [*elpis*] are in God.

Are you hearing in this, now, the reverberating echoes of Psalm 34?—“None of those who **hope** in the Lord will be condemned.” And are you seeing how Peter has taken the last words of Psalm 34 and “baptized” them into the brand new realities of the New Covenant? These verses in 1 Peter 1 are really Peter’s New Covenant interpretation and application of Psalm 34. Peter is reading and interpreting Psalm 34 in the full light of all the realities of Jesus Christ.

Peter isn’t just an example to me of how I’m to read and interpret the Scripture, he’s also a wonderful example to me of how we should all be *steeped* deeply in the Scriptures. Peter has obviously meditated deeply on Psalm 34. Throughout the rest of this letter, we’re going to continue to see how Peter was steeped and saturated in *all* of the Old Testament Scriptures. And remember, this wasn’t just because he was a super-special Apostle. Before he was an Apostle, he was an “uneducated, common” fisherman. (cf. Acts 4:13) The Bible may be a book, and the Scriptures may be words on a page, but that doesn’t mean that the Scriptures can only be fully appreciated and loved by “book worms” and academics. No! Because the Bible is the very Word of **God**, and because **we** have all been begotten anew as His sons and daughters, this book can be studied and meditated upon and understood deeply by **all** of us as Christians, no matter what our makeup may be, or what our calling in life. What a wonderful thing this is! And, of course, it’s to this end that we also have teachers whose job it is to help us understand the truth and the beauty of this holy book. I pray that God would give to me, and to all of us, the same kind of love for and devotion to His Word that we’re seeing exemplified here in Peter!

II. 1 Peter 1:18a (TAKE TWO) — ...**knowing** that you were **ransomed** [*lutroo*] from the futile conduct of your ancestral family heritage,

There’s still **one more** way in which Psalm 34 provides part of the backdrop for Peter’s words. Psalm 34 concludes with these verses:

- Psalm 34:21–22 — Affliction will slay **the wicked**, and those who hate **the righteous** will be condemned. The LORD **redeems/ransoms** [LXX: *lutroo*] the life of his servants; none of those who hope [LXX] in him will be condemned.

Do you see how in Psalm 34, the Lord’s ransom of His servants goes hand in hand with their living holy and righteous lives in the fear of the Lord? In other words, the ultimate *goal*—and even the ultimate *meaning*—of the **ransom** isn’t just rescue and deliverance from exile and hardship and a “happy ending” for me, but rather a life of righteous and godly **conduct** as a true “servant”—or even a “slave”—of the Lord. (cf. 1 Pet. 2:16) And so now Peter takes this meaning of the ransom in Psalm 34 and he interprets and applies it in light of the ransom that all of us here have now experienced under the New Covenant. We have been ransomed and redeemed not

is similar (cf. Jer. 2:3; Sirach 19:4; 23:11), the meaning of the word in this context appears to be equivalent to—or perhaps shorthand for—the Hebrew “be condemned.”

only from the guilt and the condemnation of our sin, but also **from** all of the futile conduct of our ancestral family heritage – **from** all the lifestyle and the habits and the ways of sin. And so we’ve also been ransomed **into** a new life of holy conduct as we live every day in the fear of the Lord.

- Titus 2:11–14 — For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to **redeem/ransom** [*lutroo*] us **from all lawlessness** and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are **zealous for good works**.

Brothers and sisters, what is the nature of our redemption? It’s a redemption **out of** lawlessness (**out of** the futile conduct of our ancestral heritage), and a redemption **into** good works (**into** holy conduct and conducting ourselves always in the fear of God who judges impartially according to each one’s work). This is the nature of our redemption. So as we look back, then, to **this** reality of the ransom and the redemption we’ve **already** experienced, our fear and trembling is mixed in full measure with the joy and confidence that as we do fear and tremble, we will—and we must—persevere in holy conduct and good works until the end. Can you see how this confidence and joy doesn’t contradict our fear, but is rather an essential part of our fear? It’s what actually makes our fear and trembling what it **ought** to be.

So it’s in light of these things that Peter would have us *continue* to **look back** and reflect even further on our redemption.

III. 1 Peter 1:18–19 — ...**knowing** that you were ransomed from the futile conduct of your ancestral family heritage, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with precious blood, like that of a lamb without blemish and without spot, [the blood of] Christ...

And now we see that Peter isn’t **just** interpreting and applying Psalm 34 in light of the New Covenant realities that we’ve all experienced, but also Isaiah 52. Just like with Psalm 34 where we saw David exiled and sojourning in the land of the Philistines, the whole context of Isaiah 52 is the exile and sojourning of God’s people in a foreign land.

- Isaiah 52:4–5 — For thus says the Lord GOD: “My people went down at the first into Egypt to **sojourn** [LXX: *paroikeo*] there, and [then] the Assyrian oppressed them **for nothing**. Now therefore what have I here,” declares the LORD, “seeing that my people are taken away **for nothing** [into Babylon]?”

The point here is that God didn’t make any profit when He gave up His people. Neither the Egyptians, nor the Assyrians, nor the Babylonians ever paid God any sale price in order to take His people away into captivity. God gave His people up for free—without cost or payment—to exile and sojourning in a foreign land. But though God gave them up for nothing, it won’t be so “simple” to get them back. In Isaiah, the exile and sojourning of God’s people is always the result of their sin, and so as long as their sin remains, so also will their exile be permanent. What

will it take, then, to redeem Israel from captivity? What will it take for God to reclaim His people finally and completely and always for Himself? Let's go back and read in Isaiah 52.

- Isaiah 52:3, 11 — Thus says the LORD: “You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed/ransomed [LXX: *lutroo*] without silver [LXX: *argurion*].” ... Depart, depart, go out from [Babylon]...

How will God accomplish the return of His people from their exile and sojourning in Babylon, and Assyria, and Egypt? God will **ransom** them. God Himself will pay a price— but if not of silver, then what will the **price** of the ransom be?⁵ (cf. Motyer) What will the **cost** be to God if He would redeem His people from their exile and sojourning and from their sin and rebellion? That's the question that's left hanging thick in the air after verse three — *until* we come to the next chapter, Isaiah chapter 53.⁶

- Isaiah 53:4–5, 7 — Surely [God's Servant] has borne our sicknesses and carried our pains; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed... He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a **lamb** that is led to the **slaughter**, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

Are you seeing how Peter has seamlessly woven together the theme of redemption from **Psalm 34 and Isaiah 52-53** and then interpreted and applied this redemption theme in light of all the New Covenant realities that have come to us now in Jesus? So let's read what Peter writes, now, not only in light of Psalm 34, but also in light of what we've just seen in Isaiah 52 and 53: “And **if** you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's work, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, **knowing [this:]** that you were ransomed **from** the futile conduct of your family heritage, **not with perishable things such as silver [argurion] or gold, but with precious blood, like that of a lamb without blemish and without spot...**”

What did it take for God to redeem us **from our old way of living**? What was the price and the cost to Him? It was “precious blood, like that of a **lamb** without blemish and without spot...” And now those reverberating echoes from the Old Testament seem to be coming in wave after wave after wave. This time it's not just one Scripture that Peter has in mind, but a whole host of Scriptures from Leviticus and Numbers and Ezekiel.⁷

⁵ Sometimes the emphasis of the Greek word *lutroo* is mainly on God's might act of deliverance and rescue, and the idea of the *cost* of that deliverance either fades into the background or is perhaps non-existent. (cf. Deut. 7:8) Especially in these cases, *lutroo* is best translated “redeem.” However, sometimes, the context clearly introduces the idea of a cost or a price paid (not necessarily *to* any particular party), and in this case it becomes appropriate to translate *lutroo* as “ransom.”

⁶ Peter quotes extensively from Isaiah 53 in 1 Peter 2:22-25

⁷ It's possible that Peter may also be drawing specifically from the background of the Passover lamb in Exodus 12:5. Exodus 12:5 — Your lamb shall be **perfect [complete]**, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats.

However, it seems more likely that the background Peter assumes (or consciously has in mind) is more broadly derived from the entire sacrificial cult of Israel. It should also be noted that the specific word for “without blemish”

- Leviticus 1:2,10–11 — When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock... If his gift for a burnt offering is from the flock, from the **sheep** or goats, he shall bring a male **without blemish**, and he shall kill it on the north side of the altar before the LORD, and Aaron’s sons the priests shall throw its **blood** against the sides of the altar.
- Ezekiel 46:13 (cf. Num. 28:3-4) — You shall provide a **lamb** a year old **without blemish** for a burnt offering to the LORD daily; morning by morning you shall provide it.

Only the blood of an unblemished lamb without any defect could be acceptable as an offering for the cleansing of the flesh under the Old Covenant. (cf. Deut. 17:1) Where is the **blood**, then, and what is the **lamb** that could possibly be acceptable as an offering for the cleansing of our consciences **from** dead works **to** a life of serving the living God? (cf. Heb. 9:13-14)

Peter speaks of the precious blood of a lamb not only “without blemish,” but also “without spot.” “Without blemish” is a phrase that most often refers to a **physical** condition. “Without spot,” however, is a phrase with **only a moral and spiritual** meaning.⁸ We know that an animal such as a lamb could never be described as morally and spiritually without spot. So for the last time this morning, we see Peter once more taking Old Testament Scriptures and reading them and interpreting them and applying them in the **full light** of all the New Covenant realities that have come to us now in Christ. Brothers and sisters, this “precious blood” is not just the blood of a **lamb without blemish**, but rather blood **like** that of a lamb **without blemish and without spot, THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.**⁹

Conclusion

Be holy in all **your conduct** and **conduct yourselves** with fear. Why? Because if you have truly called upon God, then you **know** that you have already been ransomed **from** not only the guilt and condemnation of sin, but even the futile **conduct** and **way of living** that characterizes all the culture around you. As we look back, then, to **this** reality of the ransom and the redemption we’ve **already** experienced, our fear and trembling is mixed in full measure with the joy and confidence that as we do fear and tremble, we will—and we must—persevere in holy conduct and good works until the end.

Be holy in all **your conduct** and **conduct yourselves** with fear. Why? Because the **price** of our ransom, and the **cost** of our redemption was precious blood, like that of a lamb without blemish and without spot, the blood of Christ.

“God has claimed us as his own, claimed us at a cost that sears our minds with the flame of his love. Peter appeals to the two most profound emotions our hearts can know. One is love, love that sees the price God paid to redeem us. The other is fear, the fear of despising God’s love. What judgment[—what condemnation—]would we merit if we

used in Peter and also throughout Leviticus, Numbers, and Ezekiel is *not* the same word that we see used in Exodus chapter 12 – though, of course, the semantics are essentially the same in this case.

⁸ Eph. 5:27; 1 Tim. 6:14; James 1:27; 3:6; 2 Pet. 2:13; 3:14; Jude 12

⁹ In the Greek text of this verse, “Christ” is the very *last* word.

were to trample upon the blood of Christ, and treat God's precious ransom with contempt?" (Clowney; cf. Heb. 10:29)

"Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ!"

"As he who called you is holy, you also **be holy** in all your conduct!"

"Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile!"