

1 Peter 1:17-21

Be a Stranger

1. Remember that you *are* one

2. Live like one--in reverent fear

May 4, 2014

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God. (NIV84)

Think back to the last time you stayed in a motel. After you got into the room, what did you do? Rearrange all the furniture just the way you wanted it? Try out the mattress, decide that it wasn't quite perfect, and go out and buy another one? Get out the hammer and nails and start putting up family pictures and framed paintings? Wander into the lobby and start trying to form close relationships with the employees at the front desk? Call the post office and have them change your mailing address? Have new carpeting installed?

Of course not. You weren't staying here long. The next night you would be staying somewhere else, the night after that you would be staying somewhere else, and eventually you would be back home. But **this** was not your home. That's why, the last time we were in a hotel, many of us probably didn't even bother to fully unpack our suitcase!

Peter indicates that you and I would be just as foolish to treat our lives on earth that way--as though we were planning on staying for a long time.

1. Remember that you *are* one

He writes, "*Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here.*"

The word Peter uses here for "strangers" really has the meaning of "one staying in temporary lodging." And you and I are certainly staying in temporary lodging, aren't we? When Peter says that God is going to "*judge each man's work*", we are reminded that there will come a time of reckoning on this earth, a time when people will end up residing someplace else--either in Heaven or in Hell.

And we'll end up residing there forever. 70 or 80 years, compared to millions upon millions of years upon eternity of years--it should put a whole new perspective on "the rat race", doesn't it?

And yet sometimes we're running that race as hard as anyone, aren't we? We work long, frantic hours as though eventually **we** will reach a different finish line, as though our finish line isn't the same as everyone else's--death.

And we live as though we are going to be setting up shop here for quite some time. Our car breaks down, and we get very frustrated as we consider how much the repairs will cost us. How foolish! As though that car were going to be our transportation for all eternity--rather than just a "rental" to get us around during the time we're visiting this earth! As though that money was going to serve us well on Judgment Day--rather than be destroyed along with the rest of this world!

We live as though we are not in a hotel, but in a permanent dwelling. We insist that everything in our lives be just so, and we are greatly disappointed when the mattress isn't just as we want--as though we weren't going to be moving out a short time from now! We are most upset when our health isn't what we would like--even though elsewhere Paul referred to our body as nothing more than a "tent" (2 Corinthians 5:1)—a temporary home which we will leave behind shortly.

We get out the hammer and nails, frame a career, and nail it to the wall--as though it wasn't going to be taken down in a few short hours when we move on from this life! We wander out into this world and try to make close friends with it and its way of thinking--as though we intend to stay, as though this were the best home we could hope for!

There's a story of a man who visited the home of a Christian. He looked around at the sparse furnishings--a bed, a desk, and an oil lamp. Shocked, he asked the man, "Where is your television set, where is your microwave, where are your creature comforts, where are your luxuries?" The Christian looked at the other man's luggage, consisting of just one suitcase, and said, "Where are yours?" The man said, "But I don't live here. I'm just passing through." "So am I," replied the Christian.

Which of those two men were you more like this past week? How much of your time, how much of your energy, and especially how much of your focus and your emotion did you put into installing carpeting in the hotel room of your life?

The next time you find yourself devoting a great portion of your time and your soul to something, ask yourself, "Am I remembering that I am a stranger?"

2. Live like one--in reverent fear

If we are failing to remember that we are strangers, the chances are real good that we are also failing to remember that God will judge us.

If we fail to live our lives as strangers, we are failing to keep God in mind. We are failing to remember that not only are our lives short, but they will end with us facing God--a God who has said that he will judge *"each man's work impartially."*

The fact that God judges "each man's work" reminds us that there will be no one to hide behind on Judgment Day. God will not care if we were members of a fine Christian family. They won't be there when we are judged. No, it will be just us--all by ourselves--standing before God.

And the fact that he judges "impartially" reminds us that God cannot be fooled. You may be able to fool everyone else. You may be able to fool all of the people some of the time, and you may be able to fool some of the people all of the time. You may **even** be able to fool Mom.

You can fool all of those people because you can keep them from seeing the whole picture. But God's not like that. Both God and the people of the world see how we act when others are around, but only God sees how we treat our spouse after a long day. Only God hears the words we shout at those other people in traffic, only God knows the names that we call our boss in our head while he's piling more work on us. God sees all, and therefore he has all the facts necessary to make an accurate decision.

But sometimes people who judge do see all the facts, yet can't bring themselves to judge impartially. Every now and then you hear about a celebrity defendant who is allowed to go free, even in the face of clear evidence of their guilt, because a judge or a jury is so starstruck by the defendant's ability to hit a baseball or light up a movie screen.

God's not like that. He's not particularly impressed by the fact that our friends say that we're the kind of person who would give you the shirt off our back. He doesn't fall at our feet because we've managed to be faithful throughout our entire marriage. He doesn't judge merely based on whether or not you **appear** to be talking the Christian talk, and he doesn't even judge based on whether or not you **appear** to be walking the Christian walk. He judges based on whether we **are** doing these things, and--more than that--he judges based on **why** we do these things. That is, God judges far deeper than any human judge, because God judges our motives. God said as much to Samuel when he said, "*Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.*" (1 Samuel 16:7)

Does that make you a little afraid? It should. It ought to make everyone in the world afraid to realize that God judges impartially, to know that God punishes sin. It ought to make people think seriously about what is really important. It ought to make people stop and consider why they have not been living as strangers in the world, why they have been so concerned about cars that rust, money that loses its value, and careers that end--and why they have been so unconcerned about a God who makes judgments about eternal life and death.

And perhaps it might make us especially afraid. After all, God has great experience in judging shallow, superficially righteous lives--the sort of lives that all of us have lived on many occasions. But Peter comforts us by saying, "*For you know that is was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*"

To "redeem" means to "buy back." And what a price it took to buy us back! Gold, silver, those things that seem to be so precious, but in the end only provide us with what we need to live for our short visit here on earth--buying back our souls took far more than that.

It took a life. It took "*the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*" When we get right down to it, we know that gold and silver aren't worth that much, don't we? That's why we are uncomfortable with putting a price on the worth of a human life--because we know that a human life--and the soul that is with it--are far more valuable than money. And yet Christ was willing to put a price on human life, on your life. He was willing to offer his blood as a payment to God for our lives, for everyone's life. How precious that blood of Christ is!

And how perfect it also is. Since Jesus truly was "*a lamb without blemish or defect*", we can be assured that he has perfectly taken away our sins.

So we have nothing to be afraid of in this life, right? We don't fear the loss of health, wealth, or anything else that is used to furnish this temporary dwelling place. We know that Judgment Day is what really matters. And we know that we do not need to fear that either, because our Father will judge us impartially by looking at Jesus' perfect sacrifice. As Paul said, "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*" (Romans 8:31)

Why then does Peter speak of Christians living in fear? Are we to be cowering, quaking, terrified? But keep in mind here that Peter doesn't say, "Live your lives as strangers here in fear." If he were writing to unbelievers, he could certainly have written that.

But Peter is writing to believers, and therefore he tells us to live our lives as strangers here in "*reverent fear.*" This sort of reminds you of the explanation to the First Commandment, which tells us that we are to "fear, love, and trust God above all things." Fearing God and loving God seem to be completely incompatible.

And yet we've probably experienced that sort of fear in our lives. We've probably had something about which we were afraid to do anything which might harm it. We were that way because we loved it so much, and we loved it so much because of the high price we paid for it.

That is the sort of attitude that we have towards our Father in heaven and towards his Son Jesus. We are not to be afraid of **him**, but we **are** to be afraid of doing anything which is against his will. Because our lives have been bought with such a tremendous price, we're afraid of doing anything which would stain them with sin, anything which might indicate that we think of that blood as something less than precious. Why are we "afraid" of this, why do we so carefully avoid this? Because we love him so much.

But let's not treat life as a minefield of potential screwups. Let's treat it instead as a goldmine of potential acts of service and praise to God. Let us not shrink back from action, but instead spring into action, spring into living a life of praise to God--not half-hearted praise, not sporadic praise, but an all-out, 100% of me, complete love, praise of God.

Because that's what living as strangers is all about. It looks strange--serving God instead of serving ourselves. But we realize that we're only strangers here.

Our gold, our silver, our brilliantly painted careers, all those things will have to be left behind when we strangers check out of this hotel room that we call earth and stand before God who judges impartially. Then only one thing will matter--that we are covered in the precious blood of Christ. Until that day, let us continue to live as strangers, serving and praising our Savior, remembering that heaven is our home. Amen.