

## ***The Demands of Our Heavenly Father***

1 Peter 1:13-21

This morning we are going to consider a passage which makes clear that our heavenly Father makes demands on His children. He expects us to be obedient, He expects us to be holy, and He expects us to have an appropriate fear of Him. Another way to say it is that God expects us to love Him with all our heart, soul, and might; and He expects us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

How do you hear those demands? Do they excite you or do they fill you with dread? Are you motivated by the idea of being an obedient son/daughter of God or are you exasperated? As we discussed last week, how you hear those demands depends in part on how you related to your earthly father.

Last week I mentioned that my dad never really made any demands on me; I can't remember a time when I did something or didn't do something because I thought that's what my wanted me to do. He later told me that he believed that by the age of 15 you should make your own decisions. Consequently, when I came to Christ the idea of obeying my heavenly Father was an empty concept.

I've talked with people whose dads were harsh and exacting; consequently, they hear their dad's voice behind every command in Scripture. They perceive God to be a bully who is "controlling" and manipulative.

Thankfully, I've talked with other people - even this last week - whose earthly dads were kind and generous. In a very healthy way they were very motivated to please and obey their dads. Consequently, they welcome the demands of their heavenly Father. This attitude is advocated in the New Testament: "Because my heavenly Father has loved me in such a comprehensive and extravagant way in Christ, I will love Him in return by obeying Him and imitating Him. I trust that God knows what is best for me."

Today we will consider 1 Peter 1:13-21. I've stated the main points as affirmations. These are things we can say if we believe that He really is as good and wise as Scripture claims.

***We set our hope completely on the grace we will receive at the return of Jesus.*** (1 Peter 1:13) This is the mindset of someone who has made peace with the reality that this world is not our home.

13 Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The NT authors sometimes used the expression "the revelation of Jesus Christ" to describe His return. The implication is that now He is **hidden**; consequently, if you want to ignore Him and pretend like He isn't Lord, you can do so. But when He is **revealed**, nobody will be able to deny Him. Peter tells us that while He is hidden, we should fix our hope completely on the grace we'll receive when He is revealed. We don't pin our

hopes on what we can experience and achieve in this life; we pin our hopes on what will be given to us (i.e., the grace we'll receive) when Jesus returns.

Last week's passage mentioned several aspects of the grace that will be brought to believers at the revelation of Jesus: our inheritance that is being kept in heaven; praise, glory, and honor (the reward of our faith). Peter actually says that we will receive our full salvation at the return of Christ. If we're not careful, these future realities will seem remote and irrelevant for our everyday living.

That's why Peter mentions "preparing your minds for action and being sober-minded." The pull of this world is so strong that if we simply allow our minds to go where they want, we will live as if this life is all there is. Peter is encouraging us to maintain the mindset that says, "I am here on earth for a few short years. My citizenship is in heaven, therefore I seek to please my Father in heaven. When Christ is revealed, I will receive more grace than I can fathom. So I live **this** day in light of **that** day."

A presupposition of this verse is that what we do in this life matters. As we faithfully represent God and trust Him, His kingdom comes in our homes, our places of work, our neighborhoods; we have a foretaste of the next life. This is what brings glory to God and what draws people to Christ. Our behavior and our experience of God is often our initial witness for Christ (see 1 Peter 3:15!). Daily and weekly disciplines are crucial in order to prepare our minds for action and in order to remain sober minded. In this way *we set our hope completely on the grace we will receive at the return of Jesus.*

***We live as obedient children, being holy as our Father is holy. (1 Peter 1:14-16)***

Notice in these verses what God expects of us.

14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

God expects us to be "obedient children," actually doing what He wants us to do. God expects us to quit indulging the passions of the flesh like we did before we entered into His household. As a matter of fact, just as God told the nation of Israel, "You shall be holy, for I am holy," God also expects us to be holy "in all [our] conduct."

Do these demands sound good and reasonable or do they sound restrictive and controlling to you? As I mentioned earlier, how you hear these demands depends on lots of things in your life and experience. But consider these demands through the grid of the parable of the prodigal son. When Jesus wanted to explain the type of Father God is and how His children should relate to Him, He told this story (Luke 15).

A man had two sons. The younger son told his dad that he wanted his share of the estate, which was basically saying to his father, "I wish you were dead." Shockingly, the dad divided his wealth between his boys; the younger son took his wealth to a "distant country" and "squandered his estate with loose living." He blew his entire inheritance.

He became so desperate that he got a job feeding swine (which was about as low as a Jewish kid could get). He even longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating. Eventually he came to his senses and realized, "Even the servants in my father's house have enough to eat, and I'm starving." He rehearsed this speech in which he would ask his father to take him back as a servant (not a son).

Jesus said that "while he was a long way off his father saw him" (he must have been looking down the road hoping that his son would come home), felt compassion for him, ran and hugged and kissed him. The boy started giving the speech about being his servant and not his son, but the father ignored his offer and commanded the servants to bring out a robe and a ring and sandals, to kill the fattened calf and have a feast.

Let's ask the question again. Is it reasonable for that father to tell his son, "Now that you're living in my household, I never want you running off to a distant land. . . I never want you to return to 'the passions of your former ignorance'. . ." Of course it is! When the boy "came to his senses," he realized that he was ignorant to run away from home; life in his father's house provided abundance and security.

It isn't a punishment when God commands, "be obedient children," and "don't indulge your former passions," and "be holy as I am holy." God is saying, "My son/daughter, these commands are for your protection and security and wholeness. Remember that your former way of life was a life of hardship and danger."

If you are like the younger son (if you have a "past"), there will be times when you're tempted to return to the life you had when you were running from God. Your flesh might crave some of the things you did and experienced before coming to Christ. You might even find yourself thinking, "What's the big deal? I know that my sins are paid for and that my heavenly Father will always receive me back." Today's passage challenges you very directly: stay sober minded and don't run off again; stay home and enjoy the security and protection and abundance of your Father's house.

By the way, there was also an **older brother** in Jesus' parable. He was not happy when his younger brother came home and got a party. He may have even been a little jealous of his baby brother, thinking, "He got the best of both worlds! He got to sow his wild oats **and** he gets all the benefits of coming home!" If you put your faith in Christ early in life and, in a sense, "stayed home" you might relate more to the older brother than the younger. Your heavenly Father says to you, "Don't be jealous of prodigals. Realize that what you've always had in my household is still yours. Trust me, it's infinitely better than anything else."

As believers we affirm: *We live as obedient children, being holy as our Father is holy.* We also affirm this (verses 17-21):

***We live with "the fear of the Lord" throughout this life, knowing that our Father is also the judge.*** (1 Peter 1:17-21) In verse 17 Peter gives yet another direct command.

17 And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile,

Peter is reminding us that our heavenly Father is also the judge of all people, including us as believers. We know that our ultimate destiny won't be based on our deeds. Paul made that clear in Ephesians 2:8-9 when he wrote that we are saved by grace, not as a result of works. But the New Testament consistently says that God does judge our works, the actual things we do.

Among other things, this means that God doesn't evaluate us according to our intentions, our stated beliefs, our emotions, or our knowledge. He evaluates us on what we actually **do** ("according to each one's deeds"). In the Bible a person's deeds are an accurate reflection of his/her faith. James wrote that faith without works isn't a living faith.

The Bible has "a bias for action" when it comes to good works. Paul even told Titus that we should be "zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14). Sometimes we can overanalyze our motives and our plan of action and never get around to doing what God wants us to do. This doesn't mean that we mindlessly get busy doing good things; many Scriptures make clear that God cares about our motives (e.g., Matthew 6 tells us not to do good works to be seen by others). But we should have a bias for action, for simply and reflexively doing the things that please God.

Peter points out that our Father judges impartially; He doesn't play favorites. This means that we cannot presume upon God and think, "It's okay that I don't actually obey Him; He knows my heart." But it also means that we shouldn't insult God by assuming that our good deeds mean nothing to Him. No, our Father judges impartially according to each one's deeds.

Since this is the case, Peter tells us, ". . .conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile. . ." During our short time on earth we should live with "the fear of the Lord." It's challenging to define exactly what it means to live with "fear the Lord," but I think Dallas Willard captures the core concept as well as anybody. In his book *Renovation of the Heart* (p. 50-51) he quotes Proverbs 9:10 which says that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

". . .One begins to get smart when he or she fears being crosswise of God: fear of not doing what he wants and not being as he requires.

Fear is the anticipation of harm. The intelligent person recognizes that his or her well-being lies in being in harmony with God and what God is doing in the "kingdom." God is not mean, but he is dangerous. It is the same with other great forces he has placed in reality. Electricity and nuclear power, for example, are not mean, but they are dangerous. One who does not, in a certain sense, "worry" about God, simply isn't smart. . ."

Those of us who are believers don't have to fear condemnation for our sin; Jesus has paid for our sin. Our fear of the Lord is more wrapped up in relational fallout from not trusting God and His word. As Willard says, we simply aren't smart (on many different levels) if we don't care what our heavenly Father thinks about us and our behavior.

Verses 18-21 remind us why living with "the fear of the Lord" throughout this life is reasonable and right: the price of our redemption.

18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

God has redeemed us at the highest possible personal cost, the precious blood of His one and only Son. Therefore, it's only right and smart that we care what He thinks about us and about our behavior. Therefore, *we live with "the fear of the Lord" throughout this life, knowing that our Father is also the judge.*

**Application.** By way of application, I want to give you a simple grid for applying this passage to your life.

*First*, identify an area of obedience. In other words, what does God specifically want you to do? For example, today's passage mentions a couple of times that God expects us to **avoid the passions of our former way of life**. If you were like the younger brother, identify specific things you need to avoid doing, whether sexual sins, dishonesty, deceit, lying, drunkenness, etc.

*Second*, discern why our Father's demands are good and reasonable. In other words, seek to understand your Father's heart. Try to see his commands through the eyes of the Father in the parable of the prodigal son. See Him as the father who knows more than you do and who wants you to avoid the heartache and the destruction of a sinful lifestyle. For example, if you've identified specific sins you need to avoid, you might read Proverbs 5, 6, and 7 which are basically a father warning his son about the dangers sin; these chapter help us understand why it is reasonable and good to avoid the passions of the flesh.

*Third*, by God's grace take specific steps of obedience. Actually come up with a plan and carry it out. I'm not suggesting that this will be simple or easy. But I am suggesting that we can take steps of obedience. Again, the Scriptures have a bias for action when it comes to putting aside our former way of life and adopting new ways of thinking, speaking, and acting. You will probably need the help of brothers/sisters in Christ that you trust to change your behavior in some way.

This is one way we can "taste and see that the Lord is good" as our heavenly Father. As we understand and trust God's heart, obedience makes more sense than disobedience.

Most of my childhood memories of being with my dad happened in the shop or the driveway. One of those memories involved my dad working on our old Volkswagen beetle when I was about twelve years old. Dad had accidentally knocked over an entire set of sockets which fell down into a small cavity/space beside the engine. His hands were too big to reach down into the opening and pull them out, so I volunteered to try. One by one I pulled out those sockets; I was able to do something that my dad couldn't do! But even more significantly, it cost me something to retrieve those sockets. You see, the space was very tight and there was the tip of a sheet metal screw that scratched me every time I pulled out my hand. By the time I was finished I looked like I had been in a catfight. But my dad was so thankful to me that he gave me a dollar.

As strange as it may sound, I don't think I ever felt closer to my dad growing up than I did that day. I had done something that I knew pleased him, something that was relatively costly. He rewarded me and I knew I was appreciated. If you've never experienced something like this, you might think, "Your dad paid you off; that spoils the whole experience." All I can tell you is that it didn't work that way. I felt loved and would have done anything to please him.

That's the dynamic described in today's passage. During this life we live as obedient children, knowing that God notices when we do things that please Him. God asks us to do costly things, things that will involve suffering. Knowing that one day God will reward our obedience in ways that are fully appropriate and satisfying makes us love and obey Him even more.