

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expositional Study of **The Gospel According to Luke** **Chapter 12- Luke 12:1-5** 229- Who to Fear and What to Fear

December 29, 2013

Luke 12:1-5

1 Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another, He began saying to His disciples first *of all*, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

2 But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.

3 Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops.

4 "I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do.

5 But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!

To the Glory of God

I passed a car on the Highway the other day and on the back bumper was this sticker:

"No Fear!"

... and predictably, this car was being driven by a young man who no doubt put that sticker on his back bumper to illustrate the confidence that he has in his own ability to overcome the odds and to illustrate his youthful strength and machismo and his general approach to life.

But as I pondered that sticker I began to weep for that young man who no doubt is trying to simply impress people with how tough and strong he is but he doesn't realize that he is missing one of the most important aspects of this life that could add immeasurable joy and satisfaction to him and that is- the proper and the correct understanding of and use of holy and godly fear.

So let me begin this sermon with some seemingly contradictory passages. The first is found in **Deuteronomy 4:10-24** that says:

10 “*Remember* the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, ‘Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.’

11 “You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the *very* heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud and thick gloom.

12 “Then the LORD spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form—only a voice.

13 “So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, *that is*, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.

14 “The LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might perform them in the land where you are going over to possess it.

15 “So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire,

16 so that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female,

17 the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky,

18 the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the earth.

19 “And *beware* not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.

20 “But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as today.

21 “Now the LORD was angry with me on your account, and swore that I would not cross the Jordan, and that I would not enter the good land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.

22 “For I will die in this land, I shall not cross the Jordan, but you shall cross and take possession of this good land.

23 “So watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything *against* which the LORD your God has commanded you.

24 “For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

... so based on that- we are told *to* fear God. The next verse is found in **1John 4:18** that says:

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

... and based on that we see that perfect love casts out fear and so we are told *not* to fear. The next one is found in **Ephesians 5:19-21**:

19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;

20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;

21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

... and so we see that we are told that the way we are to be subjected to one another is with something called, “**the fear of Christ**”. And then the next one is found in **Jeremiah 46:27&28**

27 “But as for you, O Jacob My servant, do not fear, Nor be dismayed, O Israel! For, see, I am going to save you from afar, And your descendants from the land of their captivity; And Jacob will return and be undisturbed And secure, with no one making *him* tremble.

28 “O Jacob My servant, do not fear,” declares the LORD, “For I am with you. For I will make a full end of all the nations Where I have driven you, Yet I

will not make a full end of you; But I will correct you properly And by no means leave you unpunished.”

Now the obvious answer is that there are different *kinds* of “fear” and so all “fear” is not the same. One fear is a reverential respect for God while the other “fear” is an emotional terror of things unknown or things that we do not like or things that we do not want.

So one “fear” is good and the other “fear” is not good; one is productive and the other is not productive; one honors and glorifies God while the other displays a fundamental lack of trust and faith in God. And that is why the psalmist said things like:

Psalms 34:11

Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

...and

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Psalms 111:10

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do *His commandments*; His praise endures forever.

... and why the wisest man in all the world said:

Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

and

Proverbs 8:13

“The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate.

and

Proverbs 10:27

The fear of the LORD prolongs life, But the years of the wicked will be shortened.

and

Proverbs 15:16

Better is a little with the fear of the LORD Than great treasure and turmoil with it.

And Dr. Luke records the Lord Jesus saying the same thing this way:

Luke 12:4&5

4 "I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do.

5 But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!

So from what our Lord says here- we see several things:

- ✓ Very bad and evil people have been given the power to kill your body
- ✓ God has the Power to kill your body
- ✓ Very bad and evil people can't do anything else to you after they kill you
- ✓ God can do things that are either unbelievably frightening or gloriously wonderful to you after He kills you

So from this- we see that one of the reasons why we are not to fear Man is because Man is limited in what he can do to us. Some evil men have been given the permission and the ability by God to persecute genuine believers and they may take away our possessions and limit our behavior and confiscate our bank accounts and imprison us and torture us and even kill us. Evil men have also been given Divine Permission to also praise us and give us a ton of money and to promote us and to think and speak well of us and elevate us and glorify us. But whichever way it goes with people- whether we receive "Good" at their hand or "Evil"- people cannot touch us after we are dead. And so their ability to inflict either harm or good to us stops at the moment of our death.

However Dr. Luke quotes Jesus saying here that God not only has the Right and the Ability to end our lives at the moment and in the manner of His Sovereign choosing- but God goes further than that and God also has the Right and the Ability- which is just another way of saying that God has the "Power"- to either grant to us the riches of His unsearchable Mercy in Paradise where we will spend Eternity in the fullness of Joy or to give us the just Reward of His Righteous Judgment against our impenitent heart in Eternal Damnation where we will spend all of Eternity in anguish and torment *after* we are dead.

And so what Jesus is telling us here is that because God's Power and Authority and Reach goes past the grave all the way into Eternity and Man's does not- that God alone is infinitely more deserving of our respect and our admiration and our love and our devotion and our obedience and our worship and our fear than Man is.

However- if you think from this that you are therefore commanded to fear God and not to fear Man or to respect God and *not* respect Man- your still wrong because we are told over and over in the superior Revelation of the New Covenant that we are to "**honor the King**" (**1Peter 2:17**) and hold in respect and admiration those who have authority and rule over our lives and we are to submit to their authority and we are to serve and obey them- both inside the Church with godly leaders and outside the Church with parents and employers and teachers and with the civil authorities.

Now it is often said by many in the modern Church that the fear of God has no place in the Christian's life precisely because of what the Apostle John said in **1John 4:18**

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

But, as those of you who have been reading the works of the Puritans will understand- these men- who were equally under the New Covenant of our Lord Jesus Christ as those in the modern Church- spoke often about the fear of God.

And one of the reasons that explains why we hear so little about the fear of God today while it was common to hear of it back then is because we are living in the time of the great falling away and the time

that the Apostle Paul prophesied about in **2Timothy 4:3&4** is upon us where he said:

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires,

4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

... and so because we are living in that time- we are seeing those things.

But even though that is true- make no mistake about this dear friends- one of the main reason why you who attend this Church are conversant with the fear of God and so many in our day are not- is not accidental- it is the logical result of the leadership of this Church consistently and purposefully *emphasizing* this element of New Testament Christianity and of actually employing it into their daily lives to model it in front of you and those other leaders of those other church leaders purposefully *not* emphasizing it and of them *not* employing it into their daily lives so that many today honestly do not understand the fear of God precisely because they have never seen it.

And that has to do with the differences in the philosophy of Ministry- where one group is striving to be Biblical so that God is pleased while the other group is striving to appeal to the people-and the two philosophies are not the same. So while it is absolutely true that

1John 4:18b

... perfect love casts out fear...

... it is also true that we are:

2Corinthians 7:1b

... perfecting holiness in the fear of God

Now we should never get the notion that the various writers of the New Testament are at odds with one another over this issue- with some of them *in favor of* fear (like Paul and the writer of **Hebrews**) and some *against* fear (John). And the reason we know this is true is because while **Romans 11:20** *admonishes* fear, **Romans 8:15** says,

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba Father!”

... even though both of those statements were written by Paul.

And even though **Hebrews 3:12** encourages fear in an unbelieving heart **Hebrews 4:16** says,

Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

.. even though both of those statements were written by the same man as well. So the problem is not so much a disagreement between the various writers of the New Testament as it is the problem of how the same writer can warn us on the one hand to, “*Fear!*” and on the other hand offer us great hope by saying, “*Have no fear and be confident!*”

And so I suggest to you that the solution of this paradox can be found in us learning to have a *sober* fear of God which will then motivate us to trust God’s Mercy that has been shown to us in, by, and through the Lord Jesus Christ. And this “trembling trust” will then gradually- day- by day- *remove* the fear that drove us to that confidence as we see more clearly what our precious Lord has done for us.

George MacDonald was a Scottish Minister in the 19th Century who talked about this issue and he pointed out that absolutely nothing less than perfect love (both from God toward Man and Man toward God) should ever truly and finally cast out fear.

But MacDonald went on to say that because we are fallen- not because we fully understand God’s Grace- we are prone to want to be rid of fear at any cost and by any means- even if our love is not perfect or even at work at all. Yet the Apostle John says there is and should be only one means—perfect love should cast out fear.

Now many of us think that we will be better Christians when we stop fearing- but that may be a false notion. However it *is* true that we will be better Christians when we love God for His perfect Love and when we love Him perfectly. So therefore it is true to say that the perfecting of love will absolutely drive out fear but the effort to drive out fear does not necessarily mean that love has been perfected.

We must acknowledge that it is possible for us to simply desire to be rid of fear in the same way we want to be rid of a bad conscience and

therefore we may use all the same deceptive means to shed the discomfort of our fear including the rejection of our obligation to obey the Commands in the Bible that teach us to fear God and to love Him with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength.

In other words- it is possible that the attempt at removing fear from our lives is not an honest attempt at doing so through the perfecting of godly love but is simply another means by which we excuse ourselves from actually following and serving Jesus Christ in the pursuit of Biblical Holiness. So MacDonald went on to say:

“Go ahead and persuade men that fear is a vile thing- that it is an insult to God- and that He will none of it- and do so while they are yet in love with their own will and slaves to every movement of passionate fleshly impulse and what will the consequence be? That they will insult God as a discarded idol; as nothing but a superstition and a thing to be cast out and spit upon. And once that reach that place- how much will they learn of Him or even love Him?”¹

.. MacDonald continued:

“We must understand my friends that Fear is an imperfect bond to God. But it is a bond which should be replaced only by an infinitely closer bond- the bond of perfected love. And nothing short of that should ever rid us of fear.”²

So is it true then that fear should play a role in our lives up to a certain point and then never play that role again in the Christian life? Yes. But the point at which fear will no longer have a place in the Christian’s life is the point at which love is perfected.

Yet none of us is yet perfected in love. None of us is without moments in which our delight in God fades and the “things which are seen” become deceptively attractive and God and love for God seems distant and vague.

And it is in *those* moments of fleshly weakness where we are in serious need of a warning from Paul like this from **Romans 11:18-21** that says:

¹ CS Lewis; *An Assessment of George MacDonald*; Page 67

² Ibid; pages 67&68

18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that* it is not you who supports the root, but the root *supports* you.

19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."

20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear;

21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.

... or from the writer of **Hebrews 3:12-14** that says:

12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.

13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,

...or from Jesus Himself who said in **Luke 12:5**:

But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!

In these moments of weakness and of walking at a great distance away from God- we are not helped if we are completely free from this holy and reverential fear precisely because in that condition- we are not controlled by love for God- which is the same thing as saying that we are not living or walking by faith.

So we must understand that the fear that we are to experience as genuine Christians is itself a Work of God's Grace. It is a fear which casts us back into love for God and back into trust in His Mercy, and thus destroys itself and makes itself obsolete. So Fear is the proper servant of Love for imperfect saints.

Now we don't seem to grasp this concept as well as those who came before us. And the reason for that is all the real bad and shallow and self-centered teaching that we have all been exposed to during our walk with God in the last part of the 20th and the first part of the 21st Centuries. And to illustrate what I'm talking about listen to the second

line of one of the most beloved Hymns ever written, "Amazing Grace" that we sing all the time that shows us that fear is not merely a one-time experience but is the Will of God and the tool that brings us to perfect Love:

Twas Grace that taught my heart to fear,
And Grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that Grace appear,
The hour I first believed

Hidden down deep on page 102 of Jonathan Edwards' *Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections* Americas greatest theologian wrote what I am trying to say.

"So hath God contrived and constituted things in His Dispensations toward His Own people that when their love decays and the exercises of it fail or become weak, fear should arise; for then they need it to restrain them from sin and to excite them to care for the good of their souls and so to save them up to watchfulness and diligence in religion: but God hath so ordered that when Love rises and is in vigorous exercise, then fear should vanish and be driven away for then they need it not, having a higher and more excellent Principle in exercise to restrain them from sin and stir them up from their duty.

There are no other Principles which human nature is under the influence of that will ever make men conscientious but one of these two, fear or love: and therefore if one of these should not prevail as the other decayed, God's people when fallen into dead and carnal frames, when love is asleep would be lamentably exposed indeed. And therefore God has wisely ordained, that these two opposite Principles of love and fear should rise and fall like the two opposite scales of a balance; when one rises the other sinks...

Fear is cast out by the Spirit of God, no other way than by the prevailing of Love: nor is it ever maintained by His Spirit but when Love is asleep- fear must rule."

So just how are we to put this all together in our walk with God? I think that we should employ the method of Sola Scriptura and allow Scripture to interpret itself and so I think that the Apostle Peter could be of great help here so please turn with me to read what this man

wrote as the Spirit of God moved upon him to pen down these infallible Words in **1Peter 1:13-21**:

13 Therefore, prepare 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.

14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance,

15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior;

16 because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

17 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*;

18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers,

19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ.

20 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these 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.

Now in this Passage there are 20 verbs. 16 are indicative and one is infinitive. And that means there are three imperative verbs in this Passage. In other words- there are three main Commands for us here and everything else in this Passage is an explanation of and argument for those three Commands. The first Command is in verse 13b:

... fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

And the literal Greek here is that we are to "hope fully." So this is a Divine Command that we are to have full and strong hope so that when Jesus comes again we will experience Grace and this Grace will be all-satisfying.

In other words, Peter wants us to feel profoundly confident in the final outcome of our lives at the Revelation of Christ or at His Second

Appearing- because that will mean more Grace for us than we can even imagine and it will mean the fulfillment of deepest longings. And that's why we are to hope *fully*- not mildly; not just going through the motions- but fully. The return of Jesus Christ to his earth will bring great and eternally satisfying Grace to us. So that is something to look forward to and it is something to hope for and something that is worth struggling to obtain and something worth suffering for.

The second imperative is at the end of verse 15. But let's read 14 and 15 to see the flow:

14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours in your ignorance,*

15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior;

Now the phrase, “**do not be conformed**” is a participle: “not being conformed” to the former lusts which were ours in our ignorance- and then comes the Command- but as He Who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.”

The verb here is the imperative of “be” or “become.” And specifically the focus is on the outcome of this “being” that is found in our doing: “**Be holy... in all your behavior**”- which is our way of life. In other words- we are told to live a holy life before God now that we are saved. So in verse 13 we have “hope fully” and in verse 15 we have “be holy.” The third imperative is found in verse 17:

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*;

So in verse 15 the Command was, “**in all your behavior- be holy.**” And in verse 17 the Command is “**in all your conduct- fear.**” And the fear here in verse 17 is connected most closely with God's Judgment. So since it is true that our Father “**impartially judges according to each one's work**”- therefore we are to “**conduct yourselves in fear.**” So now we have three Divine Commands:

1. Live in hope
2. Live in holiness

3. Live in fear

God's Holiness and the pursuit of that holiness here on earth as believers always brings unexpected implications into our lives. Just about the time that we think we have the Gospel figured out we suddenly meet some implication of God's Holiness that just baffles us. It seems odd and strange and it doesn't make sense on the surface like:

We are to live in holiness, and the way to do that is: live in hope and live in fear.

But let's make sure that the holiness we are being called to is God's Holiness- because God's Holiness makes these strange and seemingly opposite aspects of hope and fear come together. Look again at verses 15&16,

15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior;

16 because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

So Peter is telling us here that the Holiness of God is both the Pattern for and the Ground of our holiness. Notice that the word "for" or "because" in verse 16 is from **Leviticus 11:44** that says,

You shall be holy, for I am holy.

So we are to be holy *because* God is Holy. So God's Holiness is the Ground or the Basis for our holiness. And then notice the word "like" at the beginning of verse 15, "**Like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves...** So God's Own intrinsic Personal Holiness is also the Pattern of our holiness. So it is both the Ground and the Pattern.

And that is why we are meeting such strange things in these verses. We are being called to be like God in His Holiness. And we have said that God's Holiness is His Uniqueness or His Otherness. God's Holiness is what makes God to be one of a kind. So it shouldn't be surprising that the implications of this are so surprising:

Live in hope and live in fear so that you become like God and live in Holiness.

And this is what we want to impart to our children! We want them to taste what it is to hope fully in the Grace that is coming to God's children when Christ returns. So we want them to obey verse 13b,

... fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

We want them to grow up unshakeable in their ultimate optimism for what God will make of this world. They are coming into a world that is flaunting its evil more openly than Americans have been accustomed to. What we see around us today is not new in many parts of the world. There have been many cultures all throughout history that were much more blatantly immoral than ours. But as Christianity and Biblical Morality continues to have less and less impact on the American culture- our children will have to deal with manifestations of human depravity that were more restrained in previous decades in this country. And therefore we want to raise them not as flimsy optimists whose hopes sink with every new outrage- but as ultimate, unshakable optimists- whose hope is full and strong, because of the Grace that is coming to them at the Return of Jesus Christ in addition to all the Grace that comes to them every day before that great Day comes.

And we want our children to taste the holy fear of God- Who is both their Father and their Judge. We want them to obey verse 17:

conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay *on earth*;

We don't want to raise emotionally fragile children who can only be told to hope because if they are told to fear they collapse with no emotional capacities for such a thing. We don't want to raise children who have no concept of holy fear living alongside of hoping fully. And we don't to raise children whose hope is the kind that vanishes when they fear God. We want to raise young people who are as strange as this text is strange; Children who are as odd in their emotional capacities as the Holiness of God demands.

And we want our young people to actually taste the Holiness of God implanted in their own souls as children born again by the Holy Spirit, who now bear the family traits from the Father of Holiness. Therefore we want them to obey verses 15&16,

15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior;

16 because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

We want strange and wonderful and hopeful and fearful and courageous and strong and joyful and wise young people- who are shaped by the glorious "otherness" or Holiness of God, so that their lives are a joyful exception to the unsaved people of this world.

And this is why we who are the teachers of children immerse ourselves in the Bible- the holy Word of the holy God. This is why we linger long over strange and wonderful things that we find in God's Word- in the prayer and expectation that God will free us from our former ignorance and give us mental categories we never knew before, and awaken emotional capacities that we never thought we could have. That is what Jesus was talking about in **Luke 12** and that is what Peter is talking about here. So let's do some of that now with three Commands:

Live in hope
Live in holiness
Live in holy fear

... and let's focus on the hope and the fear,- which feed into a life of holiness. Now first of all we must understand that this first chapter of **1Peter** is overwhelmingly a chapter of great hope. For example **1Peter 1:3** says:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Then **1Peter 1:4** says we have:

... an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven...

And **1Peter 1:5** says that we are:

... protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

And the result of all of these great and precious Promises is that we are made unshakably secure and hopeful- which is the "hoping fully" of verse 13. Now look at verses 8&9

8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,
9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

.. and then verses 18&19:

18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers,
19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ.

... in other words, the price of our Redemption cannot spoil or fade. And the point again is solid hope.

1Peter 1:20-23

20 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these 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.
22 Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart,
23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God.

So the very cause and the sustaining basis of our new birth is both living and lasting- so that we will hope fully! So it's clear that Peter wants his readers to live in unshakable hope. And so when he tells us in verse 13 that we should "hope fully by preparing your minds for action (gird up the loins of your mind) and by being sober- he is telling us how

to *maintain* that hope. Be awake and nimble on your mental feet to trace out every reason for hope that God gives. And do not buy into those hope-destroying untruths.

Then in verses 13-15 Peter shows how God works to make hope the fuel of holiness. And I see five steps in verses 13 through 15.

1. God calls us.

1Peter 1:15a

but like the Holy One who called you...

And this is the same thing as God's giving new birth back in verse 3. God's Sovereign Effectual Call *imposes* itself into our sinful and lost lives and *violently* and *forcefully interrupts* us and raises us up from the spiritual deadness and blindness. And the goal of God's Effectual Call is this new birth — so that we can be alive to love and trust in hope-giving Truth.

2. We are God's Children

1Peter 1:14a

As obedient children...

So the result of the Effectual Call of God or this new birth is that we receive a new nature in the likeness of our Father in Heaven. This is why verse 3 says we are born again to a living hope. Nothing is more hopeful than to be in God's family.

3. We Are Changed

1Peter 1:14b

... do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance,

The new birth overcomes the spiritual blindness and ignorance we once had and changes us to what is truly desirable. We see things radically differently now. We are not blind and ignorant and foolish anymore. We're not ignorant of God's infinite Worth any more. Now we

see the Holiness of God as the supreme Value in the universe and it causes a holy fear that leads to perfect love.

4. We Have New Thoughts and Desires

1 Peter 1:13

prepare 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.

We are now using our minds to know Truth. And that knowledge is mainly all the reasons for hope that have been laid out in chapter 1 of **1Peter**.

5. We Have a Holy Conduct

1Peter 1:15b

... be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior;

So true Biblical Holiness is born of

- ✓ God's Effectual Call — the new birth —,
- ✓ The entrance into God's family,
- ✓ The replacing of sinful ignorance with godly knowledge — the knowledge of all the grounds for hope Peter is laying out —,
- ✓ New hope-filled desires
- ✓ A growing experience of holiness in all of life.

So the girding up of the loins of the mind or the preparing the mind for action in verse 13 is meant to help us hope fully. And the way the mind does this is by overcoming the ignorance of verse 14, because that ignorance produced the desires of ignorance which produced unholy conduct.

So now the sober, active, born-again mind sees the Truth of Christ and the Beauty of Holiness, and that Truth and Beauty produce new desires in us and those new desires produce new holy conduct. So unshakable hope — confident desire — in the Truth and Beauty of Christ is the fuel for being holy as God is holy. So now we come to the \$64,000 question:

What is the role of fear in all this?

We've looked at two of the Commands:

Live in hope
Live in holiness

... and we've seen that living in hope is essential to living in holiness. So now what about living in holy fear? Just what was Jesus getting at in **Luke 12:5**? Look at **1Peter 1:17**:

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*;

Peter will not let us slip away from this paradox. He insists on calling the Judge our Father and calling our Father the Judge. And just when you find yourself slipping toward presumption that your Father is behind the bench- he reminds you that *this* Judge:

... impartially judges according to each one's work...

So there are not different standards- one low standard for the Judge's children and one high standard for the others. And just when you are starting to feel hopeless at that thought- Peter reminds you that this earthly life is only a short "**stay**" or an "**exile**".

So God really is your Father, and Heaven really is your home. And Grace really is coming to you at the return of Jesus Christ. So Peter doggedly holds onto both ends of this mystery:

- ✓ Father and Judge
- ✓ Impartial Judgment and Heaven-Bound Exiles.

In fact he makes this fear all the more strange by the following verses, 18–21. These verses are clearly an argument for the command to conduct ourselves in fear in verse 17. Notice the connection between the Command in verse 17 and the statement in verses 18&19:

1Peter 1:17b-19

17 ... conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay *on earth*;

18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers,

19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood of Christ*.

In other words, Peter is telling us to fear God because you were redeemed with something that is infinitely valuable and that will not perish. In other words, something you can base your whole future on. In other words, conduct yourselves in fear because Christ paid infinitely to free you from perishing. This is very strange. And the argument goes on in the same way in verses 20&21,

20 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these 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.

So the fear of verse 17 is grounded first in the fact that God judges impartially according to our work, and then it's grounded in the fact that this Judge is our Father. And then it's grounded in the fact that Christ ransomed us with precious and lasting Blood, and then it's grounded in the fact that God raised Christ from the dead so that our hope would be in God.

All of which means that there is a real kind of holy fear that does not destroy strong and confident hope- but it walks *beside* that hope and *deepens* that hope and *strengthens* it, and it leads to a strange and wonderful and holy life.

And based on what we saw about the origin and nature of hope in verses 14 and 15, I would describe *holy* fear like this in distinction from *unholy* fear:

- *Unholy fear* runs away from the Judgment on sin and looks for safety in all kinds of excuses and moral and religious camouflage.
- *Holy fear* runs away from the sin itself, and looks for safety in pardoning and empowering Grace of God.

Or here is a more provocative way to put it:

- *Unholy fear* runs away from the One Who judges those who don't hope fully in God.
- *Holy fear* runs away from not hoping in God into the Arms of the Judge- Who is his Father.
- *Unholy fear* ignores the preciousness of the Ransom and trembles at the Judgment of God.
- *Holy fear* cherishes the Ransom and trembles at the prospect of insulting the Goodness of the One Who paid it.

Or in the Words of our Lord Jesus:

Luke 12:5

I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!

So let us live in hope. And let us live in holiness. And let us live in holy fear. For **“you shall be holy, for I am holy.”**

Amen. Let's pray.