

1 Peter 1:17

In the Book of First Peter the Apostle Peter is taking us through a journey in the pursuit of holiness. The Greek word for holy, “hagios” means “separate” or “different.” Every Christian happens to be holy because we have God’s righteousness (**2 Corinthians 5:21**), and we are commanded to act like it. We are to demonstrate to our world, not that we’re sinless, but that we are indeed separated unto God and that we belong, uniquely, to Him.

“Holiness is the everyday [living]; holiness is the regular business of every Christian. Holiness evidences itself in the decisions we make and things we do, hour by hour, day by day.” [Charles R. Swindoll]

1. Holy fear is remembering our incredible privilege

In this text, Peter moves forward the word *Father* to a point of emphasis, so it could be translated, “*Since as Father you are addressing Him.*” Before Peter mentions anything about judgment, or evaluation, he first emphasizes that the judge just so happens to be your Father and that changes everything. Holy fear begins with remembering our incredible privilege to be God’s child.

2. Holy fear is accepting personal accountability

The original word is “*bematos*”, or “*bema*.” The original word typically referred to “a step.” Like the step you have on your front porch. Later on, the word came to refer to a raised platform that was accessed by steps.

A. The judgment seat for Christians isn’t a place where our eternal destiny is decided and finalized

The Bible makes it very clear that every single human being will one day stand before God, “*And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*” (**Hebrews 9:27**). Paul also wrote, “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*” (**2 Corinthians 5:10**)

For those who don’t belong to Christ, they will have an appointment with God called The Great White Throne (**Revelation 20:11-15**). Every unbeliever will be shown their guilt:

- Their suppression of the truth of the Creator God in unrighteousness (**Romans 1:18**)
- Their defiant resistance to their conscience and the law of God written on their heart (**Hebrews 3:8, 15; Jude 1:11**)
- For many of them, their refusal to accept the gospel of Christ as presented to them (**1 Thessalonians 1:8, 11-12**)

The Great White Throne Judgment is for unbelievers only. But there is another judgment, called the Judgement Seat of Christ. And this one is for believers only.

B. The judgment seat for Christians is not a place where your earthly sins are displayed publically and forgiven

The Bible teaches that sin was judged in Christ on the cross, and because we (believers) stand in Christ who was already judged, we will never be judged for our sins (**1 Peter 2:24**). Isaiah the prophet said that the coming Messiah would bear the iniquity of us all (**Isaiah 53:6**). God is choosing to not hold to our account, not bring to memory as it were, to effectively erase from the record Books covered by the blood of Jesus Christ, (**Colossians 2:13-14**). “*Therefore, there is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ*” (**Romans 8:1**). Micah the prophet said of God, “*You will cast their sins into the depths of the sea*” (**Micah 7:19**).

The Scriptures teach this about our security in His forgiveness, “*And when you were dead in your transgressions . . . He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions.*” (Note - not some, by the way, but all of them) “*Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees – that is, the record of sin – which was against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken [that record] out of the way, having nailed it to the cross*” (**Colossians 2:13-14**).

The judgment identified in verse 17 is a personal one-on-one encounter with the Living Lord, your Chief Shepherd, your Redeemer, where He will not judge your position in Him, but your priorities for Him. Verse 17, God’s evaluation will be impartial. God’s courtroom is holy and His judgments are right and true.

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“Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work.”¹⁴ If any man’s work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward.¹⁵ If any man’s work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). Fire is often a reference to the holiness of God. This is a reference to that moment when the believer stands before God and has their life evaluated by means of the fiery purity and holy evaluation of God.

There will be those who have nothing left, nothing as it were, but ashes, nothing but their salvation. The Apostle John warns the believer in this regard as he writes, *“See to it that you do not forfeit your full reward.”* (2 John 1:8). In **Revelation 21:4** the Scripture describe a future event, *“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”* Many theologians believe, based on where this event falls in the future, that the drying of the eyes mentioned in this verse follows the Christian’s judgment. For some who had done little for the cause of Christ the crying will be very painful while they stand before the One who suffered and died for them.

C. For the faithful Christian the judgment seat will be an awards ceremony

Paul speaks with this perspective as he writes, *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me a crown”* (a stephanos – literally, the laurel wreath of a victorious athlete), *there is laid up for me – there is waiting for me a laurel wreath of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day!* (2 Timothy 4:8).

Again, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed, [paid back] for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”* That can be translated, *“whether profitable or unprofitable”* (2 Corinthians 5:10).

The subject of that encounter with Christ will not be sin, we don’t fear that, for sin has already been judged and forgotten; the subject of our encounter will be service to God.

3. Holy fear is refusing to act immaturely

We need to live life in a way that is discernable by reverent behavior. There is a healthy respect for service to God when we realize there is a coming accountability:

- Blessed is the man who always fears the Lord (**Proverbs 28:14**)
- The writer of Hebrews said that in holy fear, Noah built an ark (**Hebrews 11:7**)
- Hebrews 12 tells us that the sight of God was so frightful and awesome that Moses was full of fear and trembling (**Hebrews 12:21**)

“Peter was describing a holy fear of offending God; born out of love and joy, the believer is all the more reluctant to displease God.” [Puritan author]

*“Fear” in the mind of Peter as he is advising is, that reverential submission to the Lord’s word and will, in the anticipation of having our lives reviewed, now and then on that day, not to discover sin, but to deliver rewards for each child of God, for every thought, prayer, ministry involvement, plan and act of submission, and obedience and reverence, those who lived with a sense of holy fear.

Application:

The judgment seat is also referred to as a performance review. Our service will be reviewed and evaluated. In what specific ways do you, ongoing, serve God in ministry? In what ways has your service for God been self-glorifying or self-exalting? How do we recognize this in ourselves? What specifically will you do to get involved in ministry and service to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?