Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Way back in 1997, a magazineran a story entitled ‘Fear: What People Are Afraid of Today.’ And according to their poll,

•     53% were “afraid” of getting cancer.

•     49% were “afraid” of not having enough money for retirement.

•     34% were “afraid” of pesticides on food.

•     33% were “afraid” of being a victim of violence.

•     25% were “afraid” of natural disasters.

Well, obviously they didn’t know about Covid and climate change! Right? And when people say that they are afraid of these things, it does not mean that they stay home and hide in a corner with a terrified look on their face, but they do think about these things and it affects the way that they live. Well, in verse 17 we read, “*Conduct yourselves with fear* *throughout the time of your exile*.” Another Bible version says, “*live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear*.” So, it seems that fear should influence the way that we believers think and live also. But what is the fear that Peter is talking about and why should it influence how we live?

Well, Peter’s **original audience** was Christians who had been forced to flee their homeland because of persecution. So, they literally were exiles. But it is also true that every Christian, because heaven is our true home, is a kind of spiritual exile on earth. We do not ‘fit in’ down here. Our views and behaviours will be different from the people around us, and we will be persecuted, to one degree or another. And you see, with that reality comes the temptation to compromise; to not be different and to just go along with the flow. Whether it be views on sex and sexuality, or creation or abortion, or how we observe the Lord’s Day, or how we run our businesses, or what we will or will not teach in our homes and schools, there is a constant temptation to compromise.

And this is the reality that Peter is addressing here. So, in view of this, **the Apostle calls believers to a life of fear**. And we are going to have to unpack what this means, very carefully. So, our two major headings will be, **what** is this life of fear? and then **why** is the life of fear necessary?

1. So, first of all, **what is this life of fear**? When Peter said, “*Conduct yourselves with fear*,” what did he mean?
   1. Well, one type of fear that the Bible speaks about is a frightful, cowering, without-any-hope terror. It is the type of fear that we all experience when we know something bad is about to happen – cold sweat, cover your eyes, shaking, terror!
      1. And the Bible connects this type of fear with the Day of Judgment. In **Hebrews 10**, for example, we read about “*a fearful expectation of judgment [and the fires of hell and] … it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*.” So, in unbelievers, there should be this frightful, cowering, without-any-hope terror in relation to the Day of Judgment.
      2. But not in believers! Turn ahead a few pages to **1 John 4:17-18**. There we read, “*By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as He is, so also are we in this world.* *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love*.” And so, if you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins, then the Holy Spirit lives in you and is making you more and more like Jesus, which is what being perfected in love means, then you do not need to be terrified by Judgment Day.
   2. But if we have been delivered from that sort of fear, then what is the fear that Peter is speaking about here. And the Bible often talks about “the fear of the Lord” as a normal and good thing. But what is it, exactly?
      1. Well, one theologian has described it as “astonished reverence.” And reverence means **awe and respect and honour**.
         1. It is to be in complete awe of God’s **majesty and power**. Maybe you have heard this before but light travels at 300,000 km/s! And if we could put a saddle on a beam of light and start flying through space at that speed, it would take us just a second and a half to reach the moon. In nine minutes, we would reach the sun, 150 million kms away. In four years, travelling at 300,000 km/s, we would finally reach Alpha Centauri, which is the star closest to our solar system. But it would take us 100,000 years to get from one end of our galaxy to the other. Now get this: there are over 100 billion galaxies in the known universe. And God made it all in six days! And the Bible tells us that the heaven of heavens can’t contain Him, and that He spans the universe with His hand. This is God’s majesty and power!
         2. But it is also to be in awe at God’s **perfect holiness**. Think of the angels crying out, “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty*!”
         3. But it is also to be astonished at His love for us in Jesus Christ, which we do not deserve. And we will explore this aspect more fully in our second point.
         4. Godly fear is astonished reverence.
      2. But I believe I would be doing you a disservice if I stripped this godly fear of any sense of terror at all.
         1. Think, for example, of **Isaiah** in **Isaiah 6**. He was a believer who was given a vision of heaven. And do you remember his reaction? He said, “*Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!*” Does that sound like terror to you? It does to me!
         2. And in case you are thinking, yeah, but that was in Old Testament times, well, the **Apostle John**, who lived with Jesus for three years, as “*the disciple whom Jesus loved*,” was given a vision of Him in **Revelation 1**. And what was his reaction? “*When I saw him, I fell at His feet as though dead*.” Does that sound like terror? It does to me!
         3. To believers, **Hebrews 12:28-29** says, “*Let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire*.”
      3. So, while godly fear is not a frightful, cowering, without-any-hope terror, it is what we might call, a holy terror, because we understand the majesty and holiness of God, and His wrath at sin and our remaining sinfulness.
         1. Common view in the church – God is like a big cuddly teddy bear in the sky, or like Santa. He is our loving Father. Almighty!
2. Now, here is where we need to slide into the **second** part of our consideration. Thus far, our focus has been *defining* this godly fear. But we cannot fully understand the life of fear if we do not look at **why** the life of fear is necessary. And Peter supplies us with **four reasons**:
   1. The **first** is in **verse 17**: “*If you call on Him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds*.” So, the first reason why the life of fear is necessary is **who God is**.
      1. 1:3-12 is Peter’s wonderful Salvation song. That is where He explores the amazing love and grace of God toward His people. But you see, God is not just our loving and gracious and merciful and slow to anger and patient Father in heaven. And Peter knew full well that if that was all he said about who God is then believers, who are under intense pressure to talk and think and act like the world, might be tempted to presume upon God’s love and patience and forgiveness and compromise.
         1. Boys and girls and young people, **is one of your parents a bit ‘softer’ than the other**? Is one of them more likely to tell you off than the other? Is one of them more likely to say yes than the other? It is often that way with parents. And we take advantage of this, don’t we. And we do this as adults too. We like teachers or bosses or even elders who are a bit ‘softer,’ who will let us get away with a bit more than the ‘harder’ ones.
         2. Now, God has no ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ side because He is One in His being. But Peter knew that if He just emphasized the love of God and said nothing about God as a holy Judge, then we might be tempted to not be holy “*in all [our] conduct*.”
      2. And so, Peter reminds us that **our Father in heaven is watching us, every day, to see how we conduct ourselves**. Earlier we read **Ecclesiastes 12**, “*Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil*.” Now, this is not about the final Judgment. As we heard earlier, we have been delivered from that judgment through faith in Christ. But each day we can truly please God by our obedience or we can displease God by our disobedience. He wants to see that our relationships, and not only our outward words and deeds, but also our inward thoughts and desires, are influenced by this godly fear.
      3. One commentator said, ‘Fear of the Lord is the continual awareness that God is watching and weighing every one of my thoughts, words, actions, and attitudes.”
      4. And so, I ask you this evening: What is your response to that statement?
      5. Now, I realize that that we have not finished with this text. And what it says in verses 18-21 is vital to understand the fear of the Lord. But God is one who “*judges impartially according to each one’s deeds*”; He is watching and weighing every one of our thoughts, words, actions, and attitudes; that is what Peter is reminding believers of here. And this must influence how we live.
   2. But the **second reason** why the life of fear is necessary is found in the **beginning of** **verse 18**: “*Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers*.” So this second reason is what we were ransomed from.
      1. Who here has seen or heard the well-known musical, **Fiddler on the Roof**? It is about a Jewish community. And it opens with a man who explains why the people in the village live as they do. And he says that he can explain it with one word: **Tradition**!
      2. And that captures Peter’s point here. You see, Jewish believers had grown up under the traditions of the Pharisees and Scribes. There were all sorts of oppressive man-made rules that produced a kind of heartless piety. People did this and did not do that because *those were the rules*. But those traditions did not fill the heart with love and thankfulness to God. They did not make the peoplem able to stand firm and courageously resist temptation. And that is why Peter describes it as “*the futile ways inherited from your forefathers*.” Futile means empty and hopeless. But now, because of Christ and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, they had the right motivation and meaning and hope and purpose to be courageous.
      3. Now, not many of us, if any, have been ransomed from man-made Jewish regulations! But outside of faith in Christ, people live for themselves, or their cultural traditions, or they try and please Allah or Buddha or another false god, or they pursue pleasure or money or fame. And they are all futile ways to live. And when a person becomes a follower of Jesus, they need to put off their old ways and put on new ways. This is a repeated theme of the New Testament. They have to learn to live and think alike in Christ people. This is the second reason why the life of fear is necessary.
   3. The **third** is found in **verses 18b-19**. And this one is of *supreme* importance. For there we are told about th**e cost or the price of our ransom**; it is “*not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot*.”
      1. If you have ever read the accounts of the animal sacrifices in the Old testament, you will know that hundreds and sometimes thousands of animals were slaughtered every day. Rivers of blood flowed to atone for the sins of the people. But as we read earlier in **Hebrews 9**, the blood of animals didn’t actually take away sin; it just pointed forward to the great sacrifice of Jesus. And do you remember how **John the Baptist** described Jesus when he first saw him? “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” And on the cross, having endured all of God’s wrath at the sins of His elect ones, what did Jesus say? “*It is finished*.” Complete forgiveness!
      2. Now, the word “**ransomed**” in verse 18, or ‘redeemed’ in other versions, comes from the world of slavery. And Peter’s original readers knew slavery up close and personal. Many of them would have been slaves or were slaves, because many of the first Christians were slaves.
         1. Well, imagine being a slave, if you can. You are owned by someone else, and you have to do whatever they ask. It was often an awful life. But then imagine that someone ransoms you from slavery and gives you your freedom, by paying the slave price. Well, that person is not your master because you are free. But you would be more eager to serve them and please them, in any way possible, than you were the master whose slave you were!
         2. And that is Peter’s point here. We have been ransomed from slavery to sin and the tyranny of the devil and eternal condemnation in hell. And the cost of that ransom was the precious blood of the Son of God! So, we have this reason too to live the life of fear – an overflowing thankfulness for the price that our Triune God paid to secure our freedom!
      3. **But Hebrews 9:13-14** says, “*For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls … [purified] the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ … purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God*.” The blood of Jesus didn’t just secure the forgiveness of sins, it also purifies us and make us eager to obey God. Does this influence how you live? It must!
   4. Well, the **fourth** and last reason why the life of fear is necessary is found in **verses 20-21**: “*He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for your sake, 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*.” And the reason to live in fear that is in view here is **our privileged salvation position**.
      1. These verses explain that the Triune God established the plan of salvation before the world was even created. And this plan required the Lord Jesus, to come to earth and to take to Himself a human nature, and to die and rise again. But this did not happen until around AD 30. So, for the 4000 odd years of Old Testament history, there was only the promise of a Messiah to come. OT believers had to live in faith at something that had not yet happened. But for those to whom Peter originally wrote these words, and for everyone since them, including you and me, Jesus has come; what was planned in eternity has come to pass; we know Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. So, Peter is saying that we, as New Testament believers, have a privileged position. The ground of our faith and hope is much more concrete than it was for Old Testament believers. We know Jesus! This is the privilege of being in the church – the coming of Christ was “*for you*.”
      2. But, with this great privilege comes a greater responsibility. Through faith in Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, you have been brought near to God; you live in His presence! And this too is why it is necessary to “*conduct yourselves with fear throughout your time of exile*.”
         1. And so, we may not compromise and be like everyone else; we must continue to preach the full counsel of God’s Word. Therefore, we must not cave and open office in the church to women, because the world says women can do everything. We must not compromise and say that same-sex sex is OK, because that’s what the world thinks, and we may not take drugs because everyone else is, and we must not shop or go to a café on Sunday because everyone else does, and we must affirm the truth of God creating us male or female and reject the idea that we can choose whatever identity we want.
         2. And we must pray for and practice personal holiness, both in terms of our words and behaviour, and our inward thoughts and desires.

And as we conclude, note the last words of **verse 21**: “*So that your faith and hope are in God*.” Can we live this life of godly fear perfectly? No, we cannot. So, our faith and hope are not in ourselves, and our ability to be holy now. Our faith and hope is in? God! And that is because God’s plan of salvation has as its ultimate goal the new heavens and the new earth where there will only be holiness. And so, for all of the reasons that we have explored together, let us live in fear, all the while longing for and praying for Christ to come again. Amen.