

ON A HILL TOO FAR AWAY - Fifteen Protestant Truths About the Death of God the Son - Part Ten
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Jesus Christ Died On The Cross To Free Us From The Bondage Of Both Our Ancestry And Our Environment

1 Peter 1:17-19 - "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, [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."

What an insightful text Peter gives us. It opens yet another window in this series of teachings on the accomplishments of Christ Jesus, God the Son, as He died for us on the cross. We're meant to see three thoughts linked tightly together - **unbreakably** together. First, there's the gracious privilege of calling upon God as our **Father** - "**....if you call on him as Father....**" (17). Then, second, there is the command to the kind of **conduct** required if we so address God - "**....conduct yourselves with fear....**" (17). You can teach a parrot to call God Father, but there is a **lifestyle** that must go along with the confession in a human person.

I said there were **three** thoughts linked together in these verses, but the idea presented in just these first **two** thoughts is profound. Peter seems concerned to make the point that Christians must never use their **closeness** to God as **Father** to cause them to treat Him with **presumption** or **familiarity**. The **Fatherhood** of God doesn't remove the **fear** of God, as though this new found status through Christ Jesus was an excuse for moral indulgence. The fact that we now **belong** doesn't remove the need for **reverence and holiness**.

Finally, in the **third** thought in these verses, Peter describes the **provision** that makes such a lifestyle of fearing God possible. He says that through Christ's death you have been redeemed from the "**....the futile ways inherited from your forefathers....**" (18). This is the phrase we want to concentrate on today. Says Peter, "Live your life here in the fear of God. Be totally different from the world around you. Live like sojourners here - **strangers - people of a different lineage - people who have their citizenship somewhere else**. And don't think for a minute you can't **do** this, because you **can!**"

And then comes our phrase - "**You can live holy lives because you've been redeemed from the futile way of life you inherited from your forefathers.**" Why does Peter, under divine inspiration from the Holy Spirit Himself, word it this way? Why doesn't he just say "**You've been redeemed from your sins?**" Or, "**You've been redeemed from your past?**" Why this very specific, carefully crafted mention of the "**forefathers?**"

I believe Peter is very intentional in his choice of words. We all **know** about sin. We all know sin is bad. We all know we're not supposed to **do** sin. Certainly there are enough lists of specific sins in the New Testament. People who think lists of right and wrong actions aren't very spiritual will have to create their own private Bibles because the New Testament is **full** of these moral shopping lists. Simply put, we **know** what the New Testament **means** when it speaks of sin because it **tells** us what it means.

So Peter isn't repeating that same process here. Rather than outline the **kinds** of sins people commit, he is addressing the **process** of how we **explain**, and, at times, **justify** the sins we commit - not **all** of them, of course, but **certain** ones, for sure. And he tells us if we're going to live holy lives here on earth, if we're going to live beautiful, radiant, whole lives - which is what the Bible means when it talks of living in the "**fear of God,**" - if we're going to live lives like that, we're going to have to **resist a specific kind of unbelief** that shuts God's grace and power out of our hearts. That's what we're going to look at today:

1) **THE SINS WE JUSTIFY THE MOST ARE THE SINS WE TIE TO OUR HEREDITY OR OUR ENVIRONMENT**

There are some sins we don't even **try** to excuse. If we're serious about following Jesus at all, we just admit we've blown it and repent with broken hearts before Father God. And He's gracious and He forgives. What a miracle of grace!

There are other sins which don't receive the same kind of healing grace with in our hearts, **not** because God won't restore us in His power and mercy, but because we haven't yet come to the place of **believing God's assessment of them as sins**. Or **we really don't think there's any hope for transformation** in those areas anyway, so we've just quietly settled for less transformation than the Spirit of God wants to provide.

Let me give you examples of the kinds of things I hear in my office all the time. People say things like this to me:

"You don't understand, Pastor Don, I find it hard to be a loving person to my wife. My father beat me as a child and I'm so full of anger and hatred. It's just the way I am from my upbringing."

"If you knew my past, Pastor Don, you'd never even ask me to forgive that person. I've had such a hard walk to walk. People have been taking advantage of me all my life. I just have no forgiveness to give anymore. If you walked in my shoes, you wouldn't even expect it from me."

"I find it so hard to trust anyone anymore. Two people have sued me for things I didn't do. My wife walked out on me for another man after twenty years of marriage. How can I ever trust anyone again?"

"It's impossible for me to control my temper, Pastor Don. My dad blew up at me all the time. Now it's just the way I respond to stress. I guess it's just in my blood."

I could pile up examples, but you see the point. The one thing in common with all those explanations is this: ***there is a sinful pattern of behavior there that isn't being broken by the power of God because it isn't being called sinful by the individual. And the reason it isn't being called sinful is it's being linked to a way of life inherited from the past. It's just the way I am and I don't actually expect to ever be any different.***

Now, please hear again with fresh ears Peter's words. ***"You have been redeemed from the futile way of life handed down from your forefathers!"*** O, we don't use those same words anymore. We have refined and modernized the terms. But the mindset is the same whether you speak of a ***"futile way of life handed down by your forefathers,"*** or ***"genetic dysfunctional influence,"*** or ***"the emotional scarring of co-dependent, emotionally distant parents."***

While not exhausting the content of this text, these are some of the roots of the bondage Peter references in these verses and the cross of Christ has a message of hope and release. But it must be received with faith and commitment to the grace of God.

2) **THE NEW TESTAMENT CALLS US TO BELIEVE THAT, THROUGH CHRIST'S DEATH ON THE CROSS, OUR PAST NEED NO LONGER DETERMINE OUR DESTINY**

The first thing Peter tells us is these chains of bondage can't be broken with silver or gold - **1 Peter 1:18** - ***"...knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold...."***

Why these words? Because, for most of us in this western world, silver and gold - our ***currency*** - our ***wealth*** - is what we immediately look to as the solution to our problems. That's why, before Peter tells us what ***will*** bring freedom and power, he tells us what ***won't***.

Ask any Pastor. I counsel as many rich people as poor - maybe more. True, wealth can provide some earthly comfort - some ***insulation*** - from the pain of the past, perhaps even some temporary ***distraction*** from it. But silver and gold can't heal one broken heart or set free one single life. The Bible says you can't just throw money at this problem.

Then Peter holds out a promise - a promise that, were it not held forth by the Spirit of God Himself, would be too precious to believe. God has redeemed us - set us free - from the futile way of life handed down by our forefathers. In fact, when you look for it, you will everywhere see this ***expansive*** power of deliverance assumed in the teaching of the New Testament:

Ephesians 4:32-5:1 - ***"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. [1] Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children."***

Notice the breadth of this command. The command is to be ***"tender-hearted."*** How can you command someone to ***become*** tender-hearted? And it never even enters Paul's mind that someone might say, ***"It's all well and good for you to say this Paul. But I'm not a tender-hearted person. I've walked through glass in my life. My dad was an alcoholic. My mother left me when I was just a kid. I've been passed around like useless goods for most of my life. I'm the product of abuse and neglect. Life has made me hard-hearted, not tender-hearted."***

Listen, I wouldn't argue for one minute that your life hasn't been difficult. And I don't know all the reasons *why* life seems harder for some than others. And I'm not denying the kind of pain you may feel, nor would I be insensitive to it. But I also know this, Peter says there has come a *redemption from the futility of your past*. Peter takes all that is bound up in our *ancestry* and announces release and redemption.

3) GOD'S COMMAND ALWAYS CARRIES WITH IT GOD'S ENABLEMENT

In other words, God's command is never just a *bare* command. He doesn't just command and stand back and *watch*. God's words don't just leave His mouth and hang out in thin air. God's words suspend galaxies and stars in nothing but space. God's words call the sun and moon into existence. God's mere words - His spoken command - called animal beings - creatures of all sorts - into living, walking realities. *God's command always carries God's power.*

When you look for it, you can see this throughout the Scriptures. Look again at Paul's moral instructions in the book of Ephesians just as a familiar example:

Ephesians 4:32-5:2 - "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another (command), as God in Christ forgave you (source of power for obeying the command). [1] Therefore be imitators of God (command), as beloved children (source of power for obeying the command). [2] And walk in love (command), as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (source of power for obeying the command)."

I'm using this text as an example because it fits in so well with the theme of the transformation of settled (many would even say *inherited*) traits of character. It's a command to *be changed* in areas that are so clearly matters of *attitude, temperament, and disposition*.

In other words it deals so specifically with the very things we usually feel are set by forces beyond our control. For many people these are the areas of life that would easily be described as *"the futile way of life handed down by your forefathers."* And the blessed news from Peter is Jesus died on the cross to *redeem us from these areas of futility!*

4) PETER WRITES TO CHRISTIANS ABOUT THIS VERY SPECIFIC POWER OF THE CROSS TO CALL THEM AWAY FROM A VERY COMMON FORM OF UNBELIEF

There are *two different kinds* of unbelief in the New Testament. One we would *never* commit, and one we can very *easily* commit. There is the unbelief of *rejection* and the unbelief of *reason*.

The unbelief of *rejection* flat out denies and rejects Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord - **John 8:24** - "I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins."

Then there is the unbelief, not of *rejection*, but that simply finds something God has said or promised to be too hard to be expected or seen as true - **Mark 9:20-24** - "And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. [21] And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. [22] And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." [23] And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." [24] Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

The first step to experiencing God's transforming grace for a futile past is to *believe that the power of the cross of Christ reaches into that past with a power that no amount of silver or gold could buy*. Something happened on the cross of Christ that is *big enough* to do more with your past than you ever could. We have been *redeemed* - not just our present and not just our future - but *all* of what makes us who and what we are comes under the power of a risen Christ.

We're not just *earthlings* trying to *copy* a good God. That would be a hopeless endeavor. We are now God's *children*. John says God's *seed* abides in us. That means *God Himself is now the most decisive factor in making us what we should be. But that truth must be believed in the heart and relied on in faith before it will become transforming in your own experience.*

Your earthly upbringing certainly may have been very tragic. And I'm not, in any way, minimizing all the pain that can bring into a life. But the Gospel has truly good news for people like this. The Gospel says **God starts something brand new when He enters a life**. Your **past** is no longer the **determining factor** in your **future**. I believe this is at least **part** of the meaning of a very difficult verse of Scripture in the New Testament:

Matthew 23:9 - "And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven."

Certainly the text has primary application to the pronouncement of **religious titles**, used to give people a certain status and spiritual elevation. But I just wonder if another point of application might not be exactly what we are studying in this message.

As important as earthly fatherhood is - and as surely as instruction in fathering is Scriptural and crucial for the church - there are still countless people who will come to Jesus Christ much later on in life. They may have had everything against them in terms of earthly heritage. And the principle - **the liberating Biblical truth** - is **the Fatherhood of God over-rides all other factors in determining what they can become through faith and obedience to the Lord!**

When Paul describes the faith of Abraham, and outlines just how God works in performing all that He commands, he says, **"...who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist."** (Romans 4:17)! Remember it all your days. **Because we have been adopted into a new family, our earthly backgrounds are no longer our destinies.**

Remember, when Christ died on that cross Father God had in mind your relationship to your ancestors. The New Testament says so. He intends to **set us free** from all factors of inherited futility.