

1 Peter 1:17

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Date: 21 April 2013

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[0 : 00] I'm going to make a series of statements that speak of God in relation to you, and I want you to take note of how you respond in your own mind to each of these statements.

God created you. God cares for you. God loves you. God forgives you. God judges you.

I want to stop there. God judges you. What do you make of that declaration? How do you respond?

Intellectually, emotionally, to that affirmation. God judges you. We live in an age where being judgmental is deemed by many the greatest sin.

That perspective, of course, is ironically a judgment in and of itself. But that is the age we live in. We mustn't judge others. And certainly, we have no appetite for being judged by others.

[1 : 29] Now, of course, it is true that there are occasions when we are wrong in judging others, and the manner in which we do so is not as it ought to be. But this rejection in a very dramatic way of any kind of judgment is something that characterizes our age. Live and let live is what we're told, each to his own. Or perhaps the word that sums it up is a word that I use myself quite often in certain circumstances. Whatever. Whatever. Let's not judge others. No place for judgment.

And yet, despite this, despite the sense that is pervading and so often we come across, we all know that there must be a place for judgment or for judging. We all recognize that in society it would be a recipe for chaos and for anarchy if our judges, for example, those who have been given that responsibility by us as a society, if our judges were one fine day to be told that they were to no longer judge. We all recognize that we all recognize that we all recognize that that would be folly. Of course, they must judge. And so, while on the one hand we're very uncomfortable with the very idea of judging, yet we do recognize when we pause for a moment, we recognize that judgment is necessary. Well, this morning we return to 1 Peter, and we will focus our attention on just one verse that speaks of God as the one who judges. And I refer to verse 17, 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 17.

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. Now, the matter of God as judge is introduced by Peter in the context of Him providing believers the grounds or the incentives for holy living. That is what he is concerned with in this part of the letter. Indeed, in the previous verses, in verses 13 to 16, when we spent some time considering them, that is precisely what we did. We identified the grounds that Peter gives for holy living. We notice that the grounds for holy living are what God has done. The therefore in verse 13 refers to what he has said already about so great salvation. What God has done for us is an incentive to holy living.

We notice that who we are is an incentive for holy living. Then in verse 14, as obedient children, or as children of obedience, who we are is a grounds for living holy lives. But then also who God is. Then in verse 16, be holy because I am holy or as I am holy. And Peter continues with this theme of providing incentives for holy living, and he touches on this reality. Continuing to consider who God's reality. Continuing to consider who God is. Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

The flow of the argument is pretty clear. Since, because of, in the light of the reality that God judges you, because that is so, because that is true, I urge you to live your lives in reverent fear.

[5 : 29] It is a reason for living a life in the feet of God, for living a life that is holy and pleasing to God. It is an incentive, if you wish, to live such a life. Now, we will, in due course, get to Peter's principle concern. Lives live in reverent fear in the light of God as judge. But I want us this morning to notice how in this verse we have significant teaching on the matter of the judgment of God presented in few but choice words. I think in this verse, in this one verse, we can identify six truths concerning God's judgment that Peter highlights. Perhaps to say that he highlights them is not accurate, but that he refers to, if only in the passing, in some cases. I'll mention what these six truths are, and then we can think of them each in turn. First of all, in this verse, we have identified the one who judges, the one who judges. We also have in this verse reference to the time of judgment. When is this going to happen, or when does this happen? We also very clearly have an indication concerning the manner of judgment, how God judges. We're told, who are those who are judged?

Who are the objects, if you wish, of God's judgment? Peter also identifies the evidence that is examined. On what evidence does God determine the judgment that He makes? And then finally, and really this is Peter's primary concern, the response that is reasonable in the light of God as the one who judges.

So, let's think of these different overlapping truths concerning this matter of God as judge. First of all, then, the one who judges. Now, it's very clear who He is. We've already taken it as a given, but we can just briefly notice what Peter says in this regard. Peter identifies the one who judges as God. But in doing so, he identifies God in His condition as Father. He identifies God in His condition as Father. Notice what he says, since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially. Peter is very clear, as we are very clear, God is judge. God judges. But in identifying God as judge, He speaks of Him as Father, as our Father, the one that we call on as a Father. God is both our Father and our judge. He is, if you wish, a fatherly judge.

And this has a couple of implications and poses one important question. Maybe more implications, but two that I want us to notice this morning, and one question that I also want to pose in the light of the manner in which Peter identifies God as judge, but as our Father who judges. First of all, then, the implications.

If God, who is judge, is also our Father, then we can be sure that He is a loving judge. He is a loving judge. He is a judge who loves those He is judging. Now, that's something we have difficulty perhaps even in conceiving. When we have in our mind a picture of a courtroom, and you have a judge, and He has to pass judgment. We imagine that there can be no relationship between the judge and those He is judging. Indeed, if there is some kind of relationship, that judge should stand aside perhaps and say, well, I'm not suitable for being judge in this case because I have an interest in it. I know the one who is accused. He is a family member. I love him. I couldn't possibly perform this role. But in the case of God, as our judge, we can declare, and we can draw this very important implication that our judge. He loves those He is judging for. He is their Father. But another implication, and it really goes together with this or flows from it, that is that He is an approachable judge.

[10 : 11] Indeed, that is precisely what Peter says very explicitly, since you call on a Father who judges. Peter makes explicit reference and recognition of the fact that this judge is approachable. He says to the believers, you call on Him. The word that He uses, the verb that He uses, it means to call for help.

And the tense that is employed suggests a regular and habitual calling on God for help. Not simply a calling on God for help in some crisis or emergency, though that is included, but the regular, habitual manner in which sons and daughters of God call on Him for help as their Father.

And Peter says, the one that you call on for help, this one who is so approachable, this one who is so inviting, this one that you can come to at any time and in any circumstance, He is the one who judges you.

Yes, He is your judge. And that is a solemn matter. But He is a loving judge. He is an approachable judge. Well, those are the implications, or a couple of implications, of Peter speaking of God as judge, also as Father. But the question that is also derived from this, and an important question that I want to pose to you this morning, is this, is He your Father?

Peter speaks of Him as Father, but is He your Father? The you, in verse 17, since you call on a Father, the you is addressed to believers. Peter, in this letter, is speaking to believers. There in verse 1, to God's elect, to those who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, and so on and so forth. He is addressing believers, and as he continues to write his letter, his audience is that of believers. And so, when he says, since you call on a Father, he's saying to the Christians, he's saying to believers, God is your Father, and you call on Him as your Father.

[12:19] Peter is challenging. He's motivating believers to a holy life. This is his concern. To such, he can speak of God as Father, for He is their Father. But we should not draw from that.

We would be mistaken to draw from that the conclusion that He is Father of all. There is a sense, of course, in which God, as Creator, enjoys a universal fatherhood. But in the sense that Peter is speaking here in this verse, God is not Father of all. He is the spiritual Father of His own children.

I think we're very familiar with the passage that speaks of this so clearly. And given the clarity of it, we would do well just to remind ourselves of it. In John chapter 1, the gospel of John chapter 1, in verses 12 and 13, we read, Yet to all who received Him, that is, to all who received Jesus, to those who believed in His name, to those who believed in the name of Jesus, He gave the right to become children of God, to become children of God. Children born not of natural descent or of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. There is a becoming that is necessary that we might be part of the family of God and that we might be sons and daughters of God. So, it is God who judges, God the Father.

And as we consider this matter, as we continue to consider this matter of God as your judge, I would urge you to give serious consideration to this matter as to whether He is your Father.

Because it makes all the difference. The truths that we'll be looking at apply to all. And there's solemn truths for all, but it makes all the difference if the judge you're dealing with is your Father, or if He is not your Father. So, give serious attention to that. So, it is God who judges, God the Father. Now, that in itself is interesting, given that the New Testament ordinarily points to Jesus as the God-appointed judge, certainly in regard to the day of judgment. We're going to be thinking in a moment regarding the matter of the when of judgment. But as we think of the day of judgment that the Bible speaks of so clearly, the unanimous testimony of Scripture is that God the Son is appointed as judge on that day. And yet, even though that is so, it is clear that judgment is a shared work that is shared by the Father and the Son. Indeed, we could rightly and properly include the Holy Spirit as participating in this work. If we just notice one verse where that is made very clear in Romans chapter 2 and verse 16, it's a verse that does speak of the day of judgment. And notice what Paul says, this will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus

[15:30] Christ, as my gospel declares. There we see clearly how the Father and the Son are involved together in this work of judgment, even, and particularly in that verse referring to the final great and solemn day.

But let's move on then to this second matter concerning the time of judgment, having identified who is the judge, God is the judge, God the Father is the judge. What can we say concerning the time of judgment? When does God judge? What do you think? If I were to pose you that question, when is it?

Okay, God's a judge very well, but when does He judge? What do you think? I think most of us, if we accept the premise that God judges, would look forward to the day of judgment as the time of judgment. Maybe to speak of looking forward isn't the happiest language to use. Maybe we look ahead rather than look forward. We look ahead to a future day of judgment. And of course, such a day is one that awaits us in the future. We've already noticed how it's referred to by Paul in the verse in Romans that we read, but we can just notice one other passage where we are presented so clearly with this reality of a future day of judgment. In Acts chapter 17, and reading from verse 29, we read, Therefore, since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent, for He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him from the dead.

Very clearly there in this address to those who were listening there in Athens, it is made very clear, a day has been set aside, a future day, when God will judge the world. Is that then the answer to our question? When does God judge? Well, we can await that day. There's the answer. Let's move on.

Well, that is not all the answer. It's part of the answer, but it's not the full answer. In this verse, in verse 17, the verse that we are considering in 1 Peter, in this verse, Peter, it seems, and I think it's clear, is speaking primarily not of future, but of present judgment.

[18:09] There is a future day of judgment. But here, Peter is not speaking of that day in the first instance. He is speaking rather of present judgment. The verbs in the verse are all in the present tense and speak of present activity. We could paraphrase what Peter says in this way, since you call now on a father who judges now, live your lives now in reverent fear. He's not speaking of how they will call in the future. He's not speaking of how they should live in the future, nor is he speaking of how God will judge in the future, but rather that God judges now. The language that Peter uses does not exclude a future reference to that ultimate day of God's judgment, but its primary focus is on God the Father judging in the here and now. God judges now. He is judging you now.

There are a couple of points I want to emphasize concerning God's present judgment. The first thing I want to say is this, the inevitability of God's present judgment. God as the all-knowing and all-seeing God who is intimately interested in you and me, such a God can do no other than judge in the here and now.

For such a God, present and permanent judgment is, I think we can say, inevitable. He can do no other than judge all that He sees and all those upon whom His eyes are fixed. Now, as we state that, it's maybe helpful to draw the distinction between what we might call judging and passing judgment.

Maybe the best way of visualizing or getting our heads around that distinction is to think of the activity of a judge in a courtroom. We think of a courtroom here in Aberdeen, and if you went to the public gallery and we're observing what was going on, from the moment the case begins, the judge or the sheriff or whatever he's called, he is judging. From the very beginning, he's judging. He's judging the evidence that is presented. He's judging the witnesses as they speak and as they make their case. He's judging the arguments presented by the lawyers, be they defense or prosecuting. And if it's a lengthy case, then maybe for weeks, even months, he is judging. Throughout all that time, he is judging.

Now, at the very end of the process, he passes judgment, but he has been judging from the very beginning. And maybe that, in a measure, helps us to understand what we're saying or part of what we're saying concerning God's present judgment and the inevitability of it. The all-seeing, all-knowing God is ever judging. But the other thing I want to say, and as we do, we'll develop what we've just said, the other thing I want to say concerns the solemnity of God's present judgment.

[21 : 24] In this regard, there's a couple of solemn truths to ponder on. And the first one is a very simple one. It's an obvious one that follows from what we're saying, and it is this, that He is judging you now. Your thoughts as you digest or dismiss the Word of God this morning, those very thoughts, those very dismissive thoughts are judged by God. He is judging you as you are perhaps less than honest with your wife. He's judging you as you twist the truth somewhat as you speak to your children.

He's judging you as you cut just a little corner at work. He's judging you as you take just a passing glance at some soft porn, as you covet your neighbor's house or car or wife in everything you do, in the bad things and in the good things, might I add. God is ever judging.

He's judging you now. But the other thing I want to say is this, that though we have drawn the distinction between judging and passing judgment and recognize that passing judgment can be something that awaits while God judges in the present, we should say, and we must say, and Peter certainly is of this opinion, that God may elect to pass judgment now. The Bible very clearly teaches that God can, and does exercise what we sometimes call, temporal judgment in the here and now. And believers, far from being exempt from such judgment, are particularly the objects of it. This is Peter's concern in this verse, God judging His own in the here and now. Now, the truth of that is very explicit in different passages of Scripture. And in these matters, time is not our friend. But let me just quickly draw your attention to maybe two very familiar passages that speak of God's present judgment on believers. In 1 Corinthians 11, from verse 27, the passage is in the context of the Lord's Supper and unworthy involvement in it, rather an unworthy organizing of it, rather than an individual's unworthy participation. But that's for another day. But if we just focus on what it says concerning temporal, present, solemn judgment on believers. 1 Corinthians 11, from verse 27,

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. But then especially what Paul goes on to say, that is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. He's speaking there of God's present temporal judgment on believers. And perhaps even more clearly, we have the words that we find in Hebrews chapter 12, and from verse 5. Hebrews chapter 12, and from verse 5, Have you not forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons? My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. And we could go on. And there, clearly the writer is speaking of how God deals in the present with his children. He disciplines them.

He punishes them. He judges their actions, and he passes judgment in punishing them and disciplining them as he sees fit. And so, when we think of the time of God's judgment, we ought not to make the mistake that this is only something that awaits us in the distant future. God judges now, and he may indeed elect to pass judgment in some measure in now. But moving on to another truth that we find in the verse, and that concerns the manner of his judgment. And here we limit ourselves to one aspect or characteristic of God's judgment that Peter explicitly highlights. One word, and the word is impartial.

[25 : 53] Impartiality is perhaps the single most important requirement of any judge. And the testimony of the Bible regarding God's impartiality is eloquent. We read in Deuteronomy chapter 10, for the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. And the impartiality of God provides us with both a guarantee and a challenge. The guarantee is that God's present and future judgment will be grounded in justice and equity. God is impartial. God is fair. He shows no favoritism. In the words of Moses, recorded in Deuteronomy chapter 32, He is the rock. His works are perfect, and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong. Upright and just is He. The manner of His judgment we can be assured.

This is guaranteed. His judgment is equitable. It is impartial. He is altogether and can only be altogether fair in His judgments. Now, that guarantee is good. It is a good thing that God is just.

But it's also a sobering guarantee, because it means that we all stand before God just as we are, and He judges us just as we are. We have no brownie points to rely on, no strings to pull, no favors to call, no names to drop, or connections to lean on. For God is impartial in His judgment, and He shows no favoritism. He accepts no bribes of any kind.

But this truth concerning God's impartiality is also a challenge. As believers, we are called to similar impartiality. The same word that Peter uses here is used in James chapter 2, where we are encouraged, where we are exhorted, brothers as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. Don't show favoritism. Indeed, we're told that to show favoritism or impartiality is a serious matter. It is sinful. If you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

The manner of His judgment, then, it is impartial. But moving on to the next truth that we have in the verse, and it is this. The verse speaks of those who are judged. Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially. Now, in everything we've said thus far, we've almost been working on the assumption, and we've stated explicitly, that all stand under God as their judge. But for the avoidance of any doubt, Peter makes this very clear. God judges each man's work.

[29 : 24] Now, while it is the case that Peter is writing to believers, in this matter of the universality of God's judgment, he is so clear and explicit. Each man is judged by God. Each man is being judged in the here and now, and each man will stand before God on the day of judgment. Those who deny God's very existence are judged by God. Those who mock and scoff at the very notion of being judged by God are judged by God. Those who imagine that they can keep themselves under the radar and live their lives unseen, they too are judged by God. Those of us who by grace know God as our Father, we too are judged by God.

Each man, each man. Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, he judges you.

But we move on. The verse also makes reference to the evidence that is examined by the judge. Peter is clear. God judges each man's work. Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, his judgment is not based on who or what we claim to be or believe. He judges each man's work.

As regards the day of judgment, that is the very clear testimony of the Bible. We think of what Paul says to the believers in Corinth, in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 10, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. Now, as we consider that truth, which is very clearly stated, are we to then conclude that we are saved by works, by the good that we do? Is that what gains us merit in the sight of God? By no means. The Bible clearly teaches that that is not so.

But what we do and how we behave, the works done and left undone, serve to reveal who we are and whom we serve and in whom we have placed our trust. And it is on the basis of these works that reveal who we are that we will be judged. That much is very clear. But as we have been stressing, Peter is not principally concerned with future but with present judgment. And God, in the here and now, judges each man's work. What about you? The question has been put rather provocatively. If you were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Well, I leave that question with you. As believers, our work is being judged by God, and we are subject to present discipline and, indeed, to present reward.

[32 : 34] And Peter is encouraging believers, he's encouraging you and me to live in the light of this reality. But that leads us to the final thing that I want us to notice this morning, and that is the response required. This really is Peter's principal concern. That is the whole flow of the verse.

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, what will this? Live your life as strangers here in reverent fear. Peter's present and pressing concern is that God's people would live holy lives, and he's employing all the possible incentives and arguments for doing so. All God has done for us, what we are as believers, God's character as a holy God, and now this further incentive, God is their judge. God is their judge, and God as their judge judges them. And in the light of that, they are to live their lives in reverent fear. Given that God is our judge, so we ought to live.

What does that mean? What does it mean to live our lives in reverent fear? In actual fact, what Peter says is simply, in fear. Live in fear. That sounds kind of scary. Now, that is a subject that merits careful consideration. And what we're going to do is we're going to continue to consider this matter of living in the fear of God, the very notion of the fear of God that Peter speaks of here as the proper response to God as judge. We're going to think more about that this evening, not as we consider this verse, but as we consider another verse that touches on this same matter. And I hope in that way to do greater justice to this final point, as it were, in regard to this verse, the response that Peter is looking for, that God is looking for in the light of this great truth that God is our judge.

How are we to respond? Well, we are to live as strangers here in reverent fear. God created you.

God cares for you. God loves you. God forgives you as you seek His forgiveness and ask for it. God judges you. The horse that won the Scottish Grand National yesterday goes by the name of God's God's me judge. I suspect it speaks volumes of 21st century Scotland that the most public recognition of God as our judge is to be found in the trivial and somewhat bizarre naming of a horse, God's me judge.

[35 : 23] But the name of that horse is one that we would do well to pronounce, each and every one of us, in solemn tones, God's me judge. God's me judge. He's my judge, and He's your judge. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we come to you as our Heavenly Father, and we delight in approaching you as our Heavenly Father. We approach you also as our judge, our fatherly judge, the judge who is indeed approachable, the judge who loves us. But we do pray that we would know the proper reverence that ought to characterize those who know you as judge, as our judge. We pray that as we have considered matters relating to this great and solemn concern, that you are the judge who judges impartially each man's work, that we would be enabled by your Spirit to consider how we ought to respond to that truth.

Help us, above all, to be able to approach you as our Father, to know what it is to have received your Son, Jesus, and believed in Him, and so have been granted that great privilege of approaching you as our Father. Help us, then, we pray, to hear and to listen and to respond as is fitting. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. We'll close our service this morning by singing in Psalm 72. You'll find that on page 92 of our Psalm books, on page 92. Psalm 72, we'll sing verses 1 to 7, and then verses 17 to 19.

We'll sing these verses to the throne. Endow the King with justice, Lord, the Royal Son with righteousness, your people, your afflicted ones. He'll judge with truth and uprightness. Psalm 72, verses 1 to 7, and 17 to 19. And we'll stand to sing.

[37 : 46] Psalm 72, we'll sing.

Psalm 72, verse 1 to 19.

Psalm 72, verse 1 to 19.

Psalm 73, verse 1 to 19. Psalm 73, verse 1 to 19. NCja, verse 1 to 20.

Wherefore may his name endure, May it continue as the sun, All nations will be blessed in him, Whom they will call the blessed one.

[40 : 01] Praise to the Lord, to his trust God, His awesome deeds grow into men, His living grace eternally, His glory fill the earth, Amen.

His glory fill the earth, Amen. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always.

Amen.