

1 Peter 1:17-21

¹⁷If you call on the Father who judges impartially, according to the work of each person, conduct yourselves during the time of your pilgrimage in reverence, ¹⁸because you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, not with things that pass away, such as silver or gold, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰He was chosen before the foundation of the world but revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹Through him you are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Conduct Yourself in Reverence

I.

Empty. That's how Peter described the former way of life of his readers. It was an ongoing condition. Generation after generation had passed on the same empty way of life. "You know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers" (1 Peter 1:18, EHV).

Some of Peter's readers were gentile Christians—that is, non-Jews. Their background included many pagan religions with all kinds of different gods that had been worshiped. Those gods had similar characteristics to human beings; they were vindictive and violent; they were incapable of doing anything to truly help those who worshiped them. Greek culture had recognized the weaknesses of their gods, but rather than turning to the One true God, they instead turned to philosophy. Their philosophy was to just endure whatever life threw at you. It was emptiness. The words "cynicism" and "skepticism" come from the Greeks. Their empty way of life led them to be skeptical and cynical about everything.

Some of Peter's readers came from a Jewish background. Peter calls even *their* background an empty way of life. The First Lesson for today shows Peter speaking about the empty way of life the Jews once had: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36, EHV). The religion of the Jews had been turned into a tyranny of blindly following the laws of God, without looking in hope to what God promised to come. Emptiness.

Another way to translate the word for "emptiness" in our text is "lacking truth." When Jesus was on trial, Pontius Pilate asked him: "What is truth?" (John 18:38, EHV). Without Jesus, people lack a source of concrete, absolute truth. They search for truth wherever they can, but they always come up empty.

Even people who were close followers of Christ sometimes displayed an emptiness of understanding. Today's Gospel shares an example of such emptiness: "The chief priests and our rulers handed [Jesus] over to be condemned to death. And they crucified him. ²¹But we were hoping that he was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:20-21, EHV). The Emmaus disciples were sad and dejected because they didn't understand what Jesus had come to do. After all their time of following Jesus' life and ministry closely, they were still looking for political salvation rather than spiritual salvation.

Society today is far superior to that of either the gentile or the Jewish Christians to whom Peter wrote, isn't it? Maybe not so much. The philosophers of this age claim to look to science for answers, but science is filled with theories with no absolute truth to *really* get to the bottom of things. Many Christians concern themselves more with political agendas

and trying to right social wrongs than with a concern for sharing the gospel.

II.

But it isn't just the gentile way of life or the Jewish way of life from Peter's day which displays an emptiness. It isn't only those "other people" in today's society without Christ or even only those who ignore parts of Scripture or those who use the words of Jesus to correct social injustice who are caught in an empty way of life. *Sin* is an empty way of life.

"If you call on the Father who judges impartially, according to the work of each person, conduct yourselves during the time of your pilgrimage in reverence" (1 Peter 1:17, EHV). Peter tells you to conduct yourself in reverence. And why? Because God judges impartially.

Is your Christian life superficial? Spiritual; that has become a faith buzzword lately. Do you have a "spiritual" life? Is your spirituality shallow? Through the last few weeks of the Lenten season and into the beginning of the Easter season, churches with livestream services saw a dramatic increase in views, often surpassing their regular attendance figures. Perhaps some who often don't turn to God or think about God were turning in desperation to a God they really don't know, or have only a shallow relationship with.

You and I look to a Father who judges impartially. Whether you are new to Christianity or have followed Christ your entire life, when God looks at your life, what he sees is not pretty. At times your spirituality is shallow. At times your worldly fears take hold to such a degree you forget that God has promised to be with you and never forsake you, no matter what life throws at you. You count on the scientists and your fellow citizens to give you answers, rather than looking to God's Word.

III.

But remember, Peter didn't say you are *in* an empty way of life, he said: "You were redeemed from your empty way of life" (1 Peter 1:18, EHV). How was that accomplished? "...not with things that pass away, such as silver or gold" (1 Peter 1:18, EHV). True redemption cannot be accomplished by buying your way into it. It cannot be accomplished by the knowledge of this world, or the scientific achievements of this world, or *any* of the other *things* of this world.

The Jewish people who followed the religious establishment of Jesus' day looked to the Old Testament ceremonial law to make them right with God. They were to perfectly fulfill the law of God. Peter spoke of that right before today's Lesson. Quoting from Leviticus, He said: "For it is written, 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:16, EHV).

Many religious leaders at the time of Jesus apparently thought that was possible for a person to accomplish. The ceremonial law of the Old Testament, however, recognized that the people could never *really* do that. That's why there were sacrifices that were required. They were to pay for the inability of the people to "be perfect." When the people made a sacrifice, they were to pick the best animals possible; they were to look for animals without any blemishes or spots.

"You were redeemed from your empty way of life ... ¹⁹with the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19, EHV). The sacrifices of the Old Testament really didn't do the job. Animals weren't sufficient. Those sacrifices pointed ahead to the one sacrifice that *was* sufficient to redeem people. Redeem means "buy back." Jesus' precious blood and his innocent sufferings and death *were* sufficient to make the payment God demands for sin.

Looking to Jesus and his perfect sacrifice is *not* an empty way of life—it is the *only* way of life—the only way *to* life. "[Jesus] was chosen before the foundation of the world but revealed in these last times for your sake" (1 Peter 1:20, EHV). Before the foundation of the

world—before Adam and Eve were even *created*, God knew there would be sin. He knew the relationship between himself and the crown of his creation would be marred beyond repair. Even though it would seem hopeless, God would not leave his people without hope. Though his relationship with human beings was beyond repair, God himself would repair it. He knew of *your* need, and he sent Jesus to fix it.

IV.

“Through him you are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” (1 Peter 1:21, EHV). You have been led away from an empty way of life to faith in Christ Jesus. You see him and you know him as the only way to a restored relationship with God.

Now what? Back to the first verse of today’s Lesson: “Conduct yourselves during the time of your pilgrimage in reverence” (1 Peter 1:17, EHV). In short, Peter is saying, “Live as a child of God.”

To be sure, your concerns and earthly fears at this moment in history will be similar to those of everyone else around you. You, however, approach these things without the same emptiness and abject fear of an unbeliever. You know that no matter what happens, God is in control and will work even the bad things of this life for your good.

Part of living as a child of God is to repeat the words of King David in the Psalm of the day: “I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever. With my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations” (Psalm 89:1, EHV). Share your faith.

Keep the empty cross and the forgiveness of Jesus always at the forefront of your mind. Your lack of emptiness will be evident in your reverence for the Lord. Your praise of his Name will resonate so that others may see the most important work ever done—the work of Jesus to atone for the world. “Conduct yourselves in reverence” in everything you do. Amen.