

GOD HAS TAKEN CARE OF OUR SALVATION

Why do Christians so often live unsanctified lives? Because we don't think. In 1 Peter 1:17-21, the first half of our Second Reading from today, Peter helps us to get our thinking straight, to see things as they really are. In fact, he is so intense that this whole paragraph in the original Greek pours out all as one sentence. Think! Remember to whom you're praying - to your Father! You are connected to Him now, and everything you do reflects on His reputation. God cares not only about how we talk but also about what we do with our lives. Respectful, God-fearing children know that the word *Father* is not just a magic word to be invoked - it is a sacred relationship that calls us to a new way of thinking *and living*. In John chapter 8, Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for their complacency- they called on the Father, but they were not of the Father because their deeds were evil. They were not listening to God's Word, and their true father was really the devil.

Peter reminds his readers of *the worthless lives you had handed over to you from your fathers*, (v. 18). Perhaps Peter was referring to Jewish listeners, people who grew up under the yoke of Judaism, rabbinic legalism, and the Talmud (a mammoth compendium of opinions of the rabbis). That way of life had become empty, for it dissolved the sure words of God into a babble of conflicting human opinions and interpretations. It was empty because it made demands of holiness and austerity on people without the forgiving grace and mercy of the Messiah. That way of life always leads either to pride, imagining that your own efforts are good enough for God, or to despair, knowing that your own efforts will never be good enough for God. What an empty way to spend your life!

But what the religious traditions of the Greeks offered was even worse. In Greek culture people were taught that their destinies were already determined, controlled by three mysterious and capricious women called the three "Fates." They were taught that death brought their souls across a grim underground river to the realm of Hades, a gray and cheerless world. Here the spirits of the dead drifted aimlessly to and fro with troubled and eternally vacant faces. A few favorites of the gods, such as great poets and heroes, made it to the paradise of Elysium, and those whom the gods wished to punish were doomed to Tartarus, a place of eternal torment. "Empty!" said Peter.

As you live your lives, remember what it cost God to make you His own - the precious blood of Christ. The Father is that serious about claiming you! The Son is that serious about rescuing you! The sacrificial lambs of the Old Testament ceremonial laws had to be outwardly perfect, without defect or blemish (Exodus 12:5). They symbolised the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. On the cross, outwardly, Jesus didn't look too good - as Isaiah said prophetically, "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him (53:2)" - but His was an *inward* perfection, without defect or blemish of sin (Hebrews 7:26). The blood of Jesus Christ has done what no other religion or philosophy in human history could do - remove sinful guilt from human beings and put in its place God's own righteousness, and all this as God's gift, received by faith. The Father showed that He accepted the Son's sacrificial gift by raising Jesus from the dead and glorifying Him at His right hand. This is our faith; this is our hope.

Peter said that this was God's plan from all eternity. Our minds are fixed in a system of measured time. We move only forward and at one set speed. But God roams back and forth in time, seeing individual moments and the big picture all at the same time. As God was planning creation, as He designed people to be holy and perfect and pure in the Garden of Eden, He also foresaw the need for a Saviour. From all eternity the Son was chosen as the Redeemer of God's fallen creatures, and now, in this New Testament age, He has finally been revealed as the One who will lift us back to God's favour.

