

April 19, 2026  
“Fairly Judged”  
1 Peter 1:17-23

**Intro:**

With Cody being a student at Luther College, it has gotten me reminiscing every now and then of the good old days when I graced those hallowed halls as a student. As I share some of those stories with my family, the kids laugh, and Cindy wonders how I managed to graduate at all.

One of my fond memories happened in art class. The teacher, who has since passed away, was a bit of an eccentric fellow but also a really talented artist and art teacher. I enjoyed his classes. This particular memory revolved around a project that we had to work on in pairs. I was paired up with Claire, who was a friend and all around fun person, and we decided to paint an abstract type of artwork. The end result was a painting of blue and red triangles, squares, rectangles, and one large yellow circle on a white background. We called it “Snowballs in July”. When we got the marks back, we discovered a problem. I had received an 80% (which if you have ever seen me try to draw something is a respectable grade), but Claire had been given a 90%, even though we had both contributed equally to the work. Naturally we asked the teacher about this, and his response was that he liked Claire better than me, and I really couldn’t fault him for that.

Most people in this situation would have cried foul, that this was unfair and unjust. Looking at it with perspective, it wasn’t fair. But it does illustrate our human tendency to play favourites – consciously and sub-consciously. There are people we just naturally gravitate towards more than others. The reasons for our favouritism shift and change, and likely involve reasons that we can’t explain or understand ourselves, but that doesn’t really matter because we still place some people ahead of others. Because of this, we tend to judge others, and ourselves, more or less harshly depending on our favouritism scale.

### **The Passage:**

This is the topic that Peter is addressing in the passage from 1 Peter that we have just read. The larger context of this section, which begins at verse 13 and extends into chapter 2:3, is a challenge to holy living. We must be careful to keep that in mind as we focus in on the section from verse 17 to 23, which is what was set forth in the lectionary reading for this Sunday.

In this larger call to holy living, it isn't just a matter of strictly following the rules. It is more than that. It is acknowledging that because Christ has given himself for us, and we have in turn committed our lives to following Him, that our human nature is in the process of being transformed into godly nature and that we need to allow the Holy Spirit to do that transformative work in us.

The first point of this is picked up in verse 17: "And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in a reverent fear of him during your time here as 'temporary residents'."

We like to play the game of favourites. We like being chosen above others. As much as I valued Claire as a friend, I was miffed that the teacher liked her better than me. We think that life is a game with winners and losers, and so we compete. We try to be better than those around us. We try to do more, or be nicer, or talk louder to get attention. We try to curry favour. Most of the time, this is not malicious or because we honestly don't like the person we are competing with, but simply because we like getting the recognition – the pat on the back or the gold star. We like to be noticed. And it is good to give that kind of positive notice to people.

But that is not how God works. He doesn't play the game of favourites. There are no people at the "head of the class" in the kingdom of heaven. You might want to argue with me at this point by pointing out that God chose and elevated various people throughout the Old Testament especially. This is correct, but I would argue that the trials and difficulties those people faced as a result of God's choosing

them might not seem like a blessing. But this isn't what Peter is talking about. He is talking about the grace of forgiveness that comes through Christ.

In this measure, which is the only measure that matters, God does not pick favourites. Jesus died for all people, everywhere, and for all time. God so loved the *world*, not just the select elite. And that extravagant love wasn't paid by gold or silver or the inconsistent standards of wealth and value in this world, but by the wealth of Heaven, which is the very blood of the Son of God. There is no greater payment that could be asked or that could be paid. And we have each received a full portion of that payment. Nothing more, and certainly nothing less. Because this is the measure of the payment, we are all placed on an equal playing field as children of God.

This is what it means when we talk about God not showing favouritism. Yes, in this world and life, some people get more than others. Peter says those are temporary things that will fade and lose their value. It is the eternal life-giving blood of Christ that is the true treasure we receive and that treasure will never diminish or lose its value, and it is given equally to all.

### **Fairly Judged:**

If God does not show favouritism, then how are we to respond, especially as we live in a world where there are winners and losers, and competition is almost second-nature?

Just as God does not play favorites, so also, He offers fair and equal judgement on how each of us embraces the call to holy living. And the score card that God uses is not complicated.

Cody is in the midst of mid-term exams right now, and I was taking a look at one of the rubrics he had been given that outlines what is required to get top marks on the exam. There is quite the system of levels and expectations that are used to determine the final grade. This rubric is a helpful tool for the teacher to maintain consistency in the grading (my art teacher did not use such a system!), and also

helpful to the student to be able to gauge what result they will get based on the amount of work they know they have put in.

God's rubric is far simpler. It is a matter of how we treat one another. When Peter says that God will judge based on what you do or do not do, he is not talking about piling up a list of good deeds, or acts of "holier-than-thou". He is simply, and profoundly, saying that what matters to God, what He is grading on, is how we treat one another. In verse 22 the simple instruction is to show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. And in case that wasn't clear enough, Peter adds "Love each other deeply with all your heart."

This is the foundation of holy living. From here, all the things that are mentioned in 1 Peter 2:1 are dealt with. If we are loving with all our heart – the whole of our being – then there is no room for evil behaviour, as Peter puts it. Love pushes those things out of our heart. It is a total spring cleaning with eviction notices handed out.

**Practice:**

It all starts with the family – our home families and our church family. How we treat our family is how we will treat those not part of the family. So how do we treat our family well, so that we will also treat those not yet part of the family in a holy way?

Peter tells us in verse 2:1 – be done with deceit. Deceit isn't just bald-face lying. It is gossip. It is trying to manipulate people or situations so that we come out looking good (or better than someone else), or to our advantage. Be done with hypocrisy. This is one of the biggest factors in people rejecting Christ in their lives – observing Christians who claim to embrace the love of Christ, and then turn around and destroy others with hatred or selfishness.

Be done with jealousy. Jesus talked about removing the plank from our own eye before worrying about the speck in someone else's. The same principle applies with jealousy. Jealousy comes about because we think the gift/talent/blessing

received by a brother or sister in Christ is better than what we have been given. Not only does this drive a wedge between people, it cheapens and rejects the gifts that God has given to you.

Be done with all unkind speech. Nothing destroys relationships faster than using words to wound. We might say we mean no offence, but then we say something offensive. Again, gossip fits here, judgmental comments, and speaking without also listening.

Holy living invites the opposite of those things. It calls us to be transparent and upright in our dealings with one another. It calls us to be consistent in our behaviour and our words. It calls us to celebrate the blessings of others as though they were our own. It calls us to use our words to build up, not tear down. It calls us to listen and to think before we speak.

**Conclusion:**

It is easy in life to think that things are not fair, that we have somehow been short-changed. But we have not been short-changed by God. We have been and are equally and fairly treated and blessed. We are also equally and fairly judged by God, not as punishment, but to see us grow in holiness and to see the family of God grow.

Remember: You are so greatly loved by God... therefore go out and greatly love those who are part of God's family, and those who are not yet part of it.

Let's pray.