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ANCHORED IN IDENTITY: OPPOSITION AND THE  
IDENTITY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN 1 PETER

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Ian James Hales  
December 2021

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ANCHORED IN IDENTITY: OPPOSITION AND THE  
IDENTITY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN 1 PETER

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For the glory of God.

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## PREFACE

It is difficult to express the overwhelming debt of gratitude I owe to so many who have supported, encouraged, and helped me on this journey. The personal growth and development I have enjoyed during this season of education and writing has been the result of the kindness and grace of a multitude of people who deserve to be recognized and honored. I am truly grateful for the faculty and staff of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and especially those in the Biblical Theology department who helped me grow in my love for God and his Word throughout the entirety of this program. It has been a joy to dig deeper into the Scriptures and see the beauty and glory of the grand story of redemption.

First, to the elders of Redemption Church who have always supported my desire for further education, thank you. Your willingness to serve with me and to serve me and my family during this season has been a source of great joy and refreshment. Your own desire to grow in the knowledge of the Lord and to shepherd the flock of God among us has spurred me on and encouraged my soul. It is a joy and delight to serve with you men and I thank God for you.

To the faithful flock at Redemption Church who prayed for me, encouraged my growth and development, and labored alongside me in the work of the Lord, thank you. One of the greatest joys in ministry is preaching to those who love Jesus and love the Word of God. Your eagerness to hear and obey God's Word is a testimony to your love for the Lord and desire to bring glory to him. It is a privilege to preach Christ to you and to grow together in our love for the Savior.

I would be remiss if I did not thank my advisor, Jay Owens, whose insights and help has been invaluable. From the very beginning he enthusiastically encouraged this

project and believed in its value for the church. Thank you for your words of wisdom and guidance throughout this process. Thank you also to Betsy Fredrick for her editing expertise and help in finalizing this project.

Finally, to my family. Karis, Joshua, and Caleb, you have watched your Dad try to juggle the many demands of life, ministry, and school. Your loving encouragement and patience with me during this season have helped me more than you know. My love for you has only grown in this season and I pray that we continue to grow in our love for each other and for Jesus as we enjoy life together. You are a delight and joy to your Dad. Sarah, you are a loving and faithful wife. Your encouragement and support have been invaluable. Your loving sacrifice during this season has not gone unnoticed. It has been a joy to grow together and to draw near to the Lord. Being married to you is the greatest evidence of grace in my life next to my salvation.

God has filled my life with many good things and his grace to me overflows. I am grateful most of all to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ whom I love even more now because of this project. May this work and my life bring him alone all glory, honor, and praise.

Ian Hales

Whitby, Ontario

December 2021

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the people of God have been met with great hostility from the world. Ever since the cross and resurrection, followers of Jesus have endured hardship for the sake of the gospel. Even today, many suffer and even die for the name of Jesus. However, for many in North America, the concept of suffering for Jesus is difficult to grasp. It has long been an issue only for those in other parts of the world. But the tides of culture are changing, and the church must be prepared for greater opposition. The church must learn to embrace a living hope found only in the gospel in order to remain faithful in an increasingly hostile world. The book of 1 Peter anchors believers' identity as the people of God in the gospel and provides the church with a firm foundation in times of increasing hostility. Since 1 Peter shapes Christian identity as the people of God to help the church stand firm in the face of opposition, the aim of this project is to preach through 1 Peter and shape the identity of Redemption Church Durham to help them stand firm in the face of rising cultural opposition.

#### **Definition and Purpose of Biblical Theology**

Biblical theology is not simply theology found in the Bible. D. A. Carson notes that biblical theology involves “the articulation and exposition of the structure of thought of a particular biblical writer or corpus . . . and the delineation of a biblical theme across all or part of the biblical corpora.”<sup>1</sup> James Hamilton helpfully suggests that biblical theology is “the attempt to understand and embrace the interpretive perspective of the

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<sup>1</sup> See the series preface of the New Studies in Biblical theology found in G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 9.

biblical authors.”<sup>2</sup> The goal of biblical theology is to understand how Scripture develops and how both the divine and human authors advance the overarching story of the Bible. In doing so, biblical theology shows how the continuity and multiformity of the Bible display one divine author and one ultimate metanarrative. While I take this approach throughout this project, it should be noted that historically there have been a variety of ways to understand and practice biblical theology.<sup>3</sup>

To understand the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors special attention must be paid to what they wrote. One must understand, as much as is possible, not only the world they lived in but how they understood the revelation that preceded them. It is also imperative to understand how they interpreted Scripture in their context and as they looked to the future, as well as how they continued to develop, expand upon, or extend the theology, themes, and patterns of Scripture. Seeing the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors allows modern interpreters to make better sense of what they wrote and how it should be interpreted and applied to a modern context.

Such a view of biblical theology is helpful when interpreting 1 Peter because it is filled with Old Testament language and imagery.<sup>4</sup> Peter seems to be intentionally adopting language previously reserved for Old Testament Israel and applying it without reservation to the New Testament Church. In so doing, Peter teaches how to understand the development of Israel as God’s chosen people, showing as well that there is important continuity between the Old and New Testaments. An intended theological trajectory must also be embraced by the church in order to remain faithful in a world that is often hostile toward the Christian faith. Peter anchors the church by placing their feet firmly upon their identity as His chosen people that He has promised to protect, preserve, and deliver.

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<sup>2</sup> James M. Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 20-21.

<sup>3</sup> See for example the discussion by Klink and Lockett on the five “types” of biblical theology found in Edward W. Klink and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> See 1 Pet 1:1, 17; 2:5, 9-12, 25; 4:17.

Biblical theology not only helps us understand 1 Peter, it also helps with the communication of 1 Peter through preaching.

### **Biblical Theology and Preaching**

Christians have long believed that the preaching of God’s Word is central to the growth of God’s people. If preaching is the principal method designed by God for making and maturing disciples of Jesus, then theology is the principal means by which this happens. As Kevin J. Vanhoozer notes, “The church, like Israel, is a set-apart people with a set-apart mission: to proclaim, embody, and inhabit the kingdom of God. To use Augustine’s image: the church is the city of God, and the purpose of church ministry is to help members live lives worthy of citizens of the gospel (Phil. 1:27).”<sup>5</sup> Those called to the preaching ministry of the church bear significant responsibility in shaping the theology of believers and thereby shaping their spiritual growth and maturity. Preachers, therefore, must not neglect the role and impact of biblical theology as they minister to the church.

Biblical theology is vital for faithful biblical preaching. It is easy to both misunderstand and therefore misapply a text if it is not rightly understood in its immediate and redemptive-historical context. While many preachers pay attention to the immediate context of a passage, they often neglect the canonical and biblical theological context. Due to the Bible’s unity, determining where a particular text sits within the overarching story is critical for a full understanding of the passage. In fact, Stephen Wellum and Peter Gentry suggest that a text is not properly interpreted unless it is set within three particular contexts: the textual, the epochal, and the canonical.<sup>6</sup> This contextual grid allows the preacher to not only understand the passage in light of the storyline of the Bible, but to demonstrate where and how it unfolds the storyline of the Bible. With this contextual

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<sup>5</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Hearers & Doers: A Pastor’s Guide to Making Disciples Through Scripture and Doctrine* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), xix.

<sup>6</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL Crossway, 2018), 119-27.

understanding the preacher can properly connect these truths to the lives of those living in their contemporary context.

As previously stated, Hamilton argues that biblical theology (at least in part) is about understanding the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors. Biblical theology then concerns proper hermeneutics. Good preachers do not simply deliver a correct interpretation of the biblical text; they are teaching their people how to study and interpret the text for themselves. Equipping the congregation for Bible study entails showing how the biblical authors read, interpreted, and applied the previous biblical texts. In effect, Scripture becomes the authority on how to interpret Scripture. Biblical authors teach biblical pastors how to teach biblical hermeneutics and Bible study habits to their people. Admittedly, it is not always easy to discern how the biblical authors are interpreting or applying past revelation, and this has been the source of much disagreement. However, careful exegetes will be able to assess how biblical authors faithfully interpret Scripture without violating the original context, and weave or unpack these truths and themes into their own authoritative writings.

One of the great benefits of biblical theology in preaching is the opportunity to make the text primarily about God rather than his creation. Faithful biblical preaching is always God-centered rather than man-centered. Unfortunately, preachers who are eager to apply the text in relevant ways to their people can unwittingly do a disservice to the text and the God it displays. Biblical theology, however, can be a safeguard against sloppy exegesis and sloppy application. Biblical theology constantly keeps God at the center, and his plan of redemption at the forefront. If every passage is ultimately about how God is redeeming and restoring his creation, then every passage, no matter how applicable to our lives, points us back to the glory of our God. If done properly, this does not remove application but instead enhances application with the right motivation and proper perspective, reminding us that this life is not fundamentally about us, but about the God who has chosen to save us.

Since 1 Peter makes so many connections to the Old Testament, there may be some confusion as to how Peter is using the Old Testament in relation to the New Testament church. The understanding of biblical theology I present will help to evaluate Peter's hermeneutic and provide ample opportunity to understand and embrace the interpretive perspective he sets forth in his epistle.

### **Why This Topic?**

To claim the name of Jesus is always costly. Ironically, being accepted by God through faith in Jesus Christ has often meant being rejected by the world. How does the church today learn to live in light of this reality, especially as hostility from the culture increases? The church in North America faces a unique challenge in this post-Christian climate.<sup>7</sup> For the church to thrive as pressure and persecution increase, the people of God must be grounded in their biblical theological identity.

The people of God have always been ostracized. They have always been out of step with culture and society and have always been viewed as different. Resistance is not unusual nor is it unexpected. In fact, it is God's design and will for his people. God's children are not a people who assimilate into the culture and become like the pagan nations that surround them; they infiltrate the culture and stand out as radically different from those pagan nations. They have always been called to view themselves as sojourners and exiles passing by on the way to their homeland. With this newfound identity and citizenship come both blessing and burden, trial and triumph, hardship and hope.

The Bible traces this story of God's people. Sadly, this story is often filled with compromise and capitulation. Rather than standing out from the nations, God's people often become like those nations. Rather than infiltrate with the gospel, they assimilate with idolatry. The pressure to conform, temptation to embrace, and desire to avoid suffering

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<sup>7</sup> For a helpful analysis and discussion on the current state of the church and the challenges the church is facing, see Mark Sayers, *Disappearing Church: From Cultural Relevance to Gospel Resilience* (Chicago: Moody, 2016).

are strong deterrents to obeying the will of God. And yet, faithfulness is both expected and possible. God has always preserved a faithful remnant who embrace their identity, display their God, and hope in the promise of what is to come. However, how does the church of today remain faithful in the midst of an increasingly hostile world?

First Peter speaks directly to the church in the first century about the realities of following Christ as God's people. Peter does not offer new solutions to ancient problems. Instead, he connects the church back to their spiritual heritage and God-given identity, so that they can find hope and help to press on in the faith. What the church experiences in the first century to the present day is no different than what God's people have always had to endure. In addition, the truths that Israel understood and applied are the unchanging truths that must continue to sustain and strengthen the church through the last days. As Peter gathers up Old Testament truth and applies it to the church, one sees a masterful display of biblical theology intended to exhort, encourage, and equip the church, anchoring them in their identity as the chosen people of God.

### **Summary of Literature**

The literature summarized in this section is separated into three categories. The first section surveys top scholarly exegetical commentaries that engage the structure, grammar, and theology of 1 Peter. The second category surveys monographs concerning 1 Peter and includes some background literature helpful for understanding the socio-political context as well as the social and religious climate just prior to and including the first century Greco-Roman world. The third category summarizes biblical theology resources that further the understanding of the broader themes, patterns, and concepts being addressed in the book, including whole Bible biblical theologies, New Testament theologies, and works that address specific aspects of biblical theology.

## Commentaries

There is no shortage of quality commentaries on 1 Peter, but some exegetical works rise to the top. The Baker Exegetical Commentary Series is widely recognized for its consistent quality and academic integrity. The volume on 1 Peter by Karen Jobes interacts with historical scholarship providing helpful assessments of the differing views and clear conclusions based on careful exegesis.<sup>8</sup> Jobes does not shy away from contrary views but rather engages the arguments and supports her positions with thoughtful theological acumen. Aside from the exegesis, Jobes' commentary provides invaluable background material to help sort through the many debated questions and issues surrounding the book of 1 Peter.

Another important exegetical commentary on 1 Peter comes from Peter Davids.<sup>9</sup> While written before Jobes' commentary, Davids is widely recognized as a first-rate scholar and exegete, and his commentary has been an essential resource since its publication. Davids has more recently produced a theological companion to his commentary that interacts in more detail with the biblical theology found in 1 Peter.<sup>10</sup> This resource provides helpful theological insight and detailed interaction with the key themes of 1 Peter.

The New American Commentary series is well known for its clarity and accessibility. Thomas Schreiner has authored one of the series most formidable works.<sup>11</sup> According to D. A. Carson, "It is one of the most impressive volumes in the NAC series, nicely displaying Schreiner's exegesis and theological reflection couched in admirable

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<sup>8</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> Peter Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter and Jude*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 181.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003).

clarity.”<sup>12</sup> In this commentary, Schreiner displays his ability to think deeply while communicating clearly. It is a rare gem amongst scholarly works.

One of the most referenced commentaries in the field of scholarship is by Paul J. Achtemeier.<sup>13</sup> The Hermeneia series is renowned for its scholarship. It is academically rigorous and this particular volume is a masterclass of careful exegetical and theological scholarship. Achtemeier gives helpful perspective on how the author of 1 Peter uses Old Testament Scriptures and applies them to his recipients.<sup>14</sup> While the meat of the commentary is exceptional, the footnotes allow readers to pursue the finer points. While this commentary is of the highest caliber, it does not always hold to conservative theological interpretations. Regardless, it provides the best arguments even for lesser held or more liberal perspectives.

Another important commentary that explores Peter’s use of language to ground the identity of God’s people is *A Home for the Homeless* by John H. Elliott.<sup>15</sup> The title of this book hints at its significant contribution for understanding the context of the recipients of Peter’s letter. Elliott’s exegetical work contributes to a greater understanding of how God’s people are to consider the dualistic nature of their existence in the time before the second coming of Christ. Elliott asks the important question: “If the recipients are indeed ‘strangers in a strange land,’ then in what sense are they simultaneously and paradoxically

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<sup>12</sup> D. A. Carson, *New Testament Commentary Survey*, 7th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 146.

<sup>13</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> For further discussion on this point see Achtemeier’s helpful essay, Paul J. Achtemeier, “The Christology of First Peter,” in *Who Do You Say That I Am? Essays on Christology*, ed. Mark A. Powell and David R. Bauer (Louisville: Westminster, 1999), 140-54. For Achtemeier, the christology of 1 Pet serves as support for the ethical admonitions throughout the letter.

<sup>15</sup> John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981).

‘at home with’ or ‘the household of’ God?’<sup>16</sup> Questions of identity prove to be central for Peter’s desire that the people of God stand firm in the faith.

First Peter broadly illuminates how Christians and Christianity was perceived and treated in the first century. However, much can be elucidated by further development of the historical context of the early first century and intertestamental period. N. T. Wright provides a helpful resource in *The New Testament and the People of God*.<sup>17</sup> He details the development of Judaism leading up to the first century. Wright looks at the influence of Hellenization as well as the hopes and expectations of the different sects of Judaism. He helpfully paints the setting in which Christianity emerges and begins to flourish. Similar to Wright’s work, Oskar Skarsaune’s *In the Shadow of the Temple*,<sup>18</sup> provides an analysis of the Judaism under the rule of the Roman empire. Skarsaune also provides helpful commentary on the dynamics of the early church and the persecution they frequently faced.

Additionally, Larry W. Hurtado has recently provided a helpful contribution in the area of historical context. In *Destroyer of the gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World*,<sup>19</sup> Hurtado helps fill in some gaps by showing how Christianity was perceived by the Roman authorities. While his work branches beyond the first century, the information detailed in this work provides helpful insight into the Jewish and Christian relations, as well of the treatment of the early church by the ruling authorities. Understanding how the Roman authorities viewed Christian distinctiveness adds much value to the suffering and persecution alluded to in 1 Peter.

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<sup>16</sup> Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless*, 24.

<sup>17</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016).

## Monographs on 1 Peter

A recent publication entitled *Strangers to Family*<sup>20</sup> seeks to look through diaspora as a theme for understanding how to live as a Christian in a pagan world. In this work, Shively Smith argues that *diaspora* is a term being used to describe the Christian's condition not as a rootless wandering, but a created condition "controlled, and remedied by God, which has implication for the social situation and movements of God's people. The movements of diaspora people, therefore, are never without purpose, direction, or aim."<sup>21</sup> Her contribution helps nuance the rubric of exile-sojourner often used for interpreting 1 Peter. As it relates to identity, Smith states, "Fundamentally, the letter's construction of diaspora existence encodes and transmits foundational ideas about Christian identity and reality."<sup>22</sup> This nuance gives helpful perspective on why Christian identity matters for living faithfully.

Elliott's *The Elect and the Holy: An Exegetical Examination of 1 Peter 2:4-10 and the Phrase "Basileion Hierateuma"* is another significant work.<sup>23</sup> Here, Elliott sets out to examine the passage within the title in light of the concept of the priesthood of all believers. Elliott seeks to discredit the way this verse is used and believes many have used this verse wrongly as a proof-text for the priesthood of all believers as it is commonly understood. He argues that this passage is primarily about the election of the people of God and how that identity influences the way they live in holiness.<sup>24</sup> Elliot interacts with the themes of the New Exodus and indicates that through faith in Christ the

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<sup>20</sup> Shively T. J. Smith, *Strangers to Family: Diaspora and 1 Peter's Invention of God's Household* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 8.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 42.

<sup>23</sup> John H. Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy: An Exegetical Examination of 1 Peter 2:4-10 and the Phrase "Basileion Hierateuma"* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1966).

<sup>24</sup> Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy*, 73.

status and identity of the elect crosses ethnic boundaries. No longer is the status limited to the Jewish nation, but incorporates all nations.

Similar to Elliott, William W. Klein's book, *The New Chosen People*, looks at the question of election and identity in 1 Peter.<sup>25</sup> However, Klein focuses attention on the corporate nature of election in contrast to the individual nature. In arguing for his corporate view of election he states, "Peter did not say God chose some to save, nor even that God chose those whose eventual faith he foresaw. Rather Peter uses it expansively to refer to himself and his Christian readers, and all they are."<sup>26</sup> While his conclusions may be questionable, his interaction with the concepts of identity as God's chosen people as it pertains to the New Testament church are a helpful contribution to this project.

Stephen Ayodeji Fagbemi has authored a helpful monograph entitled *Who Are the Elect in 1 Peter?*<sup>27</sup> While the scope of this work is somewhat narrow, driving toward application specific to the Anglican Church of Nigeria, the exegesis of specific texts and interaction with relevant scholarship makes this a valuable resource for this project. For example, Fagbemi states, "The frequent use of imageries such as the household of God (2:5; 4:17) or brotherhood (2:17; 5:9), the familial terms of 5:12-13; household instruction pattern in 2:18-5:5, among others, were intended to create an identity for them as people belonging together."<sup>28</sup> These identity markers were all a part of finding their primary identity as the people of God, enabling them to stand firm as resident aliens.

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<sup>25</sup> William W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

<sup>26</sup> Klein, *The New Chosen People*, 246.

<sup>27</sup> Stephen Ayodeji A. Fagbemi, *Who Are the Elect in 1 Peter? A Study in Biblical Exegesis and Its Application to the Anglican Church of Nigeria*, Studies in Biblical Literature 104 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> Fagbemi, *Who Are the Elect in 1 Peter?*, 52.

The more recent scholarly work produced by Abson Joseph provides some helpful content to consider.<sup>29</sup> For example, Joseph notes, “First Peter’s theological hermeneutic of the Old Testament has to do with the author’s understanding of the theological role the Old Testament plays in shaping the identity and behavior of the audience, and in the formation and transformation of his audience, more specifically, as it relates to their response to suffering.”<sup>30</sup> By addressing the continuity between the testaments and the hermeneutical perspective of the biblical author, the identity of the believer is held forth as an essential reality for standing firm in the faith.

### **Theological Resources**

A couple of key New Testament and whole Bible theologies will be utilized in this project. George Ladd offers an important contribution to biblical theology in *A Theology of the New Testament*.<sup>31</sup> In this volume Ladd outlines what the various New Testament authors teach, while addressing critical questions and interacting with a variety of scholars. Likewise, G. K. Beale in his more recent New Testament theology offers a helpful perspective on the various themes found within the New Testament.<sup>32</sup> Beale consistently shows how earlier Scripture sheds light on what comes later, and how the New Testament’s use of the Old gives greater understanding of what came before. Beale, along with D. A. Carson collaborated in their in-depth volume entitled *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*.<sup>33</sup> As the title states, Beale and Carson present a detailed analysis of the Old Testament quotations and allusions found in the

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<sup>29</sup> Abson P. Joseph, *A Narratological Reading of 1 Peter* (London: T & T Clark, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Joseph, *A Narratological Reading of 1 Peter*, 54.

<sup>31</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> G. K. Beale and D.A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

New Testament, which contribute to a greater understanding of how the overarching story of the Bible was understood and applied through the fulfillment of Christ.

Two whole Bible theologies (and perhaps a third), are worth noting here as well. First, James Hamilton's *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment* seeks to identify and trace the main theme (suggested in the title), through each book of the Bible.<sup>34</sup> This helpful book addresses the many Old Testament quotes and allusion found in 1 Peter which will be a valuable contribution to this project. More recently, Thomas Schreiner has written a whole Bible theology that traces the title and theme, *The King in His Beauty*, through both Testaments.<sup>35</sup> His many insights, and ability to trace the progress of revelation, help to clarify the connection between the Old Covenant people of God and New Covenant people of God in their shared identity. In many ways, Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum have also produced a whole Bible theology in which they trace the theme of God's kingdom as it unfolds through the narrative plot structure of the covenants.<sup>36</sup> Their detailed exposition of the biblical covenants presents a suggested structure through which God is progressively revealing and accomplishing His plan of redemption.

Two other contributions in the area of biblical theology are worth mentioning. While neither are whole Bible theologies or even New Testament Theologies, both add important insights to how the New Testament should be interpreted and understood. Beale's fascinating and thorough treatment of the temple has aided biblical theology by establishing the trajectory of the temple, stretching its origin back to the Garden of Eden

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<sup>34</sup> James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*.

as the first “cosmic temple,” forward to the New Jerusalem.<sup>37</sup> His work is not only filled with valuable insights into God’s Word but also serves as a model of how to do thematic biblical theology. Temple theology is present in 1 Peter and therefore this work will prove useful in developing this theme as it relates to identity. Stephen Dempster has written an important Old Testament biblical theology entitled *Dominion and Dynasty*.<sup>38</sup> Dempster demonstrates the intentional structural and thematic unity of the Old Testament, showing how the overarching narrative framework develops from Adam to David and into the New Testament. His understanding of the Old Testament people of God provides useful insight into how 1 Peter applies Old Testament passages and patterns.

### **Overview of Biblical Texts**

The following seven texts found in the letter of 1 Peter serve to advance Peter’s goal that the believers receiving this letter will “stand firm” in the face of opposition (5:12). This letter is significant in its use of the Old Testament Scriptures. Davids notes, “There are at least eighteen citations of the Hebrew Scriptures (usually clearly from the Greek translation, for our author’s ‘Bible’ was Greek).”<sup>39</sup> That is to say nothing of the possible allusions and connections Peter makes. It is clear that the author of this letter is well versed in the Hebrew Scriptures. However, it is not simply that Peter references the Hebrew Scriptures, but how he does so that is vital for this study. To help his first century readers/hearers stand firm and remain faithful, Peter links their experience to the similar experiences of the Old Covenant people of God. He draws attention to their continuity with Israel. Elliot notes, “The letter employs a diversity of OT text, motifs, and themes in order to illustrate the ancient heritage to which the Christian brotherhood is heir and to

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<sup>37</sup> Beale’s work on the temple is a classic example of this approach. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 79-80.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*. New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003).

<sup>39</sup> Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter and Jude*, 181.

provide scriptural and hence authoritative substantiation for its message of affirmation and exhortation.”<sup>40</sup> With this information in mind, seven texts will be explicated in this project:

### **First Peter 1:1-3**

This introductory paragraph is loaded with rich theology intended to anchor the exhortations that follow. It is also crucial for establishing the Old Testament connections and some important themes related to biblical theology. Peter greets the recipients with the term ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδήμιος, calling them the “elect exiles of the Dispersion” (1:1).<sup>41</sup> This phrase creates an obvious paradox that permeates the epistle.<sup>42</sup> It also seems to indicate that he is writing to a group of Jewish Christians in Asia Minor. However, the evidence of the rest of the epistle seems to indicate that the original audience is actually Gentile Christians “redeemed from the empty way of life that was your heritage” (1:18; cf 4:3-4).<sup>43</sup> Michaels notes, “The apparent inconsistency can only be resolved by candidly acknowledging that Peter is addressing certain communities of Gentile Christians as if they were Jews.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries, vol. 37 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 17.

<sup>41</sup> Elliot highlights the significance of the social realities that the audience faced. He rightly challenges the interpretation that Peter uses these terms exclusively in a theological or metaphorical sense. However, he wrongly argues that these terms should be understood exclusively as sociological designations. Elliot, *1 Peter*, 313. Rather, these terms should be understood as both theological and sociological.

<sup>42</sup> Joseph, *A Narratological Reading of 1 Peter*, 75.

<sup>43</sup> Thielman notes that most commentators believe 1 Peter was written to a group that included both Jews and Gentiles. See, e.g., Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1947), 42-44; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 50-51; Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless*, 65-67, 95-97. While it is more than likely that there are some Jewish Christians within these churches, 1:18 and 4:3 show that Peter is thinking of Gentiles when he writes and that he considers these Gentiles to be heirs to the promises of Israel.

<sup>44</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 7.

Peter continues to draw upon Old Testament allusions referencing the “sprinkling with his blood” (1:2), which is likely a reference to Exodus 24:3-8 where Moses invited the people to enter into the covenant with God. After agreeing to the covenant terms, oxen were sacrificed and Moses took the blood and threw it on the people declaring, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words” (24:8). In this sense, Peter is linking the New Covenant people of God with the Old Covenant people of God. Peter continues to make these links by referencing the “inheritance” being kept in heaven by God for believers. Schreiner notes that the language of “inheritance” in the Old Testament refers to the land God promised to his people.<sup>45</sup> It appears that Peter is expanding upon the land promise to ancient Israel and pointing toward its typological fulfillment in the new heavens and new earth.

### **First Peter 1:10-12**

In verses 10-12, Peter draws attention to the Old Testament prophets and their careful inquiry into their own prophecies.<sup>46</sup> These prophets knew they were serving a future generation of God’s people who would see the fulfillment of their prediction regarding the messiah—specifically his suffering and subsequent glory. Here the Scriptures offer a glimpse into the hermeneutic of Peter for how to read and interpret the Old Testament Scriptures. Achtemeier helpfully states, “This phrase points therefore to the continuity between prophets and gospel: both have the same inspirer and ultimately the

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<sup>45</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 62.

<sup>46</sup> Much has been written regarding this passage and its importance for understanding 1 Peter. For a survey of the discussion, see Jobes, *1 Peter*, 97-106; Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 60-65; Michaels, *1 Peter*, 38-50. I will address the strategic location of these verses in the opening section of the letter and how Peter’s hermeneutic conveyed therein permeates the entire epistle. These verses in particular have been identified as the basis for Peter’s hermeneutic.

same content.”<sup>47</sup> Understanding how Peter views the Old Testament allows the interpreter to understand how he is using the Old Testament, specifically as it relates to identifying the church with Israel.

These truths are intended to fuel the hope of believers as they suffer for Jesus and consider those who came before them to serve them in their time of need. These verses serve to strengthen the unity, origin, and substance of the Old Testament prophetic witness to the gospel. The Old Testament prophets and the New Testament authors are united not only in their view of the inspiration of the Scripture but by the fulfillment of those Scriptures in Christ. Achtemeier states that this fulfillment of the prophets’ message “is itself the beginning of the eschatological fulfillment they foresaw.”<sup>48</sup> This is the new identity and new reality that can begin to shape the lives of those who are God’s people.

### **First Peter 1:13-21**

After developing a theology of salvation in the introductory verses, Peter moves to exhort believers toward action. The language again draws attention to the primarily Gentile audience as those marked by “passions of your former ignorance” (1:14). Yet, this Gentile identity marker is followed by a distinctly Jewish call to be holy with a direct quote from Leviticus 11:44: “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” These words once reserved for Israel are now applied without reservation to the church of Jesus Christ.<sup>49</sup> Peter situates his exhortation within the context of Israel’s experience at Sinai. Joseph explains, “The words that were spoken to Israel are appropriated and applied to the audience’s experience because the holiness to which they are being called is consistent

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<sup>47</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 110. It is possible here to find a connection with Luke 24:26-27 where the hermeneutic of Jesus is the same. This text is paradigmatic for Peter’s use of the Old Testament. Schreiner notes, “The Old Testament Scriptures speak of Christ and those that belong to him. Since believers are united with Christ, the Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled with reference to Christ and those who believe in him.” Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 76.

<sup>48</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 113.

<sup>49</sup> Peter’s treatment of this concept connects the church to Israel where similar exhortations are made between election and holiness. See for example Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 17.

with God's character as revealed in God's dealings with the community of Israel."<sup>50</sup> As he establishes this continuity, Joseph then notes, "It appears that the role of Israel has been fulfilled by Jesus who now fills the church with His Spirit to accomplish His mission to reach the world with the gospel."<sup>51</sup> Identity and action cannot be separated in the biblical paradigm. This identity is ultimately established by the gospel.

Peter reminds them of this gospel yet again in 1:19, alluding to the blood of the Passover lamb that would be fulfilled in the death of Christ. This allusion follows on the heels of Peter telling them that they are to conduct themselves with fear throughout the time of their exile (1:17). The background for this kind of fear can be found in Deuteronomy 4:10, 8:6, as well as numerous sections of wisdom literature (e.g., Prov 1:29, 3:7, 9:10; Eccl 12:13). It should also be noted that the term *redeemed* or *ransomed* in 1:18 has significant connections to the Old Testament people of God. According to Schreiner, the term *redeem* and the word group recalls Israel's liberation from Egypt.<sup>52</sup>

### **First Peter 2:4-10**

In this section, Peter uses extensive Old Testament imagery to show that New Testament believers are a new people of God who possess all the blessings of Old Testament Israel but in much greater measure. Grudem notes that the idea of drawing near to God, as mentioned in 2:4, is frequently used in the LXX of "drawing near" to God, either to hear him speak (Lev 9:5; Deut 4:11) or to come into his presence in the tabernacle to offer sacrifices (Exod 12:48, 16:9; Lev 9:7-8).<sup>53</sup> The metaphor of the temple that Peter continues to employ draws upon the Old Testament place of worship and Old Testament Scriptures (Ps 118:22). In fact, Peter is about to quote three Old Testament

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<sup>50</sup> Joseph, *A Narratological Reading of 1 Peter*, 84.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph, *A Narratological Reading of 1 Peter*, 84.

<sup>52</sup> See for example Deut 7:8; 9:26; 15:15; 24:18 in Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 84.

<sup>53</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 17 (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1988), 106-10.

“stone” prophecies and apply them to Christ. The imagery and use of these Scriptures demonstrate that Christ is the living stone, the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises, pictures, and patterns. Now, by their union with Christ, believers too are being built up into a spiritual house (2:5). New Testament believers can continue to have great hope and remain faithful since they have a better way of drawing near to God in their time of need.

This section brings together a cluster of metaphors that help to establish the identity of the church in connection with Israel. Both holiness and election are important themes in this passage, but election is the dominant theme. The term elect occurs in verses 4, 6, and 9. In the first two occurrences it refers to Christ and in the latter to the readers. Martin writes, “Election effects the transformation of the ‘no people’ into the ‘people of God’ (2:10).”<sup>54</sup> It is election that has brought about the new birth and thus this new identity that transforms behavior. Election has made the church into living stones being fashioned into a spiritual temple.

### **First Peter 2:18-25**

The dominant theme of suffering is placed front and center again in this text. However, the suffering of Christians is now viewed in direct relation to the suffering of Jesus. Peter calls Christians to endure suffering, especially if suffering unjustly for doing good—for this is precisely what the Savior endured. Interestingly, Peter alludes to this kind of suffering as a Christian calling and notes that Christ served as an example to follow (2:21). The theme of calling is significant and relates to the believer’s election and salvation (1:15; 2:9). Suffering is not a detour on the way to receiving the promised inheritance, but instead God’s appointed means for receiving it.<sup>55</sup> The call to follow Christ in suffering contains allusions to Israel’s suffering as the means to receiving the

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<sup>54</sup> Troy W. Martin, *Metaphor and Composition in 1 Peter* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 162.

<sup>55</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 122.

promised land, and better yet, Jesus' suffering on the way to securing the believers eternal inheritance.

Jesus was more than an example to follow, though he is not less than that.<sup>56</sup> Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and pictures. He bore our sins so that we might be set free and walk in righteousness. Here, the theme of substitutionary atonement becomes a powerful motivator for holy living and standing firm in the face of hostility. However, this motivation relates not simply to the example set by Jesus, but by our identity in Jesus as the true Israel. In Isaiah 49:3, Israel was identified as fulfilling the role of the servant of YHWH. On the other hand, Israel is differentiated from the servant of YHWH since the servant brings about Israel's justification (Isa 53:11). Joseph notes, "As in Isaiah, the work of God in Christ brings about the audience's salvation. Yet, now that they have become God's people, his servant, he also uses them to carry out his plan of salvation."<sup>57</sup> The strength of Peter's argument comes from his use of Isaiah 53 where he weaves three different verses together from that majestic chapter (53:4, 11, 12). Peter's desire is to make clear that forgiveness was accomplished by the means of the death of Jesus. Peter's choice of the word "tree" rather than "cross" is also interesting and contains allusion to Deuteronomy 21:23. Again, the purpose of Christ's death was not only to provide an example, nor simply to provide forgiveness but to grant a new identity and empower his people to "live to righteousness" (2:24).

### **First Peter 3:8-12**

Continuing on the theme of suffering for righteousness' sake, Peter now addresses how it is possible to live the good life even in the midst of opposition. Suffering

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<sup>56</sup> Schreiner notes, "Just as Christ's suffering led to the salvation of others, so too the unjust suffering of believers will draw some to faith in Christ." He goes on to say that "Peter recognized and specifically taught that the suffering of Christ and believers is not comparable in every respect, in that Christ's substitutionary death is the sole basis of the relationship of believers with God (1:18-19; 2:24; 3:18)." Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 142. Substitution draws in the idea of representation, linking believers to their identity as the people of God through a representative figure—Christ, the true son of God.

<sup>57</sup> Joseph, *A Narratological Reading of 1 Peter*, 110.

conflicts with the world's understanding of what it means to live the good life. In 1 Peter 3:8-12, Peter reminds us of our eschatological identity by reaching back into the Old Testament and instructing us on what it means to truly live the good life. Living the good life is not about the kind of life you make for yourself, but rather the new life you find in Jesus. It is about true life; a life with God at the center.

How we respond in the midst of suffering reveals where we find our hope and happiness. The ability to trust the Lord and respond like Christ to the injustice we experience is a testimony to the presence of God in our lives. In order to press this home, Peter quotes from Psalm 34 where David is suffering not because of sin but because of God's electing grace. David's exhortation and example serve the church by calling her to find rest in the Lord. God sees and hears the cries of his children and will hold out a future hope of the fullness of his presence that can be known and enjoyed even now.

#### **First Peter 5:1-14**

Peter turns his attention away from outside persecution to internal housekeeping. He draws particular attention to the role of the elders who are called to shepherd the "flock of God" (5:1-2). Once again, Peter uses language that links the church to Israel. God was the Shepherd of Israel (Ps 23), and this term is directly applied to the church. This statement of identity reminds the elders (and the church), that they are indeed God's people and His possession.<sup>58</sup> As Peter explains this task of shepherding, he does so by way of contrast with Ezekiel 34, where the shepherds of Israel are indicted for their perverse and selfish tactics. While calling the elders to lead selflessly, he calls the congregation to respond humbly, likely quoting from Proverbs 3:34. Humility toward God is key to receiving blessing from God. Peter is impressing upon his hearers the need to

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<sup>58</sup> Schreiner rightly notes that the words "God's flock" remind the elders that the congregation does not belong to them. It is God's church, and they are given the privilege and responsibility of shepherding it. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 233.

continually submit to God and trust Him, to beware of the pride of rebellion that exists in every human heart, and to stand firm in the grace that is ours in the Lord Jesus Christ.

As Peter concludes his letter he does so by warning of the attacks of Satan and the sufferings experienced by believers around the world (5:9). The suffering of God's people will not last forever but will soon come to an end and they will enter into his eternal glory (5:10). He closes with customary greetings and alludes to Babylon, which likely refers to Rome<sup>59</sup> but connects the readers back once again into the larger framework of the biblical storyline. Babylon is the city of man that wars against the city of God. Achtemeier believes that the use of this term was not to veil the letter from the authorities but "rather it is included here to reaffirm the analogy of Christians living in conditions of diaspora (1:1) as exiles and aliens within Greco-Roman culture (1:1, 2:11)."<sup>60</sup> Michaels agrees, stating, "Babylon at the end of the epistle is simply the counterpart to 'diaspora' at the beginning."<sup>61</sup> With this word, Peter forms an *inclusio* with the opening verse to frame the identity and expectation of the people of God. Peter, with his closing remarks, calls believers to stand firm as they live out their time in Babylon as exiles, faithfully holding fast to their God.

### Looking Forward

The above passages will form the framework of this project and will be the basis for each chapter. Each chapter will be an exposition of the text that will be faithfully applied to the contemporary church. While all Scripture is true and inspired by God, some Scriptures seem to be more needed at certain points in history. There is no doubt that the cultural tides are turning against the church and the waves of opposition and

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<sup>59</sup> Achtemeier believes that Babylon is likely a cryptic reference to Rome and that this view was universally held until the period of the Reformation, at which time, because it appeared to give support to papal claims regarding Rome, that identity was disputed. See Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 354.

<sup>60</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 354.

<sup>61</sup> Michaels, *1 Peter*, 311. Michaels also states, "The designation becomes a metaphor both for an actual city (Rome) and for an experience of alienation not necessarily linked to a particular place" (311).

hostility are growing and increasing at an alarming pace. The church today finds itself in a post-Christian culture that will no longer tolerate antiquated views and old-fashioned beliefs. If the church does not understand and embrace its true identity as laid out across the pages of the Bible, then it will not be able to stand firm in the faith but will compromise and collapse.

Thankfully, God has provided help for His people in the book of 1 Peter. Here, God anchors the identity of the church and sinks its roots deep into the soil of the Old Testament. As we look intently into these passages in 1 Peter, we will see not only the call to understand our identity, but how that identity shapes how we are called to live. May God use this project to strengthen faith, build his church, and exalt Jesus Christ who is our hope and life.

## CHAPTER 2

### IDENTITY AS EXILES: 1 PETER 1:1-3

#### **Sermon Introduction**

Imagine living life without knowing who or what you truly are. In his children's series *The Wingfeather Saga*, Andrew Peterson tells the tale of three siblings who are growing up unaware of their true identity.<sup>1</sup> Janner, Tink, and Leeli live relatively simple lives in the countryside of a town called Skree. Raised by their mother and grandfather, one thing they know is that life is not easy. They live in enemy territory, ruled by vicious and cruel masters who seek to keep them suppressed and in subjection. They know almost nothing about their father, only that he died years ago in the war. They are poor, fatherless, and obscure. That is until the day they learn their true identity. On that day, everything changes.

They come to learn that they are actually the sons and daughters of a great king and have been living as exiles in enemy territory. As their world is turned upside down and their lives are in great danger, this newfound identity gives them renewed purpose, hope, and strength. In understanding and embracing their identity, their lives begin to change.

Imagine your life could radically change by simply understanding and embracing your true identity. Peter does not imagine this to be true, he expects it will be true for the people of God. Far too often, God's people fail to live out their faith because they do not live from their new identity. Only when we grasp who we are as defined by God, can we truly live as who we are, called by God.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Peterson, *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness: The Wingfeather Saga* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2008).

## Text

First Peter 1:1-3 reads,

To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.<sup>2</sup>

## Need

It is fair to say that those of us living in the West have likely faced little to no real persecution. Most have not had to flee for our lives and live in exile because of our faith in Jesus. Very few have ever actually suffered for our faith in the way that believers suffered in the first century. But that does not mean we have not faced any oppression or suffering for the sake of Jesus. Perhaps you have been mocked for believing in God or for sharing the gospel. Maybe you have been ostracized from a peer group or passed over for a promotion because you are an outspoken or even a relatively quiet Christian. Or maybe you simply sense a growing antagonism toward your faith and an increasing intolerance to the exclusive claims of Christianity.

Regardless of the level of persecution or suffering you have experienced for your faith in Jesus, it seems clear that our culture is no longer willing to tolerate the “intolerant” words and ways of Jesus. Our faith is outdated in the eyes of the world, and we need to get with the times or get out of the way. Rather than compromise and capitulate, we must hold fast and stand firm.

The believers who received 1 Peter needed to be reminded of their identity so that they could resist the temptation to conform to the world. They needed to embrace *who* they truly were in order to live as God had called them to live. We need to understand and embrace our true identity as the people of God so that we can live faithfully for Him.

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<sup>2</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

## Main Point

As we look at verses 1-3 we see that God's people draw strength to live for God from understanding and embracing their true identity<sup>3</sup> as exiles in this world who have been called by the triune God.

## Context and Preview

Before going back to better understand the role the term *exile* plays in the Old and New Testaments, it is important to first look briefly at the context of 1 Peter. The internal evidence of the book suggests a dominant theme of suffering and trials (1 Pet 1:6, 2:19, 3:16-18, 4:1, 4:16, 5:10). In fact, George Ladd states, "The most important emphasis in Peter's thought about God is that of the divine providence in human suffering."<sup>4</sup> But the sufferings addressed by Peter are not the normal or typical kinds of sufferings experienced by all human beings in a fallen world; rather, "it is the sufferings people are called upon to endure because they are Christians."<sup>5</sup> The opening verse gives a clue not only to the authorship, but the condition of the original audience. It is here that Peter begins to ground their identity by using language that connects them to the Old Testament people of God. They are referred to as the "elect exiles of the dispersion" (1:1). This language links directly back to Israel of the Old Testament and sets the stage for the rest of the letter which is dominated by exile and new-exodus imagery, Old Testament quotations, and allusions to the wilderness sojourn (2:11–4:11), instructing the redeemed how to sojourn toward the Promised Land.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The term *identity* can easily be misunderstood. I use this term in both its ontological and psychological senses. Ontologically, it represents who a person truly is as determined and defined by God. Psychologically, it represents the constant reminder to realign false sources or beliefs about identity with the objective reality of established by God in His Word.

<sup>4</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 2000), 644.

<sup>5</sup> Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 644.

<sup>6</sup> James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 522.

There is debate about the date of this letter and therefore the kind of persecution they may be facing (physical versus social ostracization). There is also some debate about the primary ethnicity of the original audience (believing Jews or believing Gentiles).<sup>7</sup> Regardless, this audience is experiencing great difficulty for their faith in Jesus. Whatever the exact circumstances and date, 1 Peter describes the unique challenges facing the church in an often, hostile world. Peter's primary objective is found near the end of the letter where he states that he has been "exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it" (5:12). Peter writes to give hope to the church, reminding them of their identity in order that believers might "stand firm in it" while they endure hostility from the world.

First Peter draws heavily upon the Old Testament Scriptures to create parallels between the Old Covenant and New Covenant people of God. In effect, Peter seems to be arguing that New Covenant believers are a part of the new Israel of God and as such experience the same patterns of difficulty and privilege that faithful ethnic Israel experienced under the Old Covenant. James Hamilton suggests,

Given their locations (cf. 1 Pet. 1:1), the churches to whom Peter wrote were at least partly, if not predominantly, Gentile. This makes Peter's call to these new sojourners (2:11) to abstain from warring passions and to keep their conduct honourable "among the Gentiles" (2:11b-12) all the more striking. This new (Gentile) people of God is, theologically speaking, no longer Gentile. It is difficult to see how the church here is anything other than the new Israel.<sup>8</sup>

These Old Testament allusions and references form the basis from which Peter exhorts the people of God to stand firm. Peter also patterns their experience of suffering after the experience of Jesus (4:13). This helps to establish the Israel-Christ-Church connection, creating continuity between the two covenants. As they consider who they are and the

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<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1947), 42-44; and John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 65-67; 95-97. While it is more than likely that there are some Jewish Christians within these churches, 1:18 and 4:3 show that Peter is thinking of Gentiles when he writes and that he considers these Gentiles to be heirs to the promises of Israel.

<sup>8</sup> Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 525.

continuity they experience with the people of God across the ages, they can be firmly anchored amidst the waves of hostility.

### **First Peter 1:1: The Author and The Audience**

First Peter gives some helpful insight into how God's people have always been viewed by the world, and how they should view themselves within the world. God's people are a heavenly people. As such, they find themselves in a world that is not ultimately their home. This identity is foundational for faithfulness and perseverance.

#### **Exiles**

Peter is here identified as the author. While he says little about himself, what he says reminds us of his unique role in redemptive history. He identifies himself first as an "apostle." He is one of the twelve, chosen by Jesus to be His disciple and apostle. He was the first to confess that Jesus was the Christ and was thereby identified as the one upon which Jesus would build his church (Matt 16:18). Peter was an eyewitness to the life of Jesus, to his death and resurrection. His role as an apostle is to be a witness to the truth of Jesus. He has been appointed for this very purpose, as an apostle "of Jesus Christ." He comes bearing the authority of an apostle; the very authority of his master Jesus Christ.

Peter addresses the believers as "those who are elect *exiles* of the Dispersion" (1 Pet 1:1). At the outset of his letter, Peter identifies his audience as "exiles." Peter uses the term *παρεπίδημος* which means "stranger, sojourner, or resident alien."<sup>9</sup> This specific word is used twice in 1 Peter to help establish the identity of God's people in their present circumstances. This is not incidental but fundamental to their identity. J Ramsey Michaels notes, "The identity of the recipients is a more central concern to the author than his own identity."<sup>10</sup> It is difficult to miss the biblical significance of this single word that would

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<sup>9</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 775.

<sup>10</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 6.

bring vivid reminders of God’s people throughout the Old Testament. The Jews were exiled from their land by Assyria in 722 and by Babylon in 586. They had been uprooted and forced to live in a land that was not their own. Tom Schreiner notes that this word “introduces a crucial idea in the letter, that is, that God’s people are pilgrims, sojourners, and exiles on Earth.”<sup>11</sup> They lived as strangers or resident aliens, surely longing for their homeland.

Shortly after this introductory statement, Peter uses the term again. In fact, 1 Peter 2:11 is the only other place it is used in his letter. Peter states, “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and *exiles* to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.” Here, Peter is informing believers that their identity as exiles and sojourners helps them understand their relationship to the world. They are to resist their fleshly or sinful impulses. Their behavior must reflect their identity as sojourners and exiles.<sup>12</sup> There is no need to try to distinguish between the terms *sojourners* and *exiles* as Peter intended us to read them together as indicating the same idea.<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly, the Greek word *παροικίας*, translated here as “sojourners,” is translated as “exile” in 1 Peter 1:17 where Peter says, “Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your *exile*.” They hold the title “exile” because they are currently *in exile*.<sup>14</sup> In the New Testament, this word is most often used in the sense of a resident

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37, Accordance electronic ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 50.

<sup>12</sup> It is helpful to note that the term “exile” is translated a variety of ways including alien (NJB, REB), foreigner’ (CEV, NLT), pilgrim (TEV), stranger (KJV, NAB, NIV), and exile (NRSV, TNT).

<sup>13</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 116. Paul also seems to use the two terms synonymously in Eph 2:19. However, he is addressing Gentiles who have become followers of Jesus and are therefore “no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” Similar to Peter, Paul is employing these terms to help them understand their identity as God’s people, and the citizenship that defines their earthly life.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Achtemeier observes that this word originally meant “neighbor,” but in time came to mean “resident alien,” that is, “one who, though not a full citizen and hence having neither obligations nor the privileges that fell to citizens, nevertheless did have recognized status and hence was not totally outside legal protection.” Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 173.

alien; someone that is not in their homeland.<sup>15</sup> Again, Peter is seeking to remind the church of their identity and how it ought to shape their attitude toward the world and actions within the world. This world is not their home—they are sojourning through this land on their way to a better and more permanent home.

Outside of 1 Peter, Hebrews 11:13 is the only other place in the New Testament we find the word *παρεπίδημος*. Here, the author of Hebrews writes, “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.” First Peter and Hebrews have much in common. Both epistles capture one aspect of the dualism that Christians face. They are citizens of heaven while living as resident aliens on earth. Also, as the author of Hebrews indicates, this is not a New Testament phenomenon. Hebrews 11:14 adds that “they were seeking a homeland,” and verse 16 that “they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.” The Old Testament people of God who walked by faith and not by sight had this same perspective. This perspective enabled them to continue to walk by faith.

Hebrews 11 gives many examples of those who exemplified faith in God. All these heroes of the faith did not receive “the things promised,” which included possession of the land, founding of a nation, and blessing that would come through Abraham’s descendants.<sup>16</sup> However, here we see an interesting fact being stated: the patriarchs openly acknowledged they were “aliens and strangers.”<sup>17</sup> Even the patriarchs acknowledged that they were resident aliens, and they embraced this biblical reality of alienation.<sup>18</sup> The book

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<sup>15</sup> See for example Acts 7:6, 29; 13:17.

<sup>16</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47B, Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 356.

<sup>17</sup> Again, the combination of these terms most likely forms a hendiadys, which essentially means “sojourning stranger.” Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 357.

<sup>18</sup> Harold Attridge observes, “The imagery of the patriarchal confession was similar to what Greek tradition had long used to describe the fate of the soul in the world, an exile from its true heavenly home.” Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 330.

of Hebrews adopts this same alienation reality to help believers understand the very real alienation they are experiencing in their current cultural environment and could expect to experience again.

However, there is more here than meets the eye. While Peter is connecting his audience to their spiritual heritage, he seems to deepen this connection by looking beyond the nation as a whole and pointing to specific individuals. The term Peter uses here is used twice in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. First, in Genesis 23:4 it says, “I am a *sojourner* and *foreigner* among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.” Abraham, the great patriarch and father of the faith, was also a sojourner and foreigner. He was an exile.

The second occurrence of this term is found in Psalm 39:12. This Psalm of David is a plea to God for help in which David states, “Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; hold not your peace at my tears! For I am a *sojourner* with you, a *guest*, like all my fathers.”<sup>19</sup> Like his fathers before him, he is simply a resident alien, a sojourner and stranger on a pilgrim journey that finds its full and final realization with God in the heavenly homeland. This truth becomes an anchor for his soul in the midst of suffering and pain. Peter grabs hold of these Old Testament examples and drives them into the hearts of the believers to whom he is writing. If they can simply embrace their God-given identity as exiles, then they will be better prepared to face all of the pressures, pain, and persecution this world will throw at them. The problem for many Christians is that they become too comfortable with this world; too enamored with this life. And if believers are not careful, then they can forget that this world is not really their home. Perhaps it is appropriate to ask, are you living like this world is your home? Have you forgotten that you are a sojourner and exile, waiting for your true eternal place of rest?

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<sup>19</sup> It is interesting that the two septuagintal references both point to key figures with whom God made a covenant. Peter Gentry notes, “The Davidic covenant carries forward in specific ways the intentions and purposes of God expressed in the Israelite covenant and, even further back, in the covenant with Abraham. Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway: 2018), 389.

## Dispersed Exiles

Peter calls these believers “elect exiles *of the dispersion.*” The idea of dispersion is another reminder of their current condition. They are dispersed or scattered, homeless and seemingly left alone in the world. Again, these terms would have more than likely evoked images of Israel being dragged off to Assyria and Babylon. Though there is one striking difference that Peter will make clear throughout this letter. These believers are like God’s people in the Old Testament in many ways. They share the same God and spiritual heritage; they have the same spiritual identity.<sup>20</sup> However, they are dissimilar in many ways. They are unlike God’s people of old in that they are not dispersed exiles because of their sin, but rather because of their salvation. Not because of their failure to obey God, but because of their faithfulness to God. They are not being punished by God with exile and dispersion, they are being rewarded with exile and dispersion.

It seems ironic to state the situation this way but that is precisely what Peter is indicating. The reward throughout this letter is that they get to suffer just like their Savior. They are being affirmed in their faith when they suffer for and suffer like Jesus. What a blessing it is to know that when believers suffer for Jesus it is actually a gift from God. For Peter, the phrase “exiles of the dispersion” describes the typical experience of the Christian. The geographical locations mentioned by Peter (Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia) are all found in Asia Minor. While this may indicate that Peter is writing to a group of Jewish converts, it seems more likely that Peter uses the term *diaspora* metaphorically to describe the nature of the church in this world scattered among the nations and sojourning until the Lord returns.

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<sup>20</sup> Karen Jobes notes,

The framing of the letter with a reference to ‘Diaspora’ in 1:1 and ‘Babylon’ in 5:13 invites the Christian ‘foreigners’ of Asia Minor to see their own situation as parallel to the history of God’s people, ancient Israel. . . . Diaspora has a double purpose: first alluding to the actual experience of Peter’s readers; second, interpreting that experience from the perspective of God’s chosen Israel as a way of identifying his readers as God’s chosen people. (Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005], 64)

Throughout history God's chosen people experienced dispersion because of covenant failure. Now, God has not only dispersed his children around Asia Minor but around the world, because of covenant faithfulness. Even today, as believers are dispersed across the globe, displaced from their families, communities, and even homelands, there is great encouragement to be found in looking at the history of God's people and the ongoing faithfulness of God.

### **Elect Exiles**

Not only are they exiles, but they are *elect* or *chosen* exiles. Throughout the Old Testament God speaks of Israel as his chosen or elect people.<sup>21</sup> In Deuteronomy 7:6 Moses states, "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the people who are on the face of the earth." Peter makes note of this again in 2:9, calling his readers "a chosen race." This is not a trivial point. In fact, it is vital to their identity. They may be outcasts in the world, but they have been chosen by God. Also, Peter is inviting the church to identify with their spiritual heritage by using this language.

Peter seems to indicate at the outset that the church is the Israel of God, his chosen people who are currently exiles or strangers. This identity is a powerful reminder to God's people that this world is not their home. The original audience would have instantly picked up on the significance of such a title. Keeping in mind that Peter was the apostle to the Jews and that the only Scripture that the church would have faithfully studied was the Old Testament, the vivid imagery would not have been lost on those reading it. Peter is inviting his audience to identify with their spiritual heritage to find comfort, hope, and strength in the midst of the difficulty they must endure. Hamilton helps to reinforce

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<sup>21</sup> Often in the Old Testament, Israel is designated as God's chosen and elect people (Deut 4:37, 7:6-8; 10:15; 14:2; Ps 106:5; Isa 14:1; 41:8-9; 43:20). See Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 50.

the significance of this single term when he states, “Like Old Testament Israel, they are chosen. Like Old Testament Israel, they are sojourning toward the Promised Land.”<sup>22</sup>

Exiles by nature not only feel out of place, but also unwanted. They sense that they are different and that those differences make them outsiders. The great danger in feeling this way is the temptation to leave your unique and distinct identity and attempt to assimilate into the pagan society and culture around you. While a degree of assimilation is always necessary, distinctiveness is crucial for the believer. The very label “Christian” is intended to set us apart and was likely a term created by unbelievers in the first century to mock and deride believers.<sup>23</sup> To be a Christian is to be wanted by God. It is to be chosen specifically by Him. It is an intimate term that speaks specifically of those whom God loves. What a beautiful reminder for God’s people—though the world may hate and reject them, they are loved and accepted by God.

### **God’s Exiles**

Many believers struggle to understand the purpose of suffering in the Christian life. They view it as an intrusion to the ideal or normal Christian experience. Suffering does not seem to fit with their theology of a loving God who promises joy, peace, and rest for His children. But Peter has made it clear in one simple verse that God’s children are “elect exiles of the dispersion.” And just in case we are confused about who has defined the Christian life by such startling language, Peter tells us in 1:2. In fact, he uses a trinitarian formula to describe where and how the believer’s identity originates.

First, Christian identity finds its basis “according to the foreknowledge of the Father” (1:2). God chooses us. Our new identity is determined by the eternal plan of God. God’s foreknowledge is the reason for our newfound identity. The idea of foreknowledge does not just relate to knowing a fact, but knowing people with a personal, loving, fatherly

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<sup>22</sup> Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation*, 523.

<sup>23</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 91.

knowledge. In other words, this is not some cold or clinical knowledge like a scientist or mathematician plugging in some kind of formula. Foreknowledge is a deeply intimate and relational knowledge defined by a special and specific love. In God's divine election, he chooses some to receive a new identity in Him. This foreknowledge focuses on the beginning of God's electing or calling of his children. It is synonymous with being called by God.<sup>24</sup> This divine calling and special love has taken place in eternity past, like Christ himself who was "foreknown before the creation of the world" (1:20). God choosing His people is specific and determined and has nothing do with the inherent quality or value of the individuals chosen.

This foreknowledge is all about God's *Fatherly* love. God reminds His children that they are chosen solely based on that love.<sup>25</sup> They have not and cannot earn this divine affection. As a result, they cannot lose this divine affection. How comforting is it for God's people to know that while the world is fickle and fleeting with their love, God is steadfast and eternal in His.

Christians often struggle with understanding why God chooses some and not others. While the Scriptures do not provide all the details to sufficiently answer this question, they do give enough insight to know that God chooses on the basis of his love and according to his divine purpose and plan. Knowing that we are chosen "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" reminds us that God is the one who took initiative in salvation and that he bears ultimate responsibility for salvation. It also reminds us that we are in a loving and intimate relationship with the God who is our Father and holds supreme authority over our lives. Karen Jobes states, "Such a reminder is apt at times when Christians are troubled by the circumstances in which they find themselves, confused about

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<sup>24</sup> Peter five times refers to God's people as being "called" in 1:15; 2:9, 21; 3:9; 5:10.

<sup>25</sup> Jobes notes, "Peter develops and expands the father-child paradigm throughout his letter." Jobes, *1 Peter*, 69.

how to live, and tempted to doubt God's goodness or faithfulness."<sup>26</sup> Though we may be temporally hated by the world, we are eternally loved by the Father.

It is also worth noting that God did not choose his children because he "knew" they would eventually choose Him contra many well-meaning Christians. This version of foreknowledge places man at the center of salvation, giving him ultimate decision-making power. It leaves salvation in the hands of man rather than in the hands of God. The comfort for the believer is not found in his own ability or wisdom to initiate a relationship with God, but rather in the ability and wisdom of God who chose to initiate and provide for our redemption. All of this was according to His divine plan and His divine power.

We know that God chooses us, but how does he make that choice our new reality? Peter now points to this divine power, stating, "In the sanctification of the Spirit." Peter further unfolds his trinitarian formula by pointing to the role or participation of the Holy Spirit in redemption.<sup>27</sup> What Peter describes here is not the ongoing work of sanctification that is the result of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Instead, this sanctification speaks to our position or status. We have been sanctified or consecrated by the Holy Spirit when we hear the gospel message proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit and respond to it in faith because of the work of the Holy Spirit. At the moment of salvation, God's children are uniquely set apart as His chosen possession. What was planned in eternity past is accomplished in the present moment of conversion. This is not the result of our strength or power but His.

Left to ourselves, we would never choose God. Indeed, we could never choose God. Our sin nature being so corrupt and so pervasive means that our spiritual death could only be overcome by the life-giving power of God's Spirit. Believing this to be true is

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<sup>26</sup> Jobes, *1 Peter*, 69.

<sup>27</sup> There is some debate as to whether Peter is speaking of the Holy Spirit or our spirit. I agree with Jobes when she notes, "Because God the Father and Jesus Christ in the other two prepositional phrases clearly refer to the divine initiative, 'spirit' here is almost certainly to be understood as the Holy Spirit, who is the instrument, or agency, by which God makes his electing foreknowledge operative in the lives of those who come to faith in Christ." Jobes, *1 Peter*, 69-70.

crucial for the believer's identity. In a world where we are told we can be anything we want or do anything we set our minds to, Peter reminds us of our human inability. The truth about humanity is far more pessimistic than our world would like to admit.

Certainly, humanity can achieve great success in athletic, engineering, and a variety of other endeavors, but humanity can accomplish nothing of any eternal or spiritual value apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. And as accomplished as humanity might be, we can do nothing to accomplish salvation.

When the truth of the Spirit's consecrating power sinks deep into our hearts, our identity is shaped not by confidence in ourselves but by confidence in God. If God's Spirit has done the greater thing in producing salvation, then how much more will He do the lesser thing in strengthening our faith each day as we seek to live for Him and His glory.

God chooses us and he makes his eternal choice our present reality by the power of the Holy Spirit. But for what purpose does He choose us? The consecrating work of the Holy Spirit has a specific aim and a desired goal. In contemporary culture, relationships are often a source of identity and value. They create a sense of purpose and meaning in a life that is often isolated and empty. These types of relationships often become self-centered attempts at defining our identity and ultimately our happiness. However, when Peter describes this relationship that is "according to the foreknowledge of the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit," its aim is not to generate some kind of superficial and selfish purpose, but rather a deeply intimate and sacrificial purpose: "For obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood." The language of "obedience" and "sprinkling with his blood" are linked together so that the believer is reminded again of their spiritual heritage. The background of this statement found in Exodus 24:3-8 where Moses states,

Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do." And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the

LORD. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

The context of this passage reminds us that God had promised to bring His people into the land. Though, before they could enter the land and find rest, they must choose to enter into a covenant with Him—a binding and intimate relationship. Peter is drawing a comparison with this ancient passage and teaching the church about the purpose of God’s choosing love. Peter is saying that God chose his children to live in loving obedience to Him and that He has established this relationship by the blood of His own son. The blood of this New Covenant, however, is a once and for all sacrifice that has taken away their sins and brought them near to the God and Father of their Lord Jesus Christ. His great sacrifice of love, the obedience of the Son to the Father, becomes the pattern and the purpose in our relationship with Him. We follow and obey Jesus Christ because of His great love for us.

The permanence of this New Covenant is crucial for the believer’s identity. In a world that shifts so quickly and easily, the unshifting character and promise of God becomes an anchor for our soul. This is especially important for those suffering for the sake of the gospel. Suffering tests faith in order to refine our faith (1:7). Suffering exposes the temporary pleasures of this world as fleeting and empty promises. But knowing God’s steadfast and immovable love that was demonstrated at the cross of Christ where His blood was shed for the forgiveness of our sins provides the means and motivation to press on and follow Him. Because of the “sprinkling with his blood,” Peter can encourage the believers with one final phrase.

Considering all that Peter has said, he now offers both a prayer and a promise, declaring, “May grace and peace be multiplied to you” (1:2). Back in Exodus 24, after the covenant had been ratified, something interesting takes place. The leaders of Israel go up and see the God of Israel (vv. 9-10). Not only do they see and behold God, but they eat a

meal. This is significant because it is a symbol of intimate fellowship that they now enjoy with God. It is a reminder that God is with them, and that God will sustain them. Peter is saying much the same thing. He is pointing to both the objective promises of God and the subjective experience of that promise.

Peter wants our experience of God's grace and peace to be real and true. God's grace is his unmerited favor. God's peace is not only objective peace with him but sustaining peace from Him. Peter wants believers to experience this grace and peace repeatedly, in increasing measure and frequency. To have this grace and peace multiplied is to be reminded that it is not just a one-time offer. They do not have an expiration date. God is not running out of them. This grace and peace are multiplied in his sustaining presence and sustaining power in all of our lives. Therefore, whatever we face for following Christ cannot compare with what we are given for following Christ. Our suffering will be met by his great provision of grace and peace, and we will be sustained beyond what we can ask or think.

### **Conclusion**

Imagine you are living in a hostile world. In fact, you are living in enemy territory. You are ostracized, mocked, scorned and sometimes severely persecuted. The oppression you experience can be alleviated and you can choose to change your situation. All you need to do is compromise the truth that you believe. You simply must give in and assimilate into the culture from which you have been rescued. How is it possible to resist? More than that, how is it possible to stand firm in your beliefs and thrive in the midst of oppression?

The answer comes down to identity. You must understand who you are and whose you are. Peter makes it clear that believers are "elect exiles of the dispersion" (1:1). We have been chosen by God and for God with trinitarian love, power, and purpose. As we rest in this truth, we are reminded that this world is not our home, we are simply passing through. This has always been true for God's chosen people, and it will be until

he returns or calls us home. As we sojourn toward the promised land anchored in our identity as exiles, God will sustain us with His unending grace and peace.

## CHAPTER 3

### BETTER THAN BEFORE: 1 PETER 1:10-12

#### **Sermon Introduction**

Perhaps you have heard of the phrase “first world problems.” Merriam-Webster defines it as “a usually minor or trivial problem or annoyance experienced by people in relatively affluent or privileged circumstances especially as contrasted with problems of greater social significance facing people in poor and underdeveloped parts of the world.”<sup>1</sup> People will often use this phrase when they recognize that the things they are complaining about are minor or trivial in comparison to those who live in other less fortunate parts of the world. Things like having slow internet access, a cell phone battery dying, or finding out the item you tried to order from Amazon is out of stock.

However, this idea is not simply a modern geographical phenomenon created by disparities in technological and economic developments between countries. This same concept can apply to historical disparities that are often forgotten. Imagine living a few hundred years ago where modern refrigeration, grocery stores, and plumbing could not even be fathomed. But these disparities can be stretched into a different historical category: redemptive-historical disparities. As Christians, sometimes we think we have it pretty hard, when the truth is we have it pretty good. When we look back in history, what we know and experience now in the gospel could not have been fathomed or imagined. Our spiritual ancestors only caught a glimpse of what New Covenant believers now enjoy. Though, we who have these luxuries often forget how privileged we are. We complain and grumble that life is so hard! Why do we have to suffer the way we do!

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, “first world problem,” accessed April 16, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/first%20world%20problem>.

While in some ways it may be harder, the reality is it has never been better in redemptive history than it is right now. We have more knowledge, more insight, and more understanding than all of the prophets and even angels during the Old Covenant era. So, before we get too comfortable or complacent, and before we grumble and complain about suffering for the sake of following Jesus, let us remember that what we have is better by far than it ever was before. We are truly blessed living this side of the cross.

### **Text**

First Peter 1:10-12 reads,

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

### **Need**

Christians living under the New Covenant need to be reminded of how good we have it. Our tendency is to let our immediate circumstances and struggles dictate how we feel and therefore how we live our lives. When we focus on our trials and suffering, we can forget the incredible gift of salvation we have been given.

It can be helpful to remember that those who came before us would have given anything to know what we know. Peter helps us see our need to understand the unfolding story of redemption and how the story concealed in the Old Testament and now revealed in the New Testament should fill our hearts with wonder, awe, and praise in order to encourage our hearts, heighten our praise, and spur on our endurance.

### **Main Point**

As believers face adversity and even suffering for their faith, they can lose sight of the historic nature and power of the gospel. The gospel has a glorious prophetic past that gives it an even more glorious present power. In 1:10-12, Peter highlights the prophetic

past of the gospel to increase the believers' praise and strengthen the believers so that they will continue to press on and stand firm in the faith. Peter shows that the glory of our salvation is greater than the grief of our suffering.

### **Context and Preview**

To fully grasp the importance of these verses, it is imperative to understand where they fit in Peter's argument. At the beginning of the letter in 1:1, Peter briefly introduces himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ." But the bulk of his greeting is spent helping the believers in Asia Minor understand their identity as God's children. Peter's primary concern is that the believers grasp this identity that they might stand firm in the true grace of God (5:12). For the believers to stand firm, they must first understand who they are and whose they are. Contrary to what they might have hoped when they surrendered their lives to Christ, being accepted by God made them an exile in the world (1:1). This new identity was indeed the triune God's eternal purpose and plan (1:2). Rather than being left to their own strength and power, Peter prays and promises that God himself will supply an abundance of grace and peace while they sojourn toward the promised land like all of God's chosen people before.

Peter then lays out the believer's future hope, indeed it is a "living hope" that holds with it an "eternal inheritance" (1:3-4). This eschatological truth of the hope of what is to come is certainly both an encouragement and motivation to faithfully follow Jesus and endure exile for Christ on this earth.<sup>2</sup> Following Christ may require giving up temporary earthly treasures, but it has guaranteed a future eternal reward beyond all comparison. This inheritance cannot be lost or diminished in any way but instead is being protected by God until that future day of full and final salvation (1:4-5).

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<sup>2</sup> Jobes notes, "The future eschatological perspective is important, for it is meant to determine how Christians are to face life in their present situations." Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 92.

While the believer's future inheritance is marvelous and produces great motivation, it does not erase present trials and suffering. In fact, trials of all kinds serve to test and refine the faith of God's children to increase "praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1:6-7). It is apparent that the believers to whom Peter is writing are suffering for their faith. Some were likely despairing and confused. With great pastoral love and care Peter writes to these believers to strengthen them and affirm their faith. Their trials are not a mark of a failure of their faith, but are marks of genuine faith. God has given them the opportunity through suffering to prove their faith and be encouraged by what they see.

In these final verses of the introduction (1:10-12), Peter will heighten their appreciation of the gospel by showing them how privileged they are to live this side of the cross. There is an incredible advantage for those who have heard and believed the gospel and when this is understood, it provides fuel for the Christian life. And if you are in Christ this is true of you today! Peter unveils four realities of salvation to encourage and strengthen the believers faith.

### **First Peter 1:10-12: The Christian's Privilege**

Peter highlights the unique advantage that believers have over those who came before them. While they endure many hardships for the gospel, they are the recipients of unprecedented knowledge of the gospel. The ordinary Christian has more insight than both prophets and angels who longed for the insight we now possess. They enjoy the incredible privilege of living in the days when the history of salvation was being fulfilled. As Peter unfolds these great truths, he upholds the ongoing relevance of the Old Testament and teaches the church how to interpret and understand previous revelation in light of the fullness of the gospel.

## **The Prophets Diligently Sought**

The salvation that Peter has been writing about is now brought into greater perspective. The story of redemption is not a New Testament phenomenon. The whole of Scripture is unfolding the story of redemption, but it is doing so progressively and incrementally. In the past, God used prophets to communicate divine truth. Peter states, “The prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours” (1:10). Peter points his readers back to the Old Testament prophets who spoke the Word of God.<sup>3</sup> The prophets were God’s spokesmen so to speak. We first read about the prophetic office in Deuteronomy 18. God had rescued his people from Egypt, and He had called Moses (and Aaron) to be his spokesman. God’s message for both Pharoah and the Hebrews came from the mouth of Moses.

After God’s people were graciously liberated from slavery in Egypt and began to sojourn toward the promised land, God began to speak to the entire assembly as a whole. As desirable as this sounds, the Hebrews were filled with great fear at the sound of God’s voice and stated, “Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more lest I die” (Deut 18:16). So, God in His kindness instituted the office of the prophet that would be patterned after Moses. From now on these prophets would convey to God’s people “all that I command” (Deut 18:18). These Old Testament prophets heard the voice of God, were given a message from God, and were tasked with speaking that message on behalf of God.

Peter says that these prophets who prophesied did not have full or total insight into what they were tasked to speak. This lack of insight is specifically in relation to “the grace that was to be yours” (1:10). That phrase is simply another way of describing the salvation that Peter is unpacking. Salvation is a gift of God’s grace to those who do not

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<sup>3</sup> Schreiner notes that some scholars have argued that the prophets mentioned here are New Testament prophets, believing it is more conceivable that the New Testament prophets searched the Scriptures rather than the Old Testament prophets who actually wrote them. He notes that most commentators agree Peter is speaking of Old Testament prophets. Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 72. See also J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 41; Jobes, *1 Peter*, 102.

deserve it and cannot earn it. Sinners deserve punishment for their sin but in God's plan of redemption he determined to rescue lost sinners by an act of His grace. While salvation has always been an act of God's grace, the culmination of that grace was not yet known or completely understood by the prophets who wrote about it in the Old Testament.

While these prophets were somewhat unclear about the salvation of which they wrote, they desperately wanted to understand it. So much so that Peter tells us that they "searched and inquired carefully" (1:10).<sup>4</sup> The idea here is that they diligently sought to understand and searched the Scriptures with the greatest of care. How is it that they could search and inquire carefully about their prophecies? Or to put it another way, what exactly were they searching so carefully? Perhaps they were combing over their own prophecies, mulling them over and meditating upon them. That is certainly probable seeing that the mind of God and the Word of God are often far deeper and more meaningful than we first recognize. But there is another way to understand this diligent searching.

The Word of God is not delivered in a vacuum. Rather than writing an individual book, it is better to understand the biblical authors' contributions in light of the whole of Scripture. God is the supreme author of Scripture, and he used a variety of secondary human authors (prophets) to contribute individual chapters. If you were to pick up a book and simply open it to a chapter in the middle and begin to read, you would be able to glean a certain amount of information but much of it would not make sense. However, if you began from the beginning and worked chapter by chapter, you would be able to track with the unfolding story the author is progressively developing (or in the case of God, revealing). Also, if you came across some cryptic or confusing information in a later chapter, you might be well served by turning back to earlier chapters that spoke to the same themes or ideas.

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<sup>4</sup> Schreiner notes, "The two verbs should be interpreted together indicating how ardently the prophets investigated the salvation about which they prophesied." Schreiner, *1, 2, Peter, Jude*, 72.

The Old Testament prophets seemed to understand the value of letting Scripture interpret Scripture. They teach us to be careful students of the Bible. When we pick up God’s Word to read and study, it is good to remember that sometimes it takes hard work to understand it properly. We must be willing to diligently search the Scriptures like the noble Bereans (Acts 17). Pastors and teachers must do the long and hard work of cutting it straight (2 Tim 2:15), longing to know and understand God’s Word and thereby, God himself. The prophets wanted to know what we should want to know—what God meant by what God revealed. But how exactly did God speak to the prophets and what exactly did He reveal?

### **The Spirit Clearly Revealed**

Peter already highlighted the trinitarian nature of God in the work of salvation (1:2), but this section of Scripture further elaborates how the triune God operated not only in accomplishing salvation but revealing salvation. As the prophets searched the Scriptures, Peter states that they were “inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories” (1:11). This is both enlightening and instructive. Their prophecies were inspired by “the Spirit of Christ,” showing that what they spoke and wrote was authoritative and accurate. What they communicated on behalf of God was not a product of their own imagination nor was it unclear speculation. In fact, Peter says that it was “revealed to them” (1:12). But how are we to understand this phrase, “the Spirit of Christ?” Does this imply that Christ has his own Spirit, apart from the Holy Spirit? No, this is none other than the Holy Spirit himself, the third person of the Trinity.<sup>5</sup> It is this Spirit that has inspired all the Scriptures

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<sup>5</sup> Similar phrases are used in Scripture to describe the work of the Holy Spirit. For example, Acts 16:7; Gal 4:6; Phil. 1:19. Jobes notes, “The point seems to be that the Spirit who was the agent of revelation to the prophets of old is the same Spirit of Christ known to the first-century church... Peter thereby shows a continuity of the presence of the Spirit with the prophets and with the Christians, who receive the gospel of God’s mercy centered in the suffering and glorification of Jesus Christ.” Jobes, *1 Peter*, 101. See also Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 73.

and it is these Scriptures that speak primarily of Christ. The Old and New Testaments both have the same inspirer and ultimately the same content.<sup>6</sup>

The Scriptures are filled with prophecies of the Messiah. The Spirit, however, did not reveal everything about Christ nor did He reveal Christ all at once. The story of redemption is progressively unfolding and over time more and more clarity is given. Certain themes or aspects of the Messiah were not hidden and were in fact consistently predicted. Peter states what was clearly revealed through the prophets and by the Spirit were the “sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories” (1:11). While much of salvation was a mystery, it was clearly understood that the Messiah must suffer before glory.

The idea that the Messiah must suffer was not widely accepted by the Jewish people. They believed the Scriptures spoke of and promised a Messiah who would sit on his throne and rule and reign in righteousness. By the first century, Israel was under Roman oppression and longed for the Messiah whom they saw primarily as a political figure.<sup>7</sup> Yet, the Scriptures repeatedly pointed to the reality of suffering *before* glory. This pattern is not incidental to the Christian experience but fundamental. Peter shows his readers the correlation between their experience and that of the promised Messiah. He wants to encourage Christians who are facing suffering to look to the glory that awaits. The Christ who is now exalted and crowned in glory was first mocked and crowned with thorns. The Christ of glory is the Christ of the cross and the sequence of our lives follows the sequence of His life. This pattern was predicted and understood by the prophets of old.

It should not come as a surprise that people want glory without suffering. The path of least resistance is the path most often sought. But sin always leads to suffering. The nature and pervasiveness of sin brings with it the consequence of sin and death. From

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<sup>6</sup> Actheimer states, “Underlying such continuity is the unity of the one people of God, a unity that justified the author’s appropriation for the Christian community of the history of, and language for, Israel found in the OT.” Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 110.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Bruce states, “No single form of messianic expectation was cherished by Jesus’ contemporaries, but the hope of a military Messiah predominated.” F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 133.

the inception of sin and the subsequent curse, God had planned to remove the curse and restore a fallen humanity. The first glimpse of the gospel in Genesis 3:15 reveals that the One to come who would put an end to sin must first suffer for he would “bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” The Serpent crusher would first be crushed by sin. This reality was missed by many who were looking for the Messiah. The Messiah’s suffering then glory is a theme perhaps most clearly paralleled in Luke 24 on that familiar road to Emmaus. There, on the very day of Christ’s resurrection, two disciples were returning to Emmaus, confused and dismayed because Jesus had been crucified. On the road, Jesus joined them but before he made himself known to them, he taught them from the Old Testament showing them that the Messiah must first suffer and then enter his glory. While we do not know all that Jesus said to them or all the passages he walked them through, we can be relatively certain that much of what we read in the New Testament as quoted by the apostles would match what Jesus taught.<sup>8</sup>

Not only did the Spirit reveal to these prophets the content of their prophetic predictions, but in one sense He also revealed the audience. In other words, these prophets were given Spirit-inspired understanding that they would not be the generation who see the fulfillment of these messianic prophecies. Instead, they were told that they were serving a future generation who would witness their fulfillment. Like holding onto a bond that matures at a future date at which you will no longer be alive, these prophets grasped the unfathomable value of the information they dispensed while also realizing that they would never live to see it come to fruition.

The prophets of old must have drawn great encouragement for their own lives and ministries as they considered the Christ who was to come. The prophets were largely rejected and ridiculed in their own day. As the author of Hebrews notes, “They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins

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<sup>8</sup> With regard to his suffering, perhaps familiar passages quoted in the New Testament such as Pss 22:1, 7-8; 18; 34:19-20, Is. 50:6; 53; Zech 12:10. Other passages speak of his subsequent glory, for example Pss 2:7-8, 16:10, 110:1; Isa 9:6, 40:3-5, 61:1; Dan 7:13-14.

of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains and dens and caves of the earth” (Heb 11:37-38). They suffered well, holding fast to faith in God, faith in the Word of God revealed by the Spirit of God. As in Hebrews, Peter is inviting his readers to look back to their spiritual heritage. Look and see how they held fast to the faith. Look at how they suffered so well. However, you know more and have been served by their prophecies of Christ. As they looked at Christ’s sufferings and subsequent glories to fuel their faith, so you too look to Christ and His subsequent glories to fuel your faith.<sup>9</sup> The same Spirit that revealed his Word to them, has revealed His Word to you. But now Peter addresses through whom this Spirit revealed prophecy has been announced.

### **The Disciples Faithfully Proclaimed**

There is a sequence of events taking place to get the content about Christ into the hearts and minds of those to whom Peter is writing. It has its origins in the triune God who not only purposes and plans the story of redemption but also faithfully reveals and delivers it. It comes from the Holy Spirit, to the prophets who speak and record it, and then flows through the mouths of those who have embraced it. Peter says, “Have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (1:12). Peter shifts from the past and into the present with an emphasis on how the Holy Spirit has worked in both eras. The same Spirit that birthed the prophecies in the Old Testament now enables individuals to proclaim it in the New Testament. Peter draws their attention to how God’s Spirit empowered Christ’s disciples

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<sup>9</sup> Jobes states, “Peter extends this concept to develop the idea that as followers of Christ, his readers should therefore not be surprised when they, too, suffer (1 Peter 4:12). Their sufferings for the name of Christ unite them to the experience and purpose of their Lord.” Jobes, *1 Peter*, 104.

to evangelize them.<sup>10</sup> What the Spirit helped the prophets understand and proclaim, he now helps us understand and proclaim.

Peter says the Holy Spirit is “sent from heaven.” It is possible that this is simply a reference to the divine origin of the Spirit, but it is likely more than that. In fact, Tom Schreiner says that it “is likely a reminder of Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out on the church to bear witness to Jesus Christ.”<sup>11</sup> This event was not inconsequential for Peter but rather incredibly personal. It was Peter after all who was filled with the Holy Spirit on that Pentecost and preached the powerful sermon recorded in Acts 2. In fact, that sermon is a profound illustration of what Peter has said briefly in 1:12. Peter quoted directly from the prophets in that Pentecost sermon to show how the prophets had predicted the coming of Christ. He majors on both the Old Testament passages about the suffering of Christ citing Psalm 16:8-11 and the subsequent glories citing Psalm 110:1. Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost was his first and as far as we can tell, it was the greatest.

Peter is a living, breathing example to those to whom he writes of the how God sent the Holy Spirit to empower the disciples of Christ to proclaim the “good news” to the world. In that very sermon, where three thousand people were saved, Peter declares, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (Acts 2:38-39). The very Spirit that filled him and brought the Word to thousands is the very Spirit that God has used to bring the Word of God to them through preachers and evangelists. Certainly, this must have encouraged those discouraged and dejected

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<sup>10</sup> Actheimer notes, “Since the human preachers are identified as the means by which this proclamation occurs, the Holy Spirit (πνεύματι ἁγίῳ) is probably not to be understood here as the instrument but as the one who empowers that proclamation, although, to be sure, the two ideas are intimately related.” Actheimer, *1 Peter*, 112.

<sup>11</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 75. Actheimer disagrees and believes that at the very least it is not so much to remind the readers of the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, but rather to reinforce the divine origin and initiative. I see no reason why both are not dominant thoughts in the mind of Peter who was of course present at that first Pentecost and was himself filled with the Spirit to proclaim the gospel.

believers who were at risk of compromising their faith. To know that God had spoken so powerfully to them must have stirred their faith.

In every generation, God raises up a people to proclaim the glories and excellence of Christ. And this side of the cross, believers are privileged beyond their wildest imaginations. Those under the Old Covenant had limited insight into the gospel. But what believers have now is far superior. The apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians explaining this reality:

When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (Eph 3:4-6)

This gospel had recently been proclaimed in Asia Minor to Peter's readers. God had given them greater revelation and insight into the sufferings and subsequent glories of Christ. Therefore, they had more to ground them and strengthen them than any of the Old Testament saints and even prophets before them. What they possess is better than it was before because it has been fleshed out and fulfilled in the person and work of Christ.<sup>12</sup>

A principle can be pulled out from this passage and applied to all believers: those who have come to understand the gospel are tasked with faithfully proclaiming the gospel. Of course, this is not new or novel and can be found countless places in the Scriptures. However, here we see clearly that those privileged to live this side of the cross with greater knowledge and insight into the gospel and the entirety of the Word of God have been given the privilege and responsibility to faithfully proclaim it as it was faithfully proclaimed to us. We are the heirs of the full message of the prophets. We have been given the Holy Spirit that inspired them. Like the disciples before us, we are called to advance the Great Commission by making more disciples (Matt 28:18-20). We do this not only

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<sup>12</sup> Michaels notes, "They have heard the message for themselves, proclaimed afresh in their own time. Although Peter does not say so, this fresh proclamation and fresh hearing are what actually define the message as the gospel of Jesus Christ, supplying for its content his suffering and vindication. This, for the hearers, is the decisive revelation; the ministry of the prophets simply confirms it." Michaels, *1 Peter*, 46.

knowing it will more than likely bring greater suffering but knowing that through our suffering the gospel will continue to advance. It was this way with the prophets, it was this way with the apostles, and it was this way with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. From this truth we draw courage and confidence. Though, Peter wants to emphasize one more point in order to strengthen our faith.

### **The Angels Eagerly Examine**

What at first glance seems to be an odd statement is actually incredibly important. Remember that Peter is writing to help believers stand firm in the faith, especially as they experience oppression and even persecution. He is heightening their appreciation of the gospel and thereby their affection for God. He has helped them understand the staggering reality that they are privileged beyond what even the Old Testament prophets experienced. They have greater knowledge and insight into the gospel because they have lived in the era that has seen its fulfillment in Christ. Edmond Clowney writes, “What Peter is eager to point out is that his hearers are the heirs of the full message of the prophets. The least disciple of Christ is in a better position to understand Old Testament revelation than the greatest prophet before Christ came.”<sup>13</sup> This depth of knowledge should produce a depth of fortitude and strength. But if that is not enough, then they need only to consider the advantage they have over the angels.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout Scripture, God uses angels to convey messages to His people. Their many appearances are an indication that God reveals much to His angels. Not only do they have unique access to God by virtue of created order, but many of these spiritual beings have a unique role in communicating God’s Word to God’s people. They are often the

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<sup>13</sup> Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 59-60.

<sup>14</sup> Michaels notes that the lack of a definite article means that these are “angels” in the general rather than a particular group; yet, as in the case of the prophets, Peter evidently has specific traditions in mind. The notion that some heavenly mysteries are hidden even from the angels who dwell in heaven is found both in Jewish apocalyptic literature and in the New Testament (e. g. Mark 13:32). Michaels, *1 Peter*, 46.

recipients of privileged information and deeper insight into the plans and purposes of God. However, God has held back important information even from them. They have been privileged in the past with incredible knowledge into the plan of redemption, and what they lack they are now eagerly examining as they peer into the fulfillment of the gospel.<sup>15</sup>

What Peter describes is a strong desire: they “long to look.” They are straining to see what has long ago been prophesied and long been veiled. The point of their intense inquiry is the salvation now known and experienced by New Testament believers. Perhaps the longing to glimpse into the unfolding redemption in Christ is driven by knowledge that God has not chosen to redeem fallen angels. How intriguing to them that God has set a special love on humanity. That God would leave His throne in Heaven and put on flesh. The incarnation of Jesus was a spectacular event that included multiple angelic appearances and pronouncements alongside the multitude of heavenly hosts praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (Luke 2:14). As staggering as those events must have been, they do not compare to the cross and the resurrection.

How often are we guilty of taking the gospel for granted? Many Christians fail to understand the wealth they have inherited and the mystery that they have been privileged to understand. Like those born into wealth with all the blessings and benefits it affords but never truly appreciate what they have been given, so too Christians can quickly lose the wonder, awe, and amazement of what has been entrusted to them. Instead of possessing a superficial understanding of the gospel, the Christian must learn to plumb the depths of the mysteries in Christ. If the angels eagerly peer over the edge of heaven to simply get a glimpse of this majestic truth, how much more should those who possess its riches more eagerly examine, understand, and treasure what is already theirs.

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<sup>15</sup> Alcheimer addresses the difficulty in interpreting this final clause, but states, “While there was a tradition that angelic knowledge about redemption was superior to that of human beings, the thrust of this clause seems rather to reflect an equally widespread tradition of the angels’ lack of knowledge and their resultant inferiority to human beings. Hence they desire merely to glimpse what is now openly proclaimed in the gospel.” Alcheimer, *1 Peter*, 80.

Oh, that we would long to look into our salvation with eyes illuminated by the Holy Spirit and with hearts that long to know Jesus more. But the mind-numbing effects of this world often intrude on these heavenly desires birthed in believers by the power of the Holy Spirit. To reignite or continue to fuel these passions, the obstacles of distraction and lesser desire must be removed. Time is limited and therefore must be protected and not squandered. How many hours are lost by excessive use of entertainment? How much time devoted to the building up of the physical body? How much of our lives wasted by endless scrolling on smartphones or computer screens? Time must be used well, and few things benefit the believer more than time given over to the study of God's Word. The Christian must embrace a life of study which requires giving greater attention to the use of our time. Take a moment to consider what must go from your life for you to make space for what must be central in your life. Perhaps it would be appropriate to craft a schedule and a plan to help you long to look and actually look into the wonders of your salvation.

### **Conclusion**

It is true that sometimes life can be hard. We encounter trials of all shapes, sizes, and durations. Suffering is the reality of human existence in a fallen world, and it always will be until Jesus returns and ushers in the New Heavens and the New Earth. Even as followers of Jesus, it is easy to focus on the difficulties and challenges we face. However, Jesus never promised that following Him would be easy. In fact, He stated that it would not be easy. To follow Jesus is to pick up our cross daily; it is to suffer like Him. It is to face the scorn and hatred of the world. In these moments, we may be inclined to believe that nobody has ever had it this hard and that we are alone in our suffering and no one can relate. But as Peter reminds us, that would be wrong. We have a deep spiritual heritage that helps to forge our identity. We are part of a long line of God's children who have endured much for choosing to follow Him and being chosen by Him.

Rather than wallowing in self-pity, Peter calls us to remember those who have gone before us. Not only are we not alone in our suffering, in many ways we are far better

off than those who faithfully trusted and followed God in the Old Testament. To be sure, they were blessed and cared for by God in many ways, but their insight into their suffering and who it was pointing toward was limited. They were given a glimpse into salvation history and were told of the Messiah who would come to suffer before His glory. They had a small taste of what we now enjoy in full. While they searched and inquired carefully, we know and understand with greater clarity.

In the grace of God, those who came before were serving us. And we have been served so faithfully. The Scriptures we have been given have been fulfilled through the message preached to us. In this new era of salvation history, the one they longed to see is ours to behold. How much better is it to suffer and strive with the wonderful truth of the gospel guiding our every step! Our spiritual ancestors could only dream of the great privilege we enjoy living this side of the cross. So, instead of looking at our suffering and declaring, “Woe is me!” Let us look at our salvation and declare, “How blessed are we!”

CHAPTER 4  
FAMILY DYNAMICS—FROM HOPE TO HOLINESS:  
1 PETER 1:13-21

**Sermon Introduction**

It was a normal Sunday morning filled with sweet fellowship, wonderful praise, and the ministry of God’s Word. A dear saint and sister in the Lord walked up to me as I came down from giving the closing benediction. I anticipated a question about the sermon but as I stood there with my twelve-year-old daughter beside me, the question turned into a statement: “Wow! She looks so much like you!” It is not the first time I have heard it and it will not be the last. The family genes run strong, and it is undeniably obvious that we are related. It is not just the physical resemblance either. We share similar personalities, mannerisms, patterns of speech, and countless other seemingly trivial habits and behaviors. As I age, I notice how much I am looking more and more like my own father. I see the physical resemblances getting stronger. I hear the familiar phrases and corny jokes, the voice inflections, and subtle gestures. We resemble those we are related to and—almost by nature—we reflect the parents who have raised and nurtured us.

It is not by accident that the Scriptures highlight and reinforce the familial bond we experience in the body of Christ. God’s people are also God’s children. And far from being a trivial identity marker, the family dynamics are crucial for spiritual survival and health as we sojourn toward our heavenly home. In fact, family characteristics are required for God’s children. The Father desires His children to resemble Him in both character and conduct. When we put our hope fully in Him, looking to the future hope that he has promised, we will increasingly look more like Him. He takes us from hope to holiness.

## **Text**

First Peter 1:13-21 reads,

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” 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, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

## **Need**

In the Christian life, doctrine leads to duty, learning leads to living, and belief leads to behavior. When it comes to the gospel, future hope leads to present holiness. God desires that His children look forward to all that He has promised them so that they can act and look like His children here and now. Perhaps your present holiness has stalled because you have lost sight of your future hope.

## **Main Point**

Salvation has provided Christians with a future hope that impacts their present reality. In the midst of what may feel or seem hopeless from a human perspective, followers of Jesus must look beyond what they may see or feel to what they know to be true in the gospel. First Peter 1:13-21 teaches that the future hope of what awaits the believer at the return of Jesus must result in a present holiness in our lives. We have been saved into God’s family and as a result must live as obedient children who reflect their heavenly Father who has ransomed us from our former ways of living. This great salvation was the predetermined plan of God who gave us Christ and raised Him from the dead. He now is both our future and present hope.

## **Context and Preview**

Peter begins his letter by defining the identity of his readers as “elect exiles of the dispersion” (1:1), reminding them that they are defined in this world by their relationship to God. God is their Father, and He has graciously chosen them (1:2) and caused them to be born again to a living hope because of the finished work of Christ (1:3). As a result of their new status as God’s chosen people, they will face much opposition in this world. But this world is not their home and what awaits those who are in Christ is an inheritance that far exceeds anything this world can offer (1:4). This inheritance is being divinely protected and will ultimately be revealed on the final day of salvation (1:5). This is cause for rejoicing even in the midst of trials which are necessary to test and affirm the genuineness of the believer’s faith (1:6-7). Suffering, especially for the sake of the gospel, continues to remind us that this world is not our home and that we must hold fast to the guarantee of our future inheritance. We should read Peter’s letter considering the day of our future salvation (1:8-9).

It is salvation in the fullest sense (past, present and future) to which the prophets of old spoke long ago. They looked intently into the prophecies which they themselves proclaimed and yet did not fully understand (1:10). They longed for a better understanding of the predictions of the suffering and subsequent glory of the Christ (1:11). This pattern of suffering then glory gave them hope as they were persecuted for their prophetic roles. While it served them to know that this too was the pattern of the promised messiah, the Spirit of Christ revealed that they were ultimately serving a future generation who would experience these realities in greater measure (1:12). Peter makes it clear that New Covenant believers have been given an incredible advantage over Old Covenant saints and even angels as they follow Jesus in the New Covenant era. However, following Jesus means looking like Jesus. The fullness of our future salvation is intended to spur us on to present sanctification. Here in 1:13-21, Peter will pick up the familial language to drive home the importance of future hope that leads to present holiness. As Peter begins to exhort his

readers in this section, he also continues to remind them of the redemption that undergirds his call to holiness.

### **First Peter 1:13-16: The Obedience of Hope**

Despite the significant trials Peter's readers were facing, Peter has given them a reason to endure. He has described the deep and life changing theology of salvation and said that we have been given a living hope. Christian hope is not pie in the sky kind of hope. It is not a "fingers crossed" sort of hope as in, "I really hope this happens." No, Christian hope is "living" in the sense that it is sure and secure, productive, fruitful, and fertile. Our hope has the power to change how we live because we know that it is true. Rather than taking these truths and storing them away in the basement of our minds to collect dust, he wants us to place them at the front door of our minds to help us live as God's obedient children. By beginning this section with the word "therefore" (1:13), Peter reminds us that the indicatives of the Christian life always lead to the imperatives of the Christian life.<sup>1</sup> He wants the truth we believe to transform how we behave. Or to put it another way, behavior reveals beliefs. Peter knows that clinging to biblical hope will lead to growing in holiness. To help us move from hope to holiness he guides us down a path to develop our spiritual lives. What must God's children do to move from hope to holiness?

#### **Stay Spiritually Alert: A Disciplined Mind (1:13)**

First Peter 1:13 introduces the first call to action in this letter. It is a call to holiness of life predicated upon the hope of the Christian life. The powerful truths of the gospel bring forth the call to faithfully live out the gospel. Once we understand what God has done for us, we must understand what we are called to do for him. The first call to action is to "set your hope fully." This imperative is a call to decisive and definitive action.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Schreiner notes, "In the following verses the readers are exhorted to live a godly life. But all these exhortations are grounded in God's saving work as explained in vv.1-12." Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 77.

The verb “to hope” is used only one other place by Peter where that biblical hope always leads to active obedience (1 Pet 3:5). The object of our hope needs our full and complete attention. The context of suffering already mentioned by Peter (1:6-7) would seem to indicate that this suffering can disrupt or disturb the believers resolve to set their hope *fully*. Just as the wind and waves reoriented Peter’s gaze away from Christ as he walked on the water with Jesus, so the trials of life can pull our focus off of Jesus. But what is it specifically that we are to fixate upon? Peter says, “On the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:13). It is not just Christ that we are to fix our gaze upon, but the future day of the revelation of Christ and the confidence of what will be ours on that day.<sup>2</sup> But how are we to do this? Peter tells us that the key to keeping our hearts anchored in this hope starts with having a disciplined mind.

Peter uses two participles to describe how we are to accomplish the main imperative of setting our hope fully on the grace of that final day.<sup>3</sup> The first phrase is a call to be “preparing your minds for action,” or more literally, “gird up/bind up the loins of your mind.” This phrase is meant as a metaphor that evokes imagery of sinching up the loose hanging portions of a common robe, tucking it into the belt for the purpose of work, warfare, or simply extra mobility. This was a common practice in the ancient world.<sup>4</sup> But as is common in 1 Peter, there seems to be a direct link back to ancient Israel and in particular the preparation for the nation of Israel as they fled Egypt in the Exodus. In Exodus 12:11, God’s children are told, “In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in

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<sup>2</sup> Jobes helpfully writes, “Moreover; they are to set their hope fully on this coming grace with an undivided confidence and to place no confidence in the things that society trains us to put our hope in, such as status, education, money and so on.” Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 110.

<sup>3</sup> Jobes notes that some see the participles in 1 Peter being used as imperatives, but she suggests that they are adverbial and carry imperatival sense by virtue of their relationship to the main verb which is in the imperative mood. Jobes, *1 Peter*, 110-11.

<sup>4</sup> For more biblical examples see 1 Kgs 18:46; 2 Kgs 4:29, 9:1; Job 40:7, Jer 1:17.

haste. It is the LORD's Passover." Certainly, this imagery is intended to impress upon God's people the necessity of staying spiritually alert. Jesus himself uses this language in Luke 12 to exhort God's people to be ready for the master to return, saying, "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks" (vv. 35-36). The Christian cannot be idle or complacent in this life but rather must stay spiritually alert and prepared for hard work in the mental and spiritual realms. This is a stark reminder that the primary battle in the Christian life is the battle for the mind. This is where the battle is won or lost, and it will not be won without great effort. There is a certain mental resolve and fortitude necessary for faithful Christian living. Like Israel in Egypt, we have been called out of slavery to begin a journey toward the promised land. We are called to have our minds girded so that we can set our hope fully on the grace that will be ours. How we do this is the focus of Peter's next phrase.

Spiritual alertness is then contrasted with drunken lethargy with the phrase, "being sober-minded." Obviously, this statement forbids physical drunkenness, but Peter's point is that the Christian must guard against letting the mind wander into any kind of mental inebriation or influence that would inhibit spiritual alertness; any kind of apathy of mind that steers the believer into sin through inattentiveness. Peter uses the same phrase in 4:7 and 5:8 to encourage spiritual alertness in prayer and in resisting the devil. He knows how easily Christians can lose their spiritual concentration. There is a kind of spiritual sobriety required for faithfulness in the Christian life. Many temptations and obstacles prevent us from staying focused on the return of our Lord. We are lulled into thinking we have more time, that we can waste our time with trivial and even sinful pursuits, and that we can fix our minds on the things of this earth rather than the things above. To do so is to become intoxicated with the world, which leads to ungodliness.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Schreiner states, "There is a way of living that becomes dull to the reality of God, that is anesthetized by the attractions of this world. When people are lulled into such drowsiness, they lose sight of

We cannot have our hope set partially on the return of Jesus but fully upon his immanent return. Is your mind divided or distracted? Has your gaze drifted away from Jesus and toward the attractions of this world? Are you intoxicated with earthly pursuits of wealth, reputation, entertainment, education, power, or authority? Perhaps it is time to reorient your mind back to the future. Ask God to reveal any waywardness within you. Repent of those sins and ask for grace to set your hope fully where it belongs: on the return of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Then put off those intoxicating distractions and stay spiritually alert, disciplining your mind through prayer and time meditating on Scripture. That anchored hope will lead to active holiness.

### **Stay Spiritually Awake: A Decisive Break (1:14)**

Here in verse 1:14, Peter uses familial language to remind believers of their primary identity forged by their relationship to God. He calls them “obedient children,” reminding them that this identity comes with inherent obligation.<sup>6</sup> Their identity as obedient children is also a reminder of their belonging to God’s family, which implies God’s warmth and care.<sup>7</sup> The call to obedience is a reminder that submission to God’s Word is characteristic of God’s children.

While the main verb is found in verse 15 (“be holy”), the participle Peter uses here, “do not be conformed,” carries an imperatival force.<sup>8</sup> Peter is saying that if our hope is set fully on the second coming of Jesus, then we will live a holy life here and now. And

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Christ’s future revelation of himself and concentrate only on fulfilling their earthly desires.” Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 79.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Achtemeier helpfully states, “Their metaphorical address as ‘children’ sounds the theme of newness (newly begotten, 1:3, 23; newly born, 2:2), which belongs to the central thrust of the letter.” Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 119.

<sup>7</sup> Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 67.

<sup>8</sup> Schreiner writes, “The word ‘but’ (*alla*) in v. 15 suggests, however, that the participle stands as an imperative in its own right, for the command not to conform to former desires is contrasted with the injunction to be holy.” Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 79.

that pursuit of holiness requires that we stay spiritually awake to the presence of sin in our lives and make a decisive break with it. This language is reminiscent of Paul's words in Romans 12:2 to "not be conformed to this world." There is an ever-present danger for the Christian living in this world. The opportunity to be conformed back to previous patterns of behavior reminds us that we are not yet home and need to stay awake to our present reality as partially redeemed persons awaiting the fullness of our redemption at the return of Jesus. What exactly must we remain awake to?

Peter is commanding believers to not be conformed "to the passions of your former ignorance." While the penalty of sin has been erased and the authority of sin broken, the presence of sin remains. It remains in the form of passion or desires. The sin nature that remains still has some sway over us. These desires refer to the sins that once dominated believers in their pre-conversion condition.<sup>9</sup> It is a stark reminder that even though the Christian is born again and possesses the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God, the power of sin remains and can retain a powerful grip in the lives of God's children. J. C. Ryle articulates this well, stating, "After all, I am convinced that the greatest proof of the extent and power of sin is the pernacity with which it cleaves to man, even after he is converted and has become the subject of the Holy Ghost's operations. . . . Mighty indeed must that foe be who even when crucified is still alive!"<sup>10</sup> There is a desperate need for believers to stay awake in the fight against sin; to daily make a decisive break with the old man and his old passions. According to Peter, this kind of vigilance and intentionality is in part a by-product of rightly oriented hope in the return of Jesus.

The mindset of the Christian is not a passive let go and let God approach but rather an active refusal to follow the sinful desires of the flesh. The call to be obedient

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<sup>9</sup> Schreiner rightly points out that "the reference to the 'ignorance' hearkens back to the pre-Christian past of the readers (cf. 1 Thess 4:5; cf. Acts 3:17; 17:30; Eph 4:18), suggesting also that they are Gentiles." Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 79.

<sup>10</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, & Roots* (Moscow: Charles Nolan, 2002), 6-7.

children is a powerful reminder that believers have been “born again” (1:2, 2:2) and as such do not fight this battle in their own strength. God’s children have been given the Holy Spirit to empower their obedience and therefore give evidence of their identity as members of God’s family. In coming to Christ, we made a decisive break with our old self and our former ways of living. We must now remain spiritually awake, continuing to put to death the deeds of the flesh (Col 3:5), daily making a decisive break with the old man that seeks to draw us away from God. This is a call for sweeping transformation in one’s life. And regularly making this break is the first half of pursuing holiness. Ryle writes, “A holy man will follow after temperance and self-denial. He will labour to mortify the desires of his body, to crucify his flesh with his affections and lusts, to curb his passion, to restrain his carnal inclinations, lest at any time they break loose.”<sup>11</sup> Stay spiritually awake to the ongoing temptation of sin.

**Stay Spiritually Ambitious:  
A Devoted Heart (1:15-16)**

Peter now identifies the primary calling of the Christian life, stating, “But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” Actively avoiding sin must be replaced with actively pursuing sanctification. Instead of being conformed to this world, the Christian is to conform to God himself. Tom Schreiner states, “The pattern for holiness is God himself, who is unremittingly good.”<sup>12</sup> The bar of holiness is not set by the court of public opinion, nor is it set by personal preference. The bar of holiness is God himself. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared, “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:48). While no one can fully attain to this goal in this life, it is clear that holiness must be our spiritual ambition. Children by nature look like their father. Likewise, God’s spiritual children must strive diligently to look like their Heavenly Father. It is

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<sup>11</sup> Ryle, *Holiness*, 43-44.

<sup>12</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 80. See also Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 120-21.

God who has called his children into his family. He has therefore called them into his likeness. The Christian must understand that the call to salvation is simultaneously a call to sanctification.

To be holy means that God’s children must learn to think and act like their Father in every area of life. This requires that God reveal his holiness to his people in order for them to follow the pattern of his character. God had faithfully revealed himself to his chosen people through powerful signs and wonders and through the mouth of Moses as he led them out of Egypt and into the wilderness. It was at Mount Sinai that God made a covenant with His people and gave them two tablets of stone summarizing the moral aspects of that covenant (Exod 20:1-17). To distinguish them from all the other nations and for God’s children to live in a right relationship with Him, God demanded obedience—what we commonly refer to as the Ten Commandments. God was drawing a sharp contrast between himself and the gods of the world. At the same time, He was calling for a sharp contrast between His people and all the other nations.<sup>13</sup>

This call for separation is made clear in verse 16 as Peter confirms this call to pattern holiness after God by quoting from Leviticus 19:2: “Since it is written, ‘you shall be holy, for I am holy.’”<sup>14</sup> Peter again takes a text that was directed toward the nation of Israel and applies it without reservation to New Testament believers. In doing so, he draws a line of continuity from Israel to Christ and then into the church. He calls Christ followers to read the Old Testament and to see that it has direct application for their lives.<sup>15</sup> While

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<sup>13</sup> Jobes rightly states, “Therefore, his people are to identify with him by being set apart and by relating to the world on the terms that God prescribes.” Jobes, *1 Peter*, 112. Likewise, Achtemeier explains, “To be appropriated by God means to be made holy; thus the choice of Israel as chosen people also makes them holy which is defined in Lev 29:26 as being set apart from all other peoples.” Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 121.

<sup>14</sup> Schreiner points out, “Discerning where the citation comes from is difficult since a number of verses in Leviticus qualify (Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7, 26).” Schreiner, *1, 2, Peter, Jude*, 80.

<sup>15</sup> Jobes notes, Peter assumes that the OT writings are authoritative and normative for his Christian readers, regardless of their previous ethnic origin. He makes no distinction between the Jewish and Gentile Christian in his application, nor does the span of time between Leviticus and his letter mitigate the relevance of

Peter does not reinforce all the Levitical laws, he does infer that the goal of the law was to reveal the perfect moral character of God and to transform a people into his own likeness and moral perfection. The Old Testament backdrop of Leviticus reinforces that just as Israel observed practices and morals that set them apart from their surrounding cultures, so too the church must be set apart from the world within which they live. They must stand out in a sinful culture and thereby bear witness to the God they worship.

My ten-year-old son recently asked to sit down with me and do a brief interview. He was given a school assignment that required him to interview someone he admires and wants to be like. I was honored that he chose me, his father. It reminded me that God's children should want to grow up and be like Him. Believers should be ambitious in their pursuit of holiness because of a deep desire to reflect God's Holy character. But the simple truth is, we cannot be like that whom we do not know. The Christian must therefore have a heart that is completely devoted to both knowing God in all his perfection and glory, and then spiritually ambitious to be like the God they now know. In the Christian life, personal holiness is directly related to a deep and intimate knowledge and relationship with God. We are not looking for behavior modification, we are looking for supernatural, Holy Spirit empowered transformation. That means we must be students of the Word of God. When it comes to personal holiness, the factor that makes the difference is not intellectual ability, the number of books read, sermons listened to, nor education acquired, but the quality of fellowship with Christ cultivated throughout the many seasons of life. To be like God we must be much with God. A devoted heart is spiritually ambitious, longing to be in His presence.

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God's ancient revelation of himself. . . . Peter's differentiated application of Leviticus is interesting in that it preserves the authority of God's word to ancient Israel as binding on Christians, but it does *not* prescribe the specifics of the Levitical code as the way of life to be followed by his Christian readers. The apostle recognizes continuity of authority and principle between the OT and Christians but also differences in the particulars because his readers live after the resurrection of Jesus Christ and after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, as well as in a different time and place than ancient Israel. Christians are no less God's people than was ancient Israel, and no less accountable to God than Israel was, but their holiness is expressed in ways that are appropriate to their own historical moment. (Jobes, *1 Peter*, 113-14)

### **First Peter 1:17-19: The Obedience of Fear**

Peter continues his argument but shifts gears from the hope that fuels holiness to the fear that fuels holiness. Again, it is the familial relationship that informs this right kind of fear that drives the Christian life. This is not a new concept and is found throughout both the Old and New Testaments. It is the fear of the Lord that is “the beginning of knowledge” (Prov 1:9) and the early church is said to have walked “in the fear of the Lord” (Acts 9:31). Sanctification is dependent on us being God-fearing people. Or as John Murray writes, “The fear of God is the soul of godliness.”<sup>16</sup> We must pause here to ask, Do I fear God? Am I living in the Fear of the Lord? Here Peter gives the motivation toward holiness and teaches how to properly fear God.

#### **Greater Awe of God (1:17)**

To “conduct ourselves with fear” we must understand what it means to fear God. There are two aspects to the fear of God. First is the fear of terror or dread. This fear produces trembling and trepidation. Second is the fear of veneration, reverence, and awe. When the Bible calls believers to fear the Lord it seems to speak mainly to the idea of reverence and awe. But it must be said that a proper awe of God requires a kind of fear and trembling created by an understanding of his power and authority.<sup>17</sup> The fear of terror or dread is not the dominant element of the fear of God in the Christian, but it is a vital part of what comprises the fear of the Lord in the believer. Peter heightens our fear of the Lord by identifying God as both Father and Judge. These two titles and roles are clearly authoritative and infuse a sense of responsibility and accountability to those under such authority.

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<sup>16</sup> John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1957), 229.

<sup>17</sup> Schreiner helpfully states, “Abject terror certainly does not fit with the joy and boldness of the Christian life. Reverence, however, can be watered down so that it becomes rather insipid.” Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 81.

Peter reminds believers that they have the unique privilege of calling on God “as Father.” This links back to verse 14 where believers are called to be “obedient children.” Why is Peter reminding us of God’s role as Father? This familial connection reminds us of the parental authority of a Father and the submissive obedience required of children. Children who rightly fear their Father will not live in rebellion but submission. God has called believers into a special relationship that requires a certain kind of response; namely, reverence and honor that is demonstrated in heartfelt obedience. Part of what Peter is saying is that if you want to enjoy sweet communion and fellowship with God and therefore increase in holiness, you must stand in awe of his position and status in your life. I will never forget hearing a childhood friend directly address his father by his first name. It was shocking because I would not have dared to do such a thing and I would probably not have survived to tell the tale. His relationship with his father was casual, more of a peer-to-peer relationship than a father-son relationship. Unsurprisingly, my friend consistently rejected his father’s authority and lived a disobedient life. Peter calls us to reject any kind of casual relationship with God and calls us to a heightened respect and reverence that will produce heightened obedience and therefore holiness.

God is not only a Father, but one “who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds.” Peter reminds that we have a great responsibility and a great accountability. God is both holy and just. As such, he will not be partial but will render just judgement on every act ever committed. Fear of judgement is a legitimate motivator toward obedience in both the Old and New Testament.<sup>18</sup> In the Garden of Eden, God built judgment into the fabric of humanities’ relationship with Him. Albert Martin notes, “If God made fear of His judgement a legitimate motive to Adam in his unfallen state, how much more is it a necessary motive for us who are in a redeemed state but not yet perfected and living out our days in the context of a world that continually appeals to various facets of our

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<sup>18</sup> See for example Gen 2, Deut 24, Lev 26, Josh 7, 1 Pet 3.

remaining corruption.”<sup>19</sup> The presence of indwelling sin still remains and can have destructive power in our lives and bring great reproach to our God and Father. Therefore, Peter calls us to “conduct ourselves with fear throughout the time of [our] exile” (1:17). Our time of exile is limited; it will come to an end. The point is powerful: we must not allow ourselves to become casual in our approach to God or lazy in our battle against sin because we are dealing with a God who judges impartially and to whom we will soon give an account.

For the unbeliever, understanding the judgement of God is crucial to salvation. The statements made about the wrath of God and the judgment of God are intended to produce an overwhelming fear of God.<sup>20</sup> It is right to be afraid of God. You have biblical grounds to be afraid of Him. That fear is not intended to drive you away from Him, but toward Him. Solomon famously wrote, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov 1:7). You are invited to draw near to God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, who can and will take the judgment you deserve so that you can call God Father and follow Him as His obedient child. Do not wait, flee the wrath to come, grab hold of Jesus today!

### **Greater Appreciation of Grace (1:18-21)**

This kind of fear is bolstered by a greater understanding of the grace that has already been received. Peter says that we pursue this holiness “knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1:18-19).<sup>21</sup> This indeed ought to be powerful motivation for the

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<sup>19</sup> Albert N. Martin, *The Forgotten Fear: Where Have All the God-Fearers Gone?* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2015), 40.

<sup>20</sup> See for example Isa 42:5; Jer 10:10; Rom 2:8; 2 Thess 1:7-8.

<sup>21</sup> Achtemeier notes, “These two verses are so closely intertwined with their discussion of the contrasting means of redemption (18a, 19) that they must be treated as a unit.” Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 80.

Christian. Our salvation was expensive. Cheap grace is no grace at all. When we pause and consider the costly sacrifice of Jesus it provides powerful fuel for holy living.

Peter contrasts two competing realities to highlight the magnificent grace of God in Jesus Christ. First, we must remember our former reality. We were not ransomed from some trivial condition or inconsequential lifestyle. All of humanity apart from God lived in futile ways that had been passed on from generation to generation.<sup>22</sup> Every means of trying to please God or accomplish our redemption was empty. We were slaves to our sin, and we worshipped gods who were no gods at all. Neither our efforts nor our idols had any power to save us. So, what could redeem us from our futile ways?

The idea of redemption has deep roots in the Old Testament and evokes the deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt.<sup>23</sup> In the ancient world, freedom could often be purchased. But Peter says that we could not be redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold. No earthly thing could purchase our freedom for it was of limited worth and value. Something far superior was needed, something that could not perish and that would provide the full and final payment. Only God could redeem his people. Karen Jobes points out that Peter is echoing Isaiah 52:3: “You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money.”<sup>24</sup> The cost of redemption is not money but the eternal and exceedingly precious blood of Jesus. We see again that Peter connects his readers to their identity as God’s chosen people through the use of the term *redemption* as well as the allusion to Isaiah’s prophecy. He drives this connection deeper in the next verse with the imagery of the Passover lamb.

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<sup>22</sup> Schreiner states, “Here we have firm evidence that the readers were Gentiles (cf. 1 Pet. 4:1-4), since the Jews were at least taught they should worship the one and only God. . . . The reference to silver and gold may be mentioned because of their association with idolatry (Deut 29:17; Dan 5:23; Wis 13:10; Rev 9:20).” Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 84.

<sup>23</sup> See for example Deut 7:8; 9:26; 15:15; 24:18. Schreiner notes that the term is also applied to the liberation of both people and for Israel in the book of Isaiah during the second exodus. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 84.

<sup>24</sup> Jobes, *1 Peter*, 117.

The Passover lamb was the supreme symbol of Israel's redemption. Again, the Exodus imagery is used to strengthen and sustain God's people as they navigate their time of exile. The vivid image of the precious lamb without spot or blemish was a reminder of the substitution necessary for their redemption. It was a reminder of the sacrificial system which required blood for the atonement of sin. Death was the punishment they deserved and so death was required as the price of redemption. Jesus Christ shed his blood; he poured out his life for sinners. The spotless lamb, the only sinless one, became our perfect substitute. This is the grace of God toward sinners deserving his wrath. Peter holds up this grace to heighten our appreciation and motivate our holiness. The cost of redemption was greater than we could fathom. What more do we need to compel us to live holy lives for the glory of God our Father?

If that were not enough, Peter makes it clear that God had always planned on giving us a divine payment for sin. Jesus was "foreknown before the foundation of the world." This does not mean that God looked ahead and knew that Jesus would become the Savior of the world. It speaks to the predetermined plan of God. Why is this part of his argument? God's purpose in ransoming sinners was not an afterthought but was a plan conceived in his heart before time began. And if his plan of salvation was conceived with such purpose and specificity, with such exactness, it means that you were part of this predetermined plan.

In fact, that is exactly what Peter makes clear, He was "made manifest in the last times for the sake of you, who through him are believers in God" (1:20-21). We can appreciate grace when we understand the overarching sovereignty of God's plan, but also the intimate specificity of God's plan. God has tailor made a plan to rescue humanity, but he has tailor made a plan to rescue you personally. That means that your life is not a mistake; your existence is not an afterthought; your circumstances are not an accident; and your salvation is not a surprise. He wrote your name in the Lamb's book of life. For our sake God "raised him from the dead and gave him glory" (1:21). Why? "So that your

faith and hope are in God” (1:21). Our future hope has broken into the present. The payment was made and accepted. Jesus is not dead but alive! Our hope is not dead but alive and our faith is not in vain. God planned to save you in eternity past; he planned to give you an inheritance in the future; and he planned to give you a real faith and present hope that anchors the truth of your future hope. As a result, we are debtors of God’s grace, joyfully living to the praise of His glorious grace.

### **Conclusion**

My children look like me. Much of that is not their choice. The similarities are either in their genes or absorbed through osmosis. But as they grow older, they will choose what they want to mimic. Out of love and respect they will want to be like me in certain ways. Perhaps they will be disciplined as I am disciplined or loving as I am loving. But I am just a man, and the best of men are men at best. As their father, my supreme goal is to point them to their heavenly Father. My greatest desire is that they would be like me only as much as I am like Him.

If we are God’s children, then we must look increasingly more like our Father. But holiness does not happen by accident. It requires Spirit-empowered effort and gospel-motivated focus. Peter calls us to action exhorting us to fix our minds on the future hope that is ours at the revelation of Jesus Christ. When our minds are fixed on this hope, we can intentionally live as obedient children of our gracious Father, passionately pursuing holiness in the fear of the Lord. He takes us from hope to holiness and leaves us with the supreme motivation of the cost of our redemption: the precious blood of Jesus. May we strive to be holy as he is holy, because of the hope he has guaranteed.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE PRIVILEGE OF OUR POSITION: 1 PETER 2:2-10

#### **Sermon Introduction**

I remember playing pick-up sports in elementary school. One of the most exciting (or humiliating) times was when teams were chosen. The team captains were generally pretty obvious. The two best players at the respective sport were told to select teams. They would flip a coin to see who went first then the fun began. The rest of us stood in one spot and waited to be chosen, preferably sooner than later. The earlier you were chosen, the better position you were in and the greater the responsibility you were given. These school yard tactics are employed in a variety of different areas of life though they may not look exactly the same. You throw your resume on the stack and the best of the bunch are chosen. You and your co-workers battle it out every day and hope to be chosen for the coveted promotion. Whether its sports, academia, career, or the military, to be chosen for a position is generally a great responsibility but also a great privilege.

The Christian has been chosen by God. Not because of anything they have done or how much value they add to the team, but because of God's divine love. While it is a mystery as to why God chooses some and not others, the fact that we have been chosen by God and given a position in his family and kingdom is remarkable. But this reality puts us instantly at odds with the world. It makes us outcasts and outsiders. We look not like the respected team captain, but the humiliated kid who was not picked and does not get to play at all. It can feel more like a punishment than a privilege. However, that is only true if you fail to see and understand your position. Peter points us to the privilege of our position in order to strengthen our purpose and our proclamation.

## **Text**

First Peter 2:4-10 reads,

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

## **Need**

It is easy to lose sight of the incredible privilege of our calling, especially when we are suffering for that very calling. When we understand the nature of our position in God’s spiritual house, we are better prepared to not only endure hostility but to faithfully proclaim the gospel in the midst of it.

## **Main Point**

Through the use of numerous Old Testament passages and vivid Old Testament imagery, 1 Peter 2:4-10 identifies believers with Jesus Christ the living stone and describes them as living stones built into a spiritual house. This metaphor and imagery help believers make sense of the rejection and exaltation of Jesus and therefore their own suffering as Christ followers. It further teaches believers about the privileged position they enjoy and share with God’s chosen people in the Old Testament. This privileged position comes with great responsibility to proclaim the excellencies of God who called them to this glorious new life.

## **Context and Preview**

Building off the foundation he laid in chapter 1, Peter continues to root his readers’ identity in the Old Testament people of God. They know that they are “elect exiles” (1:1, 17), that they are God’s children and He is their Father (1:2, 3, 14, 17), and

that the gospel was long ago prophesied and that they were the intended benefactors of these prophecies (1:10-12). They have been assured that they have a future hope and guaranteed inheritance (1:4, 7, 13, 21). Now, Peter draws extensively from the Scriptures to teach them that because of their union with Christ they are a spiritual house that God is continuing to build up according to His plan.

Throughout the first chapter, Peter also addressed the condition of his readers, which is marked by trials, hostility, and suffering that will continue to be a major theme through his letter (1:6). While they are united with Old Testament believers in suffering for their faith in God, the suffering they experience finds its greatest continuity with Jesus Christ himself (1:11). As they pursue holiness as obedient children, longing for the truth of God's Word to grow in Christlikeness (2:1-3), they must now see that Jesus is the foundation upon which they are built up into this spiritual house. Peter then applies Old Testament titles to his readers to make them realize the privilege of their unique position as believers in Jesus Christ. This privilege, when rightly understood, elicits the proclamation of this glorious God.

### **First Peter 2:4-8: A Spiritual House**

The first image Peter employs is that of a stone. He speaks of one specific stone that essentially divides all of humanity into two camps—those who are “built up” into a “spiritual house” and those who are broken down because they stumble over this “rock of offense.” This language is carefully taken from a variety of Old Testament Scriptures and applied to the New Testament church, establishing continuity and grounding identity. Peter describes how this happens and what the implications are for believers.

### **Becoming the Spiritual House (2:4-5)**

Peter begins by making an assertion that those who come to “him,” meaning Jesus, are becoming a “spiritual house.” He proceeds to describe how exactly this happens using the imagery of stones that are alive. Peter is carrying forward the Old Testament

reference he has drawn upon in the previous verses from Psalm 33:5-6 LXX and drives the theme of conversion through his exhortation to “come to him.” Becoming a part of this spiritual house requires first and foremost faith in Jesus Christ.

Peter identifies Jesus as “a living stone” that was rejected and seen as worthless by the “builders” but was chosen and precious to God. David Helm notes, “These are stunning words, and elevating beyond measure. In one sentence Peter grasps the entire wealth of Israel’s identity and applies it not to Jesus alone, but to any man, woman or child who comes to faith in Christ!”<sup>1</sup> This is indeed stunning and continues to anchor the believer’s identity in the entirety of the Scriptures. Jesus is the source of salvation, not a physical temple or a religious system. We must come to a person not a religious place or a religious program. But it is not only Jesus who is a living stone. All those who trust in Him for their salvation are added to the infrastructure of this spiritual house. This person, Jesus Christ, then creates a people who are here described as *living stones* and a *spiritual house*.<sup>2</sup> This spiritual union is vital for the believer to understand. Peter is calling believers to not only look to Jesus for salvation but to understand that because of their new union with Him, they will suffer rejection like Him.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to see how Peter uses this building metaphor and quickly shifts from the individual response to the institutional reality of this spiritual house. The imagery

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<sup>1</sup> David R. Helm, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude: Sharing Christ’s Suffering, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 74.

<sup>2</sup> The comparison between Jesus as the living stone and believers as living stones is a powerful reminder of the theology of union with Christ. Thomas Schreiner notes, “Jesus’ resurrection life becomes theirs, even while they live in the midst of a hostile world.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 105.

<sup>3</sup> Karen Jobes notes that this reference to Christ as a living stone introduces a dominant image in this passage that has both Christological and ecclesiastical significance. The Living Stone was rejected as worthless by “the builders” but was chosen and precious to God. The imagery implies two building projects, one constructed by human builders, the other by God. The human builders examine Christ and find him unfit for building upon. Peter’s readers can no doubt relate to the experience of rejection, since they too were being rejected by their society as unfit. (Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005], 146)

of stones and a house emphasizes the activity and purpose of God. It is God who is doing the building as the passive verb indicates. He is both creating living stones and thereby adding these stones to the spiritual house. This points then not simply to Christian identity but to Christian mission. While the Scriptures are concerned about individual Christian growth and development, the emphasis here is geared more toward corporate development and growth. The building up of the spiritual house occurs as more and more living stones are added to the spiritual structure as they come to Him by faith. The building up is ultimately about the advancement of the gospel and accomplishing the Great Commission to go and make disciples.

The language used of living stones and a spiritual house clearly alludes to the temple, which is frequently referred to as a “house” in both the Old and New Testament.<sup>4</sup> The temple (and the tabernacle before it) were places of worship because they were the place where God dwelt in the midst of His people. Theologically, this is a potent reminder of the importance of the presence of God among man and the purpose for humanity. This stretches back to the creation of man in the Garden of Eden.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the temple is not only being used here as a metaphor, but is being developed as a type. God’s physical temple was always pointing toward a greater spiritual temple that would find its *telos* in Jesus Christ and then by extension all those who come to Him and are united to him by faith.

When it comes to temple language and imagery, Peter is using terms historically reserved for the nation of Israel and therefore teaches that there is greater continuity rather than discontinuity between Israel and the church. Peter teaches how the two Testaments

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<sup>4</sup> See for example 2 Sam 7:13; 1 Kgs 3:2, 6, 8; Matt 21:13; 23:38; John 2 16-17; Acts 7:47, 49.

<sup>5</sup> The opening chapters of Genesis assume that the earth will be God’s dwelling place. Indeed, the Garden of Eden is described in the opening chapters of Genesis as a divine sanctuary. Gordon Wenham states,

The garden of Eden is not viewed by the author of Genesis simply as a piece of Mesopotamian farmland, but as an archetypal sanctuary, that is a place where God dwells and where man should worship him. Many of the features of the garden may also be found in later sanctuaries, particularly the tabernacle or Jerusalem temple. These parallels suggest that the garden itself is understood as a sort of sanctuary. (G. J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden,” *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* 9 [1986]: 19)

properly relate to each other. Israel and the church are not separate entities but a unified people in the person of Christ. Benjamin Gladd explains, “Jesus of Nazareth is the true Israel of God, who reconstituted the people of God in himself. So, the church, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles, is the restored people of God, true Israel, because of their identification with him.”<sup>6</sup> The practical ramifications of this are many, but perhaps the most important application is not for what we do but for how we think. In other words, this impacts how we think about our identity as God’s people. This identity then shapes the way we live and how we read and understand the Scriptures.

When we see how the Old Testament authors use typology and develop themes, we are being taught how to understand Old Testament Scriptures and how to apply them to our own lives and to the church. Typology or types are divinely established patterns, people, or events that point to and find their fulfillment in future corresponding realities of salvation history. So, we see how the people of God stand in continuity of purpose and practice while also recognizing an intended prophetic fulfillment in Christ. This identity allows us to read the Old Testament not merely as observers of historical events, but participants in historical patterns. Thus, when we read of God dwelling in the temple (1 Kgs 8:13) and of Israel as a light to the nations (Isa 42:6), we see that, as the reconstituted people of God, we are called to carry forward that same mission and purpose but now with greater effectiveness. When we read of the purpose and purity of the temple, we see the pattern and identity we too are called to embrace in greater fulfillment. We see who we are and how we must live. We see this most of all when we look at Jesus who is the summation or fulfillment of all the temple practices and rituals, the sacrifices and observances, from the priesthood to the holy of holies. Jesus truly is the cornerstone upon which we, the New Testament temple, is being built.

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<sup>6</sup> Benjamin L. Gladd, *From Adam and Israel to the Church: A Biblical Theology of the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019), xii.

This theological distinction is not merely an academic inquiry. It changes how we think, how we read (or study) the Old Testament Scriptures, and as a result how we live. This is after all the primary purpose of Peter writing his letter. Peter states in verse 5 that the purpose of our new identity as living stones in this spiritual house is “to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” The centrality of worship is clear. In the Old Testament the break between priests and people was sharp. The priesthood began with Aaron who stood before a holy God on behalf of a sinful people. Priests were a kind of intermediary who represented the people before God and therefore enjoyed greater access and intimacy with God. But Peter now applies the priestly office to all of God’s children and shows that it too had a typological fulfillment in Christ and application to the New Covenant peoples. In Christ, all believers are given equal access to and intimacy with God. The purpose of which is to bring “spiritual sacrifices” that are acceptable to God. While the priests of old offered ceremonial sacrifices, Peter carries forward the metaphorical understanding of these practices and makes clear that just as we are a spiritual house, we offer spiritual sacrifices. These sacrifices of worship point to the conduct and character of Christ followers.<sup>7</sup> Every part of our life is to be offered up as a spiritual sacrifice and act of worship, which means that every area of the Christian life is sacred. The mother cleaning up after her children is able to offer that up as a spiritual act of worship. The father providing for his family or the employee working as unto the Lord are able to offer their services as an act of worship. Our identity shapes our behavior.

It should come as no surprise therefore that Peter focuses much on the purpose and holiness of God’s people that flows out of their God-given identity. This idea is not unique to Peter but is found frequently in the New Testament. For example, in 2

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<sup>7</sup> J Ramsey Michaels notes, “In 1 Peter, as in Hebrews, the “spiritual sacrifices” are first of all something offered up to God as worship (ἀνεύγκαι) and, second, a pattern of social conduct. The two aspects cannot be separated, and the priority is always the same.” J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 101.

Corinthians 6:16-18, in writing to a predominantly Gentile church, the apostle Paul quotes and alludes to a variety of Old Testament texts (cf. Lev 26; Ezek 20, 37; Isa 52; 2 Sam 7). Like 1 Peter, what is so astounding is that many of these texts refer to ethnic Israel but are unreservedly applied to the church. In both 1 Peter and 2 Corinthians, the church is exhorted to embrace their identity as a New Israel and a spiritual Temple made up of living stones. The implication is clear: Christian living flows from Christian identity. Peter now moves to undergird this new identity by further grounding it in the Old Testament.

### **Understanding the Spiritual Blueprint (2:6-8)**

Peter now supports his argument with three Old Testament quotations. First, he quotes Isaiah 28:16: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” The context of this verse is crucial to understanding its intent. Isaiah 28 is rife with both condemnation and hope. The prophet is calling Judah to trust in her God for deliverance in times of crisis rather than to expect the military might of her government or allies to help. Isaiah’s lament concerns a group of people living in the norther nation of Ephraim. He refers to them as a “fading flower” that will be flooded, trampled, and swallowed up (vv. 1, 4). They are a proud crown of drunkards (v. 3). Isaiah shows the stupidity of this pride by describing the drunken parties celebrated in Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom. Their pride in their perceived self-importance and power will be their inevitable downfall.

In verses 5-6 we get a glimpse of hope, for “in that day the LORD of hosts will be a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of his people.” In what sense will God be the crown of his people? Oswald notes, “He will be the true king as depicted in 11:1-9. Instead of the drunken, craven rulers Israel and Judah had come to expect, he will

bring a new spirit to the throne.”<sup>8</sup> These two verses then serve as a prelude to what Isaiah will develop in chapters 28–31; namely, the folly of human leadership and the need for God to be king.<sup>9</sup> While this theme is not controversial, the concept of God being King over his people was a constant stumbling block for the people of God (e.g., 1 Sam 8).

In the next section, 28:7-13 continues the theme of 1-6 but with more specific accusations against the drunken priest and prophets of Judah. Not only are the rulers drunken and foolish, but they are religious leaders. They shout back in mock condescension, accusing Isaiah of contradiction and confusion, outraged that he should presume to instruct them (v. 9). They hear him muttering what Brevard Childs calls “incomprehensible nonsense.”<sup>10</sup> But Isaiah responds by telling them that if they refuse to listen to his words then God will speak to them in catastrophic judgment. They will be overrun by foreign troops who will speak to them with “strange lips and with a foreign tongue.” With great irony, Isaiah indicates that God’s judgment will become truly incomprehensible speech.

Continuing with the dual themes of judgment and hope, Isaiah now levels the devastating blow. He attacks their flawed foundation of human alliances. They have made a covenant with death (v. 15) that has sealed their death and will ultimately bring down the crushing power of Babylon on their heads. They think that their pact will save them, but it will be their demise. And in the midst of this devastating condemnation is a promise of hope in verse 16. Now enters the metaphor of the temple with particular focus on the cornerstone. This cornerstone is a sure foundation. Those who believe will not be put to shame. In fact, as verses 17-19 indicate, God will establish justice and overthrow

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<sup>8</sup> John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 508.

<sup>9</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 508.

<sup>10</sup> Brevard Childs, *Isaiah*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 207.

the rulers and the people whom they lead. This cornerstone is chosen and precious and is none other than Jesus Christ, God in flesh.<sup>11</sup>

The church is built both on the foundation of Jesus Christ, but he is also the cornerstone that sets the shape of the entire spiritual edifice. Karen Jobes states, “The imagery of the living stones being built into a single unit implies that the significance and purpose of the individual Christian cannot be realized apart from the community with other believers.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, part of the privilege of being a believer in Jesus Christ is that you not only come into relationship with God, but also relationship with others who have likewise been built into God’s great building project.

Next, Peter again reminds believers of the honor or privilege of their position. Only those who believe become part of this spiritual house to enjoy the presence and power and fulfill the purpose of God. In sharp contrast, Peter quotes from Psalm 118:22 to describe the destiny of those who do not believe: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” Psalm 118 is classified as a *hallel* Psalm. The author is unknown, but it is probably a Davidic king of Israel, one who was also the military leader of the nation.<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly, this Psalm would have been sung by the temple-priests. As they sung about the stone that was to be rejected by the builders—the stone that would indeed become the cornerstone—they would have been gazing at the temple structure, perhaps considering the theological significance and typological nature of the very structure itself. J. A. Motyer notes, “The temple-priests hail the coming Individual as *the stone* and those

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<sup>11</sup> Oswalt suggests that the possibilities for the identification of the stone are numerous and lists the following options: the law, the temple, Yahweh’s saving work, Yahweh’s relation to this people, the archetypal Davidic monarch, true believers, Zion, the remnant, and Yahweh himself. See Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 518. It is possible that the stone is intended to convey more than one of these realities. Regardless, the New Testament indicates that whatever the stone is intended to indicate would one day be summed up in Jesus Christ and thus has not only a metaphorical meaning but a typological one.

<sup>12</sup> Jobes, *1 Peter*, 149.

<sup>13</sup> Steven J. Lawson, *Psalms 76–150*, Holman Old Testament Commentary, vol. 12 (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 227.

accompanying him respond (22-23); the priest acclaims *the day* of his arrival and the group prays to experience the blessings of the day (24-25); the priests pronounce blessing on the individual and on the group (26, *you plural*).”<sup>14</sup> This Psalm is cited numerous times in the New Testament (cf. Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11). In its original context it describes the return of the king to the temple to give thanks after his victory over his enemies. The stone that was rejected according to this psalm, was the David king, and the builders were the foreign nations that rejected the rule of the anointed king of Israel.

Both Jesus and Peter apply this psalm in a shocking way. The builders who reject this cornerstone are not the pagan idol worshippers but the religious leaders of Israel. The religious leaders were following their own blueprint for building God’s house and in turn had failed to follow the blueprint of God to the cornerstone, Jesus Christ. This is a tragic reminder that people can be so close to the truth of the gospel and yet so far. It also reveals that many who practice religion and even appear to love God have actually rejected Him and will die in unbelief. Many in the evangelical church would do well to look beyond the surface of their religion’s practices to the roots of true belief in Jesus. It is only by union with Him that the privilege of this position can be translated into true God-honoring practices.

In the final Old Testament citation, Peter draws attention to Isaiah 8:14 to describe how this cornerstone becomes a source not of salvation but damnation. In the context of Isaiah 8, Israel and Judah are told to fear and trust the Lord rather than fear other nations. It is here that Isaiah predicts that they would stumble over this stone and trip on this rock of offense. They stumble over Christ because they refuse to believe in him and bow the knee to him. Isaiah seems to be developing the theology of the temple along typological lines, indicating that the temple was always pointing toward an

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<sup>14</sup> J. A. Motyer, “The Psalms,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 564.

individual, but not just any individual. Interestingly, D. A. Carson notes that there is an extensive tradition in which various texts referring to a “stone” were applied to the Messiah and to the eschatological age.<sup>15</sup> Peter will reference this citation again when he tells believers who face suffering for following Christ to “have no fear of them, nor be troubled” (1 Pet 3:14). A fear of man prevents man from fearing the Lord. The thought of being mistreated for believing in Jesus is a strong deterrent to following Jesus. The message of the gospel is exclusive and divisive, and therefore costly. Peter says that they stumble “because they disobey the message.” That is to say that they will not embrace the gospel, and this is what “they were destined to do.”

Peter is reinforcing that it is far better to be shamed by others than it is to be put to shame by God in the last day. To reject Jesus is to do so to your own destruction. The spiritual blueprint for salvation revolves around the cornerstone, Jesus Christ. All those who come to Him will not be put to shame. If you do, though you are despised and rejected by the world, you will have honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Choose Him over the world and you will not be put to shame. This is the privilege of our position—in Christ our cornerstone we have become living stones, the place of God’s presence, and a spiritual house where we offer spiritual worship that is acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

### **First Peter 2:9-10: A Spiritual People**

Peter continues to shape the identity of his readers (and all believers) by rooting them further in Old Testament terms. While Peter has shown how the identity of Christ as the living stone establishes the identity of believers as living stones being built up into a spiritual house, he now expands on this imagery of a spiritual house and identifies Christians by four significant identity markers (a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession), previously reserved for the Old Testament

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<sup>15</sup> G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1025.

nation of Israel. Peter's statements press deeper into the Christian identity. This is the point of the imagery Peter employs. These titles come from Exodus 19, when God constituted Israel as a nation, and Isaiah 43 when God promised to reestablish Israel after the exile. These are foundation statements about Israel. By applying these terms to the church, Peter tells his primarily Gentile audience that the privileges of Israel are now theirs.<sup>16</sup> They may be aliens and exiles, cast out and rejected by their former people, but God has taken them in. With these titles comes a new understanding of their position and privilege. These spiritual terms are intended to help the believer grasp their spiritual purpose that Peter drives home in verse 9.

### **A Chosen Race**

Peter begins by making a sharp contrast with those in the previous verse who are destined for destruction. Those that face destruction do so because they have chosen that for themselves since they refuse to come to Jesus, while those who believe in Christ have been "chosen" by Him. The privilege of being this chosen race is drawn from Exodus 19:6 and Isaiah 43:20-21. This contrast demonstrates that Peter is not speaking about race in any true ethnic sense, but in the spiritual sense. Spiritually speaking, there are only two races. But the concept of race reminds us of a significant identity marker. I remember when my children were younger and starting to pick up on the different races of children in their classes. They attend a very racially and ethnically diverse school and they themselves are mixed race. Growing up with parents who are in an interracial marriage, they were well exposed to different skin tones and features. One day, in attempting to describe a child in her class, my daughter identified one boy as "peach." Since we had never heard this color as a descriptor for a Caucasian person, and wondering how she would describe her own darker skin tone, my wife asked her what color she (my daughter) was. Without skipping a beat, she said, "dark peach." While it was humorous, it was also a reminder that as our

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<sup>16</sup> Michaels states, "With the use of these titles, Peter makes explicit his basis for consistently addressing his Gentile Christian readers as if they were Jews." Michaels, *1 Peter*, 107.

children get older, they both see and at least in part identify themselves and others by their race. Race is one of the most visibly identifiable factors about us, even more so than hair and eye color, height, and weight. While God's family is made up of many races or ethnicities, there is really only one race, a chosen race of people now identified predominantly by their union with Christ.<sup>17</sup> We are a people not defined by color or culture but by confession and creed; we are defined by Christ in whom we believe.

### **A Royal Priesthood**

Again, Peter uses the language of priesthood to forge the identity of God's people. A priest had the unique blessing and privilege of greater access to God's presence and therefore greater intimacy with Him. But they also had the unique privilege and role of mediating God's presence to the world. Exodus 19:6 states that God's people are a "royal priesthood." The context of Exodus 19 is the covenant that God makes with Israel at Sinai and the implication of this title is that they were to mediate or display God's presence to the nations, putting his glory on full display.<sup>18</sup> In other words, a missional component to this title connects the privilege of Israel's position to the purpose God has given them. There was a sense in which the entirety of the people of God were to be understood as a royal priesthood, not simply the Levitical priests. All of God's people had this responsibility to display the glory of God to the nations that they might see that there is no God like the God of Israel. Israel failed at this mission and were sent into exile as a punishment.

However, now, this title is given to the church of Jesus Christ by virtue of their union with Him. The church now, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, has the privileged position of being royal priests and carrying forward God's purpose to reach the nations as

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<sup>17</sup> Schreiner writes, "Peter saw these promises as fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and God's elect nation is no longer coterminous with Israel but embraces the church of Jesus Christ, which is composed of both Jews and Gentiles." Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 114.

<sup>18</sup> This concept finds its origins in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve function as a "royal priesthood," mirroring God's glory to all of creation and advancing that glory across the globe.

His people display his glory through their love and obedience to God. In the midst of our exile, which is not a result of our sin but of our salvation, the church of Jesus Christ mediates God's glory to a watching world, even and perhaps especially as we suffer for following Him. Oh, that we would see and seize our opportunity to display him so that many would then glorify God on His day of visitation!

### **A Holy Nation**

God's people have received the privilege of being citizens of God's kingdom. Again, this title is drawn directly from Exodus 19:6. Like the metaphor of the temple, this language reminds God's people that they have the unique honor of enjoying God's presence. The kingdom of God is primarily about the presence of God dwelling with His people. While God dwelt with His people in the tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament, He now dwells within God's people both individually and corporately as his spiritual temple. His presence makes us holy, set apart from all the other peoples of the earth. It is also a powerful reminder that in our efforts to display God's glory, we must strive to be set apart from the sinful living that characterizes the nations of the world who do not know God or enjoy the power of His presence. Our holiness both individually and corporately sets us apart and draws unbelievers toward the saving grace of Jesus.

### **A People for His Own Possession**

Lastly, Peter roots the identity of God's people in the reality that they belong to God. This phrase is from Isaiah 43:21, where God calls Israel "my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself." This possession is more than mere ownership. God possesses His people because he has purchased and redeemed them at the cost of His own son. Isaiah 43:1 reads, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine." God's people are intentionally and intimately defined by their ownership by God. What an important reminder for God's people who are living in a fallen world where humanity seeks to define themselves instead of being defined by God. We are released

from the burden of trying to achieve an identity that will never be enough. We are given an identity by grace through faith and have become “a people of His own possession.” Since we are His, we must do what He says. And His commands are not burdensome (1 John 5:3), but rather are the privilege of our position.

### **First Peter 2:9-10: A Spiritual Purpose**

While the purpose of God’s people has already been alluded to as a result of their privileged position, Peter now makes it abundantly clear. We have become God’s people that we might “proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (2:9). There has been a categorical shift out of darkness and into light. If you have ever walked room filled with pitch black darkness into a room that was bursting forth with sunlight, you have a sense of how startling this contrast is intended to be.<sup>19</sup> Since this has been our experience and is our new reality, we have an obligation to declare the excellencies of the God who has done this for us. The privilege of our position comes with the privilege of our proclamation. Far from being a simple obligation, proclaiming the glory of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ should be our greatest joy. It is an honor to be an ambassador of the King. As Peter so clearly addressed the community of believers throughout this section, we must see and embrace that this proclamation, while being the special calling of some, is the privileged calling of all. Together, the church proclaims the excellencies of God. We proclaim it in our character that reflects Christ, our conduct that resembles Christ, and our creed that reveals Christ.

If that is not enough motivation, Peter ends in verse 10 with one more Old Testament reference that highlights our privileged position. In the book of Hosea, sinful Israel is rejected as God’s people because of their sin and rebellion against him, but God pledges to have mercy upon them and form them again as his people. In this divine drama, Hosea plays the part of God. Gomer, his unfaithful wife, represents unfaithful Israel. The

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<sup>19</sup> Schreiner notes, “Conversion is often depicted in the New Testament as transfer from darkness to light (Acts 26:18; 2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:4, 5, 8). Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 114.

names of their children have strategic meaning. Their names mean, “not my people” and “not pitied.” Though, in an act of kindness and grace in Hosea 2:23, God changes their names to “planted in the land” and “I will have mercy.” What God did for Israel he has done for all who are in Christ Jesus. How much more meaningful that this is applied to a gentile audience who were truly not His people and had found no mercy!<sup>20</sup> Having now become God’s people and having received His mercy, we have the unique privilege of inviting others to come and receive that same mercy and to become a part of the people of God. May God give us grace and joy in fulling this privileged purpose!

### **Conclusion**

The accumulation of Old Testament imagery and titles presents a powerful statement about the believer’s identity. That identity forges a well-rounded understanding not only of who the believer is, but what the believer is called to accomplish. You have been chosen by God, not because of anything you have done but because of his great love and mercy. Now, as part of the people of God, grab hold of that deeply rooted identity and charge forward to fulfill the divine purpose for which you have been called so that, in the end, a multitude of undeserving saints can stand united in the praise of God who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

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<sup>20</sup> Michaels explains,

The very language that identifies them as Gentiles at the same time confirms their identity (established by the metaphors of v 9) as “Israel.” The experience of being “no people” or “destitute of mercy” was Israel’s experience by virtue of her disobedience long before it was the experience of these Gentiles. In their past alienation no less than in their present acceptance before God, the Jews are the prototypes for the Christians to whom Peter writes. (Michaels, *1 Peter*, 112-13)

## CHAPTER 6

### SUFFERING SERVANTS: 1 PETER 2:18-25

#### **Sermon Introduction**

Human beings are inclined to abuse their power and mistreat those who are weak and viewed as inferior. It has been this way since the fall of man. The corrupting power of sin corrupts the use of power. History is filled with examples of tyrannical leaders who crush the weak and silence the dissidents, from the Gulags in Soviet Russia under the authority of Stalin to the concentration camps in Germany under the rule of Hitler. At this very moment, the communist regime in Cuba is cracking down on dissidents who speak up against the injustice and atrocities of the government while many flee the island shores attempting to float the ninety miles to Miami in hollowed out cars or makeshift rafts with the hope of a better life. And it is not just a problem with governmental regimes. At a micro level there are numerous examples of oppression and injustice. Husbands abuse their power and mistreat their wives. Employers mistreat employees. It is a part of the fabric of this broken world. But often, the greatest injustice in this world is the oppression and mistreatment of those who follow Jesus.

No one enjoys being oppressed and mistreated and the proper response to this kind of abuse of power is not always obvious, especially by those suffering unjustly. Every part of the sinful flesh wants to inflict harm and extract vengeance upon those who practice injustice. However, the Scriptures are clear that vengeance belongs to God (Deut 32:35; Rom 12:19; Heb 10:30). The follower of Christ is not called to harm those who harm them, but rather to do good; not to rebel against authority, but to submit. The identity of a Christ follower is not that of rebellious dissident, but a suffering servant. While this is not the way of the world, it is the way of Jesus and therefore His people.

## **Text**

First Peter 2:18–25 reads,

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

## **Need**

Suffering for the sake of following Jesus is a normal part of the Christian life. Christians must know how to respond to those who mistreat them in order to rightly represent Christ, honor God, and proclaim the gospel.

## **Main Point**

Peter makes it clear that those who choose to follow Christ will suffer like He suffered. But Peter wants to help us respond to suffering the same way Christ did. This Christlike response sets us apart from the world and also helps us proclaim Christ to the world. Just as Christ was identified as a “suffering servant” to redeem lost sinners, followers of Jesus must embody this same identity in order to be used by God to accomplish this same purpose.

## **Context and Preview**

Peter continues to root the identity of the church in Old Testament texts and in connection with the Old Testament people of God. At this point in the letter, Peter is most concerned about how believers live out their faith in front of the watching world. A new section begins in 2:11 where Peter exhorts or urges his readers “as sojourners and exiles” to flee and fight the desires for sin that “wage war against your soul.” This language is graphic and shockingly yet appropriately violent, for what comes next is of eternal

importance. The conduct of the believer is critical for the witness of the believer (2:12). Here, the emphasis is on the believer's "good deeds" and "honorable" conduct, which demonstrate a commitment to Christ. But what exactly are these good deeds and what constitutes honorable living? Peter repeats one verb throughout the remainder of chapter 2 and into chapter 3 that gives his definition of good deeds toward a hostile world: "be subject" (2:13, 18; 3:1).

Peter highlights three distinct relationships to promote this Christian virtue of submission to authority. Rather than addressing those in the position of authority in each relationship, Peter directs his instruction toward those who are not in authority and who, therefore, are more likely to be oppressed and mistreated. The reason for Peter's emphasis is simple and found in 2:18-25. The believer who sees his identity as a servant will learn to identify with and suffer like the greater Suffering Servant Jesus Christ. Just as his suffering was the means by which the gospel would be made available to the world, so too the way the Christian suffers like Him, will be the means by which God will reach the world through them.

### **First Peter 2:18-19: The Mindset of a Servant**

Peter has been addressing specific relationships to clarify what Christian conduct looks like in a hostile world. The conduct he presents appears to be countercultural but presents an important distinctive for the believing community in that the way they respond to suffering will make them visible and identifiable lights in the darkness. While many believe that righteousness and suffering are incompatible, Peter seems to imply that the more righteous you are, the more you will suffer. While this is no guarantee, Peter's logic is obvious—the more righteous you are, the more you will stand out in a world that hates God and therefore will mistreat and scorn you. Peter now seeks to help believers understand what it means to suffer righteously, and he does so through the paradigm of a slave.

## The Command We Heed (2:18)

Peter has already given believers the command to “be subject” to the government (2:13-17), but now he addresses the responsibility of the slave with the same language. He is speaking of the household codes that were common in Greco-Roman culture and are addressed elsewhere in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> While this is the most specific audience being addressed, Peter grabs hold of this particular relationship and broadens the application, using it as a paradigm for the Christian life. In the previous section where Peter is addressing the relationship between governing authorities and Christian citizens, he closes by calling believers to “live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as *servants* of God” (2:16). While Peter uses a different Greek word there for “servants,” the command for every believer to embrace the identity of a servant should not be missed.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Peter holds up Christ as the example for all believers to follow in the subsequent verses rooting the believer’s identity firmly in Christ.

In speaking to household servants, Peter ultimately addresses all Christians and their calling to suffer for Christ. While contemporary ears recoil at the idea of slavery, and rightly so, slaves were a common part of the ancient world and the Greco-Roman culture. The tendency is to think of slavery in terms of race-based slavery, for example of the pre-Civil War United States. As Tom Schreiner states, “those who are familiar with slavery

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars note that Peter is speaking in this section of *haustafel* or household codes found elsewhere in the NT such as Col 3:18-4:1 and Eph 5:22-6:5. Those Pauline passages differ significantly from what Peter presents here in that they look at both sides of the relationship where Peter emphasizes only those in the subservient position. Also, Peter omits the parent/child relationship and replaces it with the government/citizen relationship. David Helm notes, “This is a very important thing to take note of. Peter’s intention is highly specific and limited in scope. He desires to provide examples of good works done by the one most likely to be mistreated in the world’s institutional economy.” David R. Helm, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude: Sharing Christ’s Suffering*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 91.

<sup>2</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels writes, The other NT examples of the household duty code address Christian slaves as δούλοι (Col 3:22; Eph 6:5), but because Peter has just referred to all his readers as θεοῦ δούλοι (v 16), he switches to οἰκέται in order to focus on household servants as a particular social group (the same group, presumably, as the δούλοι of Colossians and Ephesians). NT and LXX usage suggests no discernible difference in meaning. (J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988], 138)

from the history of the United States must beware of imposing our historical experience on New Testament times since slavery in the Greco-Roman world was not based on race and American slave owners discouraged education of slaves.”<sup>3</sup> Slavery in the ancient world was still a less than ideal situation. While some were born into this station of life, many became slaves by being conquered in war or kidnapped. Some would sell themselves into slavery as a result of financial hardships. Slaves could have a variety of educational backgrounds and jobs, including doctors, teachers, managers, musicians, and artisans, and slaves could even own other slaves.<sup>4</sup> Many, however, suffered a terrible existence and often incredible abuse at the hands of their owners.

The point Peter is making here is that their lower station in life, regardless of the reason for being there, makes them susceptible to mistreatment. That mistreatment could produce a response that could either display and therefore declare the gospel, or distort and discredit the gospel. Karen Jobes writes, “Peter is concerned that Christians not use their moral freedom in a way that brings condemnation on the infant church for subverting social order.”<sup>5</sup> How they handle this difficult situation should have an evangelistic and apologetic effect. Servants (or slaves) are called to submit to their masters. It is erroneously thought by some that surely this only applies to masters who treat their servants fairly and with respect. We are accustomed to believing that only those who treat us well deserve to be treated well—only the boss who shows us respect deserves to be respected, or the spouse who shows us honor deserves to be honored. We tend to treat others like they treat us. Though, this is not the way of the gospel. On the contrary, Peter makes it clear that this applies “not only to the good and the gentle but also to the unjust” (2:18). This

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 135.

<sup>4</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 135.

<sup>5</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 184. Jobes continues, “At the same time, the moral freedom that Christians have been given in Christ transforms their understanding of themselves in ways unparalleled in the Greek moral philosophy of their time.” Jobes, *1 Peter*, 184.

countercultural approach is intended to set believers apart from the world that operates out of selfish desire and self-interest.

Peter makes it clear that Christians do not simply submit to those masters who are deserving of it because of how they treat them, but even to the unjust. The command we heed is to be subject with all respect, even to the unjust. Perhaps the greatest struggle with this statement is that it seems to support rather than decry the institution of slavery. Again, this way of thinking is usually predicated upon a modern understanding of slavery rather than a contextual one, but regardless, this is a valid concern. Modern readers of Peter's letter might be more inclined to take a revolutionary approach and overthrow the institution of slavery. It must be said that while the New Testament never affirms the institution of slavery, it does not explicitly call for its abolition. How can this be? Why do we not find more direct commands to dismantle this oppressive institution often used to abuse and rob humanity of their dignity and value? One simple answer is that the New Testament authors speak to their audience in the situation and circumstances they live.<sup>6</sup> The Scriptures do not call believers to be social or political revolutionaries (though some throughout history have certainly done much good in these realms e.g., William Wilberforce), but rather call believers to be spiritual revolutionaries more concerned about winning souls through the truth and power of the gospel. The aim was not societal change but spiritual transformation, which very often would lead to greater societal transformation.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For further discussion on slavery both ancient and modern, as well as a detailed biblical theology of the slavery metaphor, see Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 8, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: Apollos, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Schreiner states, Railing against slavery would not be of any help to ordinary Christians, for, as noted, the dissolution of slavery was out of the question. Furthermore, New Testament writers were not social revolutionaries (cf. 1 Cor 7:17–24). They did not believe that overhauling social structures would transform culture. Their concern was the relationship of individuals to God, and they focused on the sin and rebellion of individuals against their Creator. New Testament writers therefore concentrated instead on the godly response of believers to mistreatment. Peter fits this paradigm nicely, for he admonished his readers to respond in a godly way to persecution and oppression. (Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 136)

The submission of the believer is to be done with all respect or with reverence. This respect is not primarily aimed at the earthly master but rather at God himself.<sup>8</sup> This attitude characterizes the follower of Jesus Christ. There is an overriding desire to please God and live in the fear of the Lord rather than living for the praise of man or the passions of the flesh. This reverence toward God is also a reminder that the Christian slave does not owe his total allegiance to his earthly master and is therefore obligated to obey God, not man, where the commands of his master conflict with the commands of God. The Christian is obligated to resist ungodly commands and be willing to suffer the consequences for ultimate allegiance to Christ. The command we heed does not depend on the virtue of the master we serve but on the value of the God we worship.

### **The Credit We Enjoy**

Since God is the ultimate focus of the command to “be subject,” the believer must go to great lengths to respond in a way that is pleasing to Him. Peter states that those who take great care to do this do a “gracious thing” (2:19). Peter is explaining why it is necessary for a slave to be subject even to an unjust master and the first thing he notes is that those who endure such treatment are pleasing or commendable to God. When Peter uses the phrase “mindful of God,” it functions in the same way as the statement in the previous verse about respect or reverence. Schreiner points out that the word for “conscious” usually refers to “conscience” in the New Testament and has this very meaning in 1 Peter 3:16, 21.<sup>9</sup> What is commendable is when God’s people suffer

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Achtemeier provides exegetical clarity, stating,

Such subordination in turn is to be carried out ἐν παντί φόβῳ (“with all [godly] reverence”), with φόβῳ (“reverence”), referring not to the slaves’ attitude to their owner but to God. Such a meaning is dictated not only by the normal use of that word in this epistle but also by the present context, where in the immediately preceding verse Christians are commanded to “fear God” (τὸν θεὸν φοβεῖσθε) and in the immediately following verse are urged to a way of acting “because of a consciousness of God (διὰ συνείδησιν θεοῦ). (Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], 194-95).

See also Jobes, *1 Peter*, 136.

<sup>9</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 139.

because of their relationship with Him. The idea is that “the actions which cause the suffering are motivated by an awareness of what God’s will is in the situation (cf. 2:15), not by the character of the one inflicting the unjust punishment.”<sup>10</sup> This kind of motivation is incredibly important for the perseverance of the saints, hence Peter’s statement about how “one endures.”<sup>11</sup>

The truth is that in the midst of suffering we can be inclined to question not only ourselves and our decisions, but even God’s love, care, and protection. We ask questions like: If God really loves me why am I suffering like this? Is this really God’s will for my life? What we find reinforced in this passage is that suffering, especially suffering unjustly, can produce questions that need immediate answers from God’s Word, which Peter provides here. Peter articulates the principle that those who suffer unjustly in obedience to God’s will, will be rewarded by God. After laying out this principle in verse 19, Peter now unpacks it in verse 20.

Peter points toward the believer’s rewards for suffering, defining these rewards as “credit” in verse 20. He first gives a negative example of a person who suffers because of their sinful behavior. Rather than being commendable, it is despicable. There is no reward for this kind of suffering, you are justly rewarded with a beating, the consequences of your foolishness. I remember being taught as a youth that if we choose to sin, we are choosing to suffer. It is a mantra I have tried to instill in my own heart and in the hearts of my children. If you endure suffering because of sin, what is your reward? The obvious answer is nothing. You got what you deserve.

However, Peter indicates that if you endure suffering because you do good—and here good must be understood as obedience to Christ—this is a gracious thing in the

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<sup>10</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 196.

<sup>11</sup> Achtemeier reinforces the servant as a paradigm for the Christian life: “Finally, it may be noted that the author, by making the subject of the condition τῆς (“anyone”), clearly intends here to make a general statement, not one applicable to slaves alone. It is further indication of the paradigmatic nature of this address to slaves. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 197.

sight of God. Peter bookends verses 19 and 20 with the idea of this suffering being a “gracious thing.” It is seen by God, and it will be rewarded by God. It is grace before God. Near the very end of this book Peter writes, “I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it” (5:12). There are times when our commitment to Christ will cause us suffering in this world. While the world may punish us for this commitment, Christ will reward us. The watching world needs to see servants of Jesus Christ who act honorably and are willing to suffer. As David Helm states, “Our submission is not only within the will of God—it is a gracious thing in the sight of God. In submission you gain God’s smile.”<sup>12</sup> You gain his smile, and you enjoy a reward that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you (1:4). What we need now to drive this point home is an example to emulate, which is exactly what Peter gives us.

### **First Peter 2:20-25: The Example of a Servant**

While Peter provides the supreme example of what it looks like to suffer unjustly for doing the will of God, what Peter provides is not simply an example to follow but also the very reason we must suffer. If we are prone to ask why we must suffer unjustly, then we need to look no further than the heart of the gospel and the work of Christ. If we can anchor our identity there, then we can most certainly do good and endure the sorrow of suffering for it.

### **The Calling We Receive**

Contrary to the idea that Christian suffering is outside the will of God, Peter makes it clear in verse 21 that Christian suffering is a Christian calling. Verse 21 reaches back to 19-20 to show how present suffering will be the means by which Christians receive their future reward. While countless verses disprove the teachings of the prosperity gospel, surely this one must be near the top. God’s will for his servants is not that they are happy,

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<sup>12</sup> Helm, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude*, 95.

healthy, and wealthy here and now, but rather that they are called to suffer for doing what is right with the expectation that their reward is yet to come. It is to this that they have been called. This idea of calling has already been used by Paul to convey the divine work of God in accomplishing salvation (1:15; 2:9). Peter is connecting the different aspects of our salvation to show how they are all—past, present and future—being accomplished by God.

The reason we must suffer for doing good is “because Christ also suffered for you” (2:21). Peter will elaborate on this suffering in the following verses but for now he makes it clear that the believer’s suffering for Christ’s is a result of Christ’s suffering for the believer. The pattern has already been identified by Peter in 1:11 where the prophets of Old predicted the “sufferings of Christ and His subsequent glories.” This pattern was also the subject matter of Jesus instruction to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24. On the heels of the crucifixion, the followers of Jesus were confused and distraught. They could not wrap their minds around the events they had just experienced. They had seen the miraculous power of Jesus and had witnessed the wonderful teachings of Jesus. They truly believed he was the Messiah and thought He was the answer to all their problems. But they did not understand the suffering and death of Jesus. They did not have a category for it in their concept of the Messiah. Their expectations were formed by contemporary beliefs, not by the Scriptures.

As Jesus walked with these two men who were saddened by the crucifixion (Luke 24:17), they describe to Jesus, who has veiled his identity, what had happened to Jesus. Their sadness is due to the fact that they had “hoped he was the one to redeem Israel” (24:21). They are perplexed by recent news brought by some of the women who had gone to visit the tomb and found it empty and declared they had seen a vision and that Jesus was alive. Here we read one of the most stunning and helpful statement delivered by Jesus: “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should *suffer* these things and enter into his *glory*” (24:25-26). Then, in one of the most important statements for a Christocentric hermeneutic,

Luke adds in verse 27: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” The context indicates that the Scriptures he interpreted to them were those that related specifically to both his sufferings and his subsequent glory. The order is critical because it sets the pattern and expectation for the believer who will, like Christ, receive the reward of glory only after the suffering for God.

Peter calls believers to understand that their sufferings are connected to Christ’s sufferings. He is both the reason we suffer—because of our commitment to him—and the example for how to suffer. His path is our path, and his footsteps should be our footsteps. So often our suffering leaves us in a place of confusion. The pain clouds our minds, and we cannot see where to go or what to do. However, the light of the gospel breaks through the fog and allows us to look upon Jesus our Savior, the one who suffered for us and the one we must suffer like. Peter now lays out the suffering of Jesus by taking the church back to the prophets and holding up the identity of Jesus as the supreme Identity of believers.

### **The Commitment We Make**

As Peter has called believers to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, he identifies the way in which Jesus suffered and holds it up as an example for the church. The commitment Jesus made when enduring unjust suffering was to “commit no sin” and that there would be “no deceit found in his mouth.” This too is the commitment believers must make in order to suffer like Jesus. But what is crucial to see is that as Peter elaborates here upon the suffering of Jesus, he is drawing upon Isaiah 53. This Old Testament chapter describes the suffering of the Servant of the Lord and was a crucial passage to understand the work of Jesus.<sup>13</sup> Verse 22 is an exact quotation of Isaiah 53:9b in the Septuagint, except for one

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<sup>13</sup> Schreiner notes, “By the time Peter wrote, Isaiah 53 was firmly established in Christian tradition as a text that pointed to the suffering and exaltation of Jesus the Messiah (cf. Matt 20:28; Luke 22:37; Acts 3:13; Rom 4:25; 1 Cor 15:3; Phil 2:7). Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 143.

minor change where Peter substitutes the word “sin” for “lawlessness.”<sup>14</sup> This change allows this passage to be applied more specifically to the present context with its reference to sin in (2:19, 24). The meaning is not in any way affected and the point remains the same: Jesus did not simply resist sinning in suffering, he never sinned.

This is a staggering claim but one that is vital to the gospel. For Jesus to be a perfect substitute for sinners, he must be completely sinless.<sup>15</sup> Any hint of sin would not only disqualify Jesus as a substitute, but it would also unravel the claims of deity made by Christ himself. Isaiah 53 weaves together the themes of sinlessness and substitution through the imagery of a spotless lamb, alluding to the Passover celebration and perhaps the sacrificial system. As Peter quotes from this chapter, it is clear that this suffering was not only necessary to accomplish the salvation of God’s people, but it also becomes the paradigm for the unjust suffering and thereby sanctification of God’s people. These are tall orders. God’s children are to find their identity in Christ and that means that, like Him, they must commit to a sinless suffering where even when mistreated for fearing God and seeking to please Him, they refuse to operate in the flesh and instead walk by the Spirit.

In the Western world, suffering for Jesus seems foreign and almost impossible. We have had it far too easy for far too long. The danger we face is sliding into a comfortable Christianity that does not expect to have to suffer for Jesus. Though, the tides are quickly turning, and Christianity is no longer the acceptable religion it once was. Christian convictions are being targeted by the LGBTQ+ movement and it seems that the faith once and for all delivered to the saints is being challenged. Christians can sin by choosing to capitulate to the cultural pressure or they can remain faithful and choose to obey God rather than man. This will inevitably increase the prospect of suffering, even if

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<sup>14</sup> Michaels states, “The entire verse is an exact quotation of Isa 53:9b LXX except for the introductory ὅς (replacing Isaiah’s ὅτι) and Peter’s ἁμαρτίαν, “sin,” instead of Isaiah’s ἀνομίαν, ‘lawlessness’ (cf PolPhil 8.1, but contrast IClem 16.10, where ὅτι and ἀνομίαν are retained).” Michaels, *1 Peter*, 144.

<sup>15</sup> For New Testament references to the sinlessness of Jesus, see Matt 27:4; John 7:48; 8:29, 46; 18:38; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 John 3:5.

it is only minor in comparison to the suffering of other saints around the world. But this leaves Christians with another chance to sin. When facing this unjust suffering, will we choose to respond like Jesus? Will we commit no sin and be found to have no deceit in our mouths? What exactly does this look like? Peter elaborates in verse 23.

Jesus had every opportunity to treat others like they were treating Him. But in his suffering, he refused to respond in-kind. Peter says, “When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten” (2:23).<sup>16</sup> In other words, sinlessness is not easy. It requires great effort and intentionality. It requires great self-control and patience. We are so easily offended and quick to lash out at those who hurt us. We cannot stand when people say things that are hurtful or false about our character. Imagine being the God of the universe, the one who is perfect and Holy. The One who is Omniscient and Omnipotent and who created the world. Now imagine that the creatures you created revile and threaten you! In an instant you could speak, and they would turn to dust. But instead, you keep silent and refuse to stoop to their level. What do you do instead? You entrust yourself, commit yourself, to the one who judges justly.

Jesus models the ultimate form of commitment. He continues to entrust himself to God. His nonretaliatory silence becomes the evidence of his utter trust in and dependence upon God. His silence reveals his confidence in the God who will one day judge justly. This is certainly indicative of the way Jesus operated throughout His earthly ministry but is seen in the greatest way during the passion of Jesus. When we take vengeance into our own hands, we are in effect trying to play God. Our vengeance is generally fueled by sinful anger that attempts to extract a pound of flesh for the wrongs done to us. But the gospel teaches about the just judgment of God and reminds us that our job is to remain sinless, not to sinfully judge those who sin against us. In the midst of

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<sup>16</sup> Achtemeier writes, “Unlike vv. 22 and 24, there is no reflection of language from Isaiah 53 in this verse; in light of the clear dependence in those verses on that passage from Isaiah, however, the silence of the sacrificial lamb described in Isa 53:7 could well lie behind this verse, particularly if the author had in mind the silence Jesus maintained in face of the abuse he received during his trial.” Achtemeier, *I Peter*, 200.

suffering, we must believe that God is in control and that He will bring about the proper judgment at the proper time. While Jesus was on trial being falsely accused, he refused to open his mouth. He was silent like a lamb being led to the slaughter. However, that was the way it had to occur—Jesus must suffer death in order to offer redemption.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Cross We Bear**

Peter now moves to the cross of Christ and again draws upon Isaiah 53. The cross was a mode of death reserved for slaves and those who lacked Roman citizenship. Jobes notes that this “strengthens the identification between the plight of the ‘servants’ Peter addresses in 2:18 and the Suffering Servant.”<sup>18</sup> As we consider the cross that Jesus bore, it is crucial to understand how this creates a new identity in the believer in union with Christ. On that tree, Jesus “bore our sins in his body.” He did not suffer for any sins of his own, for he had none. Rather, he suffered and died for the sins of His people. He paid for our sin with his suffering. In so doing, Jesus was more than just an example to follow. His death was the means by which the power of sin and death would be destroyed in the life of the believer so that they could be set free and “live to righteousness.” Without the substitutionary death of Christ, we would have no ability to follow in his footsteps. We would remain dead in our sin and unable to please God. But now, those who by grace through faith put their trust in Jesus can know his forgives for “by his wounds you have been healed” (2:24). On the cross, Jesus suffered and bore our sins.<sup>19</sup>

But why did he do this? Peter explains, “For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (2:25). In our sin, we

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<sup>17</sup> Jobes notes, “Peter uses the language of Isa. 53, but the order of 1 Pet. 2:22-25 follows the sequence of events in the passion of Jesus, with 2:22 and 2:23 alluding to the trial, and verse 24 to the crucifixion.” Jobes, *1 Peter*, 194. See also Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 180.

<sup>18</sup> Jobes, *1 Peter*, 195.

<sup>19</sup> Schreiner explains, “Peter’s use of the word ‘tree’ (*xylon*; cf. also Acts 5:30; 10:39; Gal 3:13) instead of ‘cross’ contains an allusion to Deut 21:23. The idea that Jesus was cursed for the salvation of his people is probably implicit. Since Christ died for the sins of the people, it is fair to deduce that his death was substitutionary (cf. 3:18).” Schreiner, *1 Peter*, 145.

were not living for our Savior. We lived for the passions of our flesh and were deserving of God's just judgement. We were like wandering sheep (Isa 53:6), unable to save ourselves or find our way home. But God made a way. The Great Shephard came and sought us out. He found us and saved us from our sins. When Peter says we have returned, he is speaking of repentance of our sin. There is no way to be "healed" apart from repentance of sin and faith in Jesus Christ's atoning work on the cross. In other words, we look at the cross he bore for us and we are saved. His suffering brought about our salvation. And though Peter does not say it explicitly here, he certainly implies that the example of the cross that Jesus bore for us points to the cross we must bear for Him.

When we, by grace, decide to follow Jesus, we are willingly embracing a cruciform life. Perhaps you are hearing the call of God to embrace the suffering servant Jesus. Do not hesitate, run to Jesus who suffered and died for you. Now walk with Jesus who calls you to suffer for Him. We are picking up our cross daily and following Jesus knowing that what awaits us, if we desire to live godly lives in Christ Jesus, is a life of suffering for his sake. Though, just as the suffering of Jesus was the plan of the Father that would lead to His subsequent glory, so too our suffering is under the plan of the Father and under the sovereign control of "the Shepherd and Overseer of [our] souls" (2:25). He has charted the path from suffering to glory. Jesus walked every step of that path in perfect obedience to the Father. May we do the same and bring great glory to God who will one day soon gather all His sheep and bring them home to glory with Christ.

### **Conclusion**

Suffering is not just a reality of life in a fallen world. It is the reality of Christians who faithfully follow Jesus. While suffering for Jesus is uncommon in the western world, it has been normal for Christians across the millennia. When we face unjust suffering, every part of us wants to push back, to fight and revolt. But this is not the way of Jesus. Every servant faces the potential to be mistreated and abused, and our response must be the response of Jesus the Suffering Servant. Peter points us to Christ as both the

reason for our suffering and the example of how to suffer well. Let us entrust ourselves to the one who judges justly, believing that God will use our suffering as servants of God to point many to the salvation accomplished by God's Suffering Servant. May we embrace the mindset and example of Jesus because we find our identity in Him alone.

## CHAPTER 7

### LIVING THE GOOD LIFE: 1 PETER 3:8-12

#### Sermon Introduction

How would you define “the good life?” In *Living the Good Life: Health and Success for You*, David Patchell-Evans writes,

I wrote this book because I want to encourage you to live the good life. What is the good life? It’s about health. It’s about feeling at home in your body. It’s about allowing your body to become the best it can be. It’s the feeling of energy and alertness you feel when you’re in good shape. It’s about the confidence with which you meet life challenges. It’s knowing that you can achieve far more than you ever dreamed. It’s the sense of yourself as a body, mind, heart, and soul—a whole being, vibrant and alive.<sup>1</sup>

Our culture is caught up with living the good life. While the good life can be defined in a variety of ways depending upon context, personal interests, and societal metrics, the idea is transcendent. We all want to live a good life. We want to experience pleasure, not pain. We want success not failure. We long for a substantive and meaningful existence, not one that is trite or trivial. However, many in the church have succumbed to cultural conditioning about the good life. While this is certainly true, living the good life is a good and honorable pursuit. In fact, it is deeply biblical and theological. Trouble comes when we look to the world to define the good life instead of looking to God’s revealed Word. When we disconnect our pursuit of the good life from our pursuit of God himself, we will inevitably come up short.

Humanity is notoriously shortsighted. We are fixated on the present moment, often failing to realize that there is greater gratification in practicing delayed gratification. If our gaze is constantly fixed upon our immediate circumstances, then we will likely come

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<sup>1</sup> David Patchell-Evans, *Living the Good Life: Health and Success for You—for Canada* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2015), ix.

to believe that we are not experiencing the good life. But living the good life is about clinging to something that extends beyond this life: the promise of a future inheritance, a future blessing, that fills our hearts with joy and our days with true life.

### **Text**

First Peter 3:8-12 reads,

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

### **Need**

Suffering does not feel good and conflicts with the worldly understanding of the pursuit of happiness. A faulty understanding of what it means to live the good life can cause us to compromise our faith and testimony before a watching world. Understanding God’s definition of the good life is crucial for enduring suffering and enjoying God’s good life both now and into eternity.

### **Main Point**

In 1 Peter 3:8-12, Peter reminds us of our eschatological identity by reaching back into the Old Testament and instructing us on what it means to truly live the good life. Living the good life is not about the kind of life you make for yourself, but rather the new life you find in Jesus. It is about true life; a life with God at the center—a life lived with God and for God. In order to live the good life, God’s people need to understand their present calling in light of their future blessing.

### **Context and Preview**

Throughout 1 Peter we see a dominant theme of suffering and trials (1:6, 2:19, 3:16-18, 4:1, 4:16, 5:10). In fact, George Ladd states, “The most important emphasis in

Peter's thought about God is that of the divine providence in human suffering."<sup>2</sup> However, the sufferings addressed by Peter are not the normal or typical kinds of sufferings experienced by all human beings in a fallen world. Rather, "it is the sufferings people are called upon to endure because they are Christians."<sup>3</sup> With this perspective Peter began a new section in 2:11 where he exhorts his readers "as sojourners and exiles" to flee and fight the desires for sin that "wage war against your soul." He calls them to live in an honorable way in the midst of unjust suffering because the character and conduct of the believer are crucial for reaching the world with the gospel (2:12). His main exhortation is summed up by the threefold use of the command to "be subject" (2:13, 18; 3:1), specifically regarding those in positions of authority who may be inclined to mistreat those under their authority. The supreme example of the suffering servant is Jesus whom Peter points believers to in order to strengthen their resolve and motivate them toward greater godliness.

Peter continually anchors the believer's identity in the Old Testament. This book is filled with allusions, theological concepts, and imagery, and direct quotes from the Old Testament Scriptures. Peter specifically draws upon Old Testament quotations and allusions to the wilderness sojourn (2:11-4:11), instructing the redeemed how to sojourn toward the Promised Land.<sup>4</sup> In 1 Peter 3:10-12, Peter cites the Old Testament directly to encourage believers to uphold Christian character and sustain the Christian community as it remains faithful to the Lord while suffering hostility at the hands of the unbelieving world. All of this conduct is driven by the promise of a future blessing which has been promised to all God's children.

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<sup>2</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 2000), 644.

<sup>3</sup> Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 644.

<sup>4</sup> James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 522.

### **First Peter 3:8: Exercising the Love That Defines Us**

The immediate context of these verses stresses the importance of Christian unity, sympathy, love, compassion, and humility in the Christian community (1 Pet 2:8). These virtues follow the call to live in subjection to the proper, God ordained authorities (1 Pet 2:13-3:7). Peter stresses the importance of a proper witness and testimony to the watching world that is often hostile toward Christians and their faith. Instead of being rebellious and thereby presenting a Christian faith that encourages disorder and rejection of authority, Christians stand out for their willingness to obey God, submit to His Word, and respect order, decency, and authority. Rather than being an individual pursuit, here we see that this must be a community project. These virtues define the character that must be cultivated by the Christian community to help them respond biblically to any injustice they may face.

Peter begins by addressing the Christian community and the character or virtues that should define it. Since Christians will inevitably face hostility from the world, the church must be a society that not only looks radically different in how they behave, but does so in order to cultivate the kind of atmosphere that prepares believers to suffer well and strengthens them while they do so. Karen Jobes writes, “The Christian community is to be an alternate society where believers should not have to face the same kinds of insult and hostility that come from those outside the church. However, in order for the Christian community to really be a place of support and refuge, certain qualities must characterize its members.”<sup>5</sup> Peter lists five virtues that should be evident in “all” who are part of the community of faith. Peter has used a literary device here called a chiasm to show us how to understand these virtues and therefore how we live the good life together. While all the virtues are critical, the one at the center of the chiasm is highlighted as the focal point for Christian community, which Peter lists here as “brotherly love.”

The first and fifth virtues are the first pair: unity of mind and humility (or a humble mind). He calls all believers to “have unity of mind.” This is essential for the

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<sup>5</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 214.

health and growth of believers who are easily conquered when divided. The main idea here is harmony and peace.<sup>6</sup> Since the world is hostile to believers, there must be harmony with God's people. This unity of mind is forged by a common salvation and faith in Christ. There will be much diversity in the body of Christ but there need not be division since the truth of God and His Word supersedes all differences. What we have in common is greater than our differences. Healthy and strong relationships require this kind of thinking since the primary means by which harmony is disrupted is pride and self-assertion. To have one mind is not to have identical opinions about politics, philosophy, business, food, music, or leisure. We can have unity in diversity. This like-mindedness can only come by imitating the humility of Jesus, who gave up His rights for the good of others (2:2-5). So much division is caused by pride expressed in personal preferences. Humility produces a willingness to put the needs of others before our own rather than fight for our passions and preferences. Christ unites His children, and we see here that the good life is a life of unity with both God and those in the body of Christ.

Next, Peter encourages believers by exhorting them to have "sympathy" and "a tender heart." They are closely related and even hard to distinguish from each other. Sympathy is the ability to feel what another feels, whether in joy or in sorrow. We must "rejoice with those who rejoice [and] mourn with those who mourn" (Rom 12:15). We know that if one member suffers, all suffer. If one member is honored, all rejoice (1 Cor 12:26). To sympathize is to enter the experience of others and, if possible, to act on what we feel. Jesus sympathizes with us in our weakness. Sympathy or compassion means that believers must look out for the needs of one another. Contrary to the selfish motives that drive the sinful human heart and often characterize those outside of the church, believers are to care for one another by meeting their practical, spiritual, emotional, and relational

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Schreiner notes, "The call to "harmony" (*homophrones*) is common in the New Testament, even though this term only appears here (cf. Rom 15:5; 1 Cor 1:10; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 2:1-2; 4:2). Presumably this admonition and others would be unnecessary if churches were not prone to suffer from division and dissension." Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 163.

needs. This is especially important where believers are suffering for their faith in Christ. The mistreatment of Christians often leads to economic and social ostracization. Christians find solace in the provision of God through the people of God. Compassion is the emotion or feeling expressed in tenderness, generosity, and warmth. In the body of Christ, we seek each other's good, but we also enter into each other's needs and concerns. This is not easy to do in a culture that prioritizes individualism and autonomy over community. As a church, we must work hard at knowing others and being known by them. Through the ministry of hospitality and organized small groups, the family of God is mobilized to care for one another with sympathy and tender hearts.

Brotherly love is the middle term, showing that it is the most important of all the virtues and that the other virtues are embraced in the call to love one another as a family. Our common relationship with Christ unites us in the same family, and one evidence of genuine Christian faith is a warm love for others as brothers and sisters. Jesus made it clear stating, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). A family love must be evident amongst the people God, so much so that Peter mentions it repeatedly in his letter (1:22, 2:17, 5:9). The people of God are indeed a family made up of brothers and sister with God as their Father. There is to be a deep and abiding affection for one another that combats the hatred and hostility of the world.

Can you see how all of this reflects Christ? The one who loves us, sympathized with our weakness, and had compassion on us, who humbled himself that he might unite us to himself, making peace by the blood of the cross? He has served us, put our good ahead of his own, and we must exercise the love of Christ that defines who we are in Him. This is how we enjoy the good life together!

### **First Peter 3:9: Employing the Logic That Drives Us**

In verse 9. Peter moves from the character that must be cultivated amongst believers to specific conduct that must be practiced toward hostile unbelievers. Peter

presents a gospel logic that drives the way believers engage with those who mistreat us for our faith. Negatively, he exhorts the church, saying, “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling.”<sup>7</sup> I remember being insulted on the playground as a kid. One of the classic responses was to hurl the cliché statement, “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me.” I do not know who came up with that statement, but I am sure of this: they were trying to mask the deep hurt of the words that were used to assault them. The truth is, words are one of the deadliest weapons and have been used to destroy people since the fall of man (Jas 3:9-10). Words pierce to the depths of our soul and have the ability to haunt us for decades. Believers must have been suffering the scorn and ridicule of their pagan neighbors and experiencing the temptation to respond in kind. Whether the abuse was physical or psychological, the believer’s response is not to be one of repayment, “but on the contrary, bless.” The call is not just for nonretaliation, but for active encouragement!

It is hard to miss the connection to Jesus’ famous words in Matthew 5:44: “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” But what does it mean to “bless?” Not only must we refuse to fling insults at those who do so toward us, but we must speak well of them. To bless is to want God’s favor to rest upon them. It is to speak words of truth, words of the saving grace of the gospel, words of forgiveness and peace. Follow the logic here: “for to this you have been called.” It’s a Christlike calling! We are representing Christ, by reflecting Christ, as we rest in Christ. With his dying breath, Stephen prayed for those who stoned him: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60). Stephen prayed in that moment for a young Pharisee named Saul who stood holding the coats of those who were throwing the stones. The Lord Jesus received Stephen and answered his prayer. As Christians, we must love even our greatest enemies in the way that Christ has loved us, and we must show them Jesus by our attitude, actions, and words.

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<sup>7</sup> Jobes notes, “As a transition to the problem facing his readers, this verse is an important indication for the kind of hostility that must be characterizing Christians’ relationships with unbelievers.” Jobes, *1 Peter*, 216.

Though, why must we bless those who show hostility toward us? What does this have to do with living the good life? Peter provides this last bit of logic for us to employ. We do this to “obtain a blessing.” To drive this home, Peter cites the Old Testament Scriptures and provides an Old Testament example.

### **First Peter 3:9b-12: Embracing the Lord Who Delights Us**

Christians are to bless those who persecute them because “to this they have been called, that you may obtain a blessing” (3:9). The word *obtain* can be translated as “inherit,” which would be a more fitting word in light of the context.<sup>8</sup> This word points toward a future reality. In other words, Peter is not holding out simply the promise of some kind of immediate or earthly blessing, but rather a future and greater blessing promised to those that are truly the children of God. Commentator Karen Jobes rightly notes, “Those who resolutely refuse this call to follow in Jesus’ footsteps and continue to behave as the pagans thereby call into question their new identity in Christ, on which their eschatological blessing (salvation) depends.”<sup>9</sup> Peter is not suggesting that we are earning eternal life, but he is calling us to give evidence of our eternal life. Enduring until the end is part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Within the book of 1 Peter, we have already seen the use of this term *inheritance* in 1:4. There, Peter points to the future “*inheritance* that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” In verse 5 he goes on to speak of the future aspect of the believer’s salvation. Peter has also used this term in 3:7 to describe wives as fellow “*heirs* with you of the grace of life.” This idea of joint heirs points forward to the future hope of the gospel and the fullness of life to come. The future blessing is intended to

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<sup>8</sup> Peter here uses the phrase ἵνα εὐλογίαν κληρονομήσητε. While κληρονομήσητε can rightly be translated as “obtain or acquire,” it can also rightly be translated as “inherit.” See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 547.

<sup>9</sup> Jobes, *1 Peter*, 219-20.

motivate ongoing sanctification in the Christian life. This would be consistent with the dominant theme emphasized by Peter throughout this book: that God’s people are indeed exiles and sojourners on this earth who are called to look different than the world around them. They are not living for the passing pleasures of this world and the good life that so many unbelievers strive to attain. Rather, they are awaiting a future day where all the promises of God will find their full and final fulfillment in and through Christ. On that day, and every day before, Christians live the good life by finding their ultimate delight in God. The unmerited blessings both now and into the future motivate the believer to bless even those who oppress and persecute. To prove that this has always been the way, God’s children react to unjust treatment, especially for righteousness’ sake, Peter quotes from Psalm 34 in an effort to let King David stand as both an exhortation and an example.

#### **An Old Testament Example: Psalm 34**

After calling for a righteous response to unjust suffering, Peter now moves to reinforce this principle with an Old Testament quote—one that contains a built-in Old Testament example. Peter quotes from the Septuagint and makes one minor adjustment to the text that does not seem to change the meaning in any way.<sup>10</sup> It is unclear why Peter makes this change, but it seems to indicate that Peter interpreted this Psalm to have a future aspect and application. So, while Peter is not changing the original meaning, he wants to make it clear that this text was always pointing toward a future hope.

Peter looks at this Psalm and says that even David, the author of Psalm 34, understood that those who put their trust in God were ultimately clinging to the promise of a future inheritance that looked past this present life. The good life was always about God’s people being in God’s place with God’s presence. While this was experienced in

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<sup>10</sup> Peter David’s states, “Peter supports this teaching with a citation of Ps. 34:13-17a. The citation uses the same vocabulary as the Septuagint, but the grammatical forms in vv. 10-11 differ. The one major difference from both the Septuagint and the Hebrew text is in v. 10, which reads in the OT: “What man is there who desires life, and loves [many] days, that he may see good?” Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 127.

part by faithful Israel in the Promised Land, David shows not only that there is a future reality yet to be fulfilled, but even now you can taste a piece of this life. In fact, Peter has already quoted or alluded to Psalm 34 earlier in chapter 2:3. While the quotation in 2:3 is not the same portion he quotes in 3:10-12, Peter likely has the entire chapter and therefore context in mind. In 1 Peter 2:3, the focus is on the first half of Psalm 34:8, which reads, “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!” The latter half of the verse goes on to say, “Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!” Peter uses this quotation to exhort his readers to crave spiritual nourishment and thereby grow up into salvation. The emphasis then is similar to the way he uses it here in chapter 3 to exhort them to righteous living and Christian maturity. As D. A. Carson notes, “Christians are to rid themselves of the vices listed in 2:1, all of which will interrupt godly relationships with others and with the Master himself.”<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that this exhortation comes in the context of some kind of difficulty or suffering and is intended to provide hope and motivation for present holiness, which is God’s definition of the good life. In other words, the good life has little to do with circumstances we may find ourselves in and everything to do with who is with us through it all.

From the context of Psalm 34, we can be certain that David links “tasting and seeing that the Lord is good” (Ps 34:8), with his saving and delivering work for he declares at the end of verse 8, “blessed is the man who takes *refuge* in Him”<sup>12</sup> It is important to see that in no way has Peter changed or invalidated the original meaning nor intent of Psalm 34. The principles embraced and employed by David as an “exile” are directly applicable to the New Testament church that finds itself in a similar predicament.

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<sup>11</sup> G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1023-24.

<sup>12</sup> Peter is drawing from the LXX translation that introduces small changes and seems to lend itself to more specific application for the Diaspora setting. Peter himself changes the mood of the verb from the plural imperative (“you taste”) to the aorist indicative (“you have tasted”). He also eliminates the second verb (“and see”), likely because of the milk metaphor he has leveraged. Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 1025.

His logic is clear: the believer should crave spiritual milk since he has already tasted that the Lord is good. Those who have experienced the Lord's goodness can continue to rest in that goodness assured that there is more to come. Since God has been faithful in the past, we can rest assured that he will be faithful in present and future circumstances. He has saved us, and he will save us. Like the saints of old, it is both past experience of God's goodness and the future hope of the fullness of God's goodness that enable the believer to stand firm in obedience to the Lord during present suffering. The eschatological goodness of God, that has been tasted in part, will now be tasted and seen in full in the future. The good life is found in God, already and not yet.

What makes this even more compelling is the context in which David wrote this Psalm. He was not living "his best life now," but was suffering for righteousness' sake just like the believers to whom Peter is writing. The superscription of Psalm 34 alludes to the event described in more detail in 1 Samuel 21:10-15. There, David feigned madness in the presence of Achish, king of Gath.<sup>13</sup> This event took place while Saul was king of Israel. David, though anointed as the king elect, was targeted by Saul and forced to flee for his life. The irony of this event should not be missed. The future king of Israel with whom God would make a covenant, guaranteeing that his descendants would remain on the throne forever, was being chased like a dog into enemy territory where he would be humiliated and mocked. Here, the future king is suffering not because of any wrongdoing, but rather for righteousness' sake. The hostility he faces is because of God's electing grace and favor upon Him, and ultimately because of his allegiance to God. In effect, David is an exile awaiting the fulfillment of God's promised blessing to him.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 278.

<sup>14</sup> First Sam 21:11 records the words of Achish the king of Gath. As he looks at what he believes to be David, he says, "Is not this David the king of the *land* (italics mine)?" He goes on to describe the accolades heaped upon him for his victories. In other words, here is the one who is supposed to be the celebrated king of the land, but he appears to be no more than a servant, and indeed, a mad man! The statement from Achish has echoes of the Abrahamic covenant and the promise of the land (Gen 12:1-3; 15:7). David, familiar with the promise made to the patriarch, would likely have understood the irony in him

How often do we find ourselves in circumstances that do not seem to fit with our understanding of God's faithfulness to us? We are told that God will provide and then we lose our job. We believe that God answers prayers, but our child is still living in rebellion. We believe that God works all things for the good of those who love Him, but the cancer treatment is not working and the quality of life is decreasing. All these things can challenge our belief in God's faithfulness or can remind us that this world is not our home and that God will be faithful to deliver us as He has promised. This moment in David's life upholds two central themes being applied by Peter to the New Testament people of God: Exile and Exodus. David is experiencing a type of exile in which he is forced to be a sojourner and cling to the promise of God's future deliverance or exodus. In the meantime, David submits himself to God, teaching us that the good life can be enjoyed right now as God's children find their hope and rest in Him.

On more than one occasion during his years of exile, David had the opportunity to exact vengeance and save his own life. On both those occasions, David was being pursued by Saul and had the opportunity to kill him but instead demonstrated his trust in and obedience to God (1 Sam 24, 26). The Scriptures go to great lengths to show how David's response was an act of righteousness. On the second opportunity David had to take the life of Saul, David spoke to Saul saying, "The LORD rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the LORD gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the LORD's anointed" (1 Sam 26:23). Rather than rebelling against Saul's God given authority, David chose submission to God and trust in him. This is a powerful example of what it looks like to fear God and not man; to long for the blessing of God rather than the blessing of man.

Peter uses Psalm 34 to remind believers that the circumstances of life are often hard and even seem to contradict the promises of God. But it also calls believers to find

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being the promised "king of the land," seemingly having no place in the land and instead being a sojourner and exile. While we cannot be certain, perhaps the statement of Achish was an ironic reminder of God's promise to be faithful to David, which gave him courage in that moment.

hope in the God of promise, stating, “For whoever desires to live life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit” (1 Pet 3:10).

According to J. Ramsey Michaels,

To “love” that life is equivalent to loving the still invisible Christ who will come revealing that salvation. To “see good days” is to see what is now unseen, the glory in store for Christians at that revelation (see *Comment* on 1:8). The language of the psalm is the language of this world, but Peter has made it metaphorical of the world to come.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, Peter uses the words of David to help fix our hope on God’s future deliverance. David serves as an example for all believers to learn from since he too was a sojourner in exile, awaiting a future blessing.<sup>16</sup> The good life cannot be separated from a life of faith in and obedience to God. That faith and obedience are tested and revealed most powerfully through trial and suffering. Even in the most trying circumstances, Peter exhorts believers with the words of David to “let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it” (1 Pet 3:11). This turning is an active and conscious decision that must be made. Sin must be rejected, and righteousness must be practiced. Holiness does not happen by accident but is the result of intentional and thoughtful choices. Those who guard their lips and their life prove that they have placed their trust in the Lord. They follow the example of David and better yet the greater David, Jesus Christ. Why do they do this?

Peter gives the reason for this kind of faithful obedience: “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Pet 3:12). There is a promise here in verse 12 for those who obey.<sup>17</sup> David faithfully obeyed God and God faithfully heard David’s prayers for help.

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<sup>15</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 180.

<sup>16</sup> Jobes explains, “The LXX translator interpreted the troubles of David from which the Lord delivered him (as shown in the superscription of the psalm) to be the fears that arose during his sojourn among the Philistines, when David was living in exile, away from Judah.” Jobes, *1 Peter*, 220.

<sup>17</sup> Schreiner notes,

Rather than retaliate and take matters into his own hands, David called upon the Lord and God heard and answered. This psalm reveals the picture of someone who has placed their hope in the Lord; of someone who clings to the Lord as their greatest joy and delight. When everything is stripped away, the presence of the Lord remains. You live the good life now by holding fast to the Lord in faithful obedience. And the good news is that the eternal life that awaits, breaks into the present, and fills this life with good days! Those who practice the love of compassion, refrain from speaking evil, and pursue peace are blessed by the Lord. His eyes are on them; he hears their prayer. Here is the question you must answer: Have you embraced the Lord? And if so, is he your greatest delight? Regardless of your circumstances, God invites you to live the good life now, believing that the best is yet to come.

Psalm 34 is a Psalm of hope. It speaks to the promise of deliverance and rescue. It highlights the theme of exodus from the exile. David himself is upheld as an archetype for believers in all times and in all places, for even King David, the recipient of the great Davidic covenant, found himself in peril, even suffering for His commitment to God. He held fast to a future hope and the promise of being delivered from his earthly exile because he had already “tasted” this deliverance. As a result, even while he suffered, he could be sanctified, enjoying the good life now in the presence of God while awaiting the fullness of that good life that was yet to come.

### **Conclusion**

As Peter draws from the experience of David in 1 Samuel 21 and his reflection upon it in Psalm 34, the church is instructed about what constitutes the good life. Contrary to what many believe, this can be experienced in the midst of great suffering, even

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The point of the text is that the Lord's favor is on those who live in such a righteous way. In other words, he will bless them with the inheritance promised in vv. 7, 9 and with the future life of the age to come noted in v. 10. The hearing of the prayers (cf. v. 7) reveals that they are truly members of God's people. Conversely, the Lord will turn his face from those who practice evil, which means they will not obtain an eternal inheritance but God's punishment. (Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 169)

suffering for righteousness' sake. While the church in North America continues to experience relative peace and prosperity as well as government favor, it is imperative that leaders capitalize on this moment to prepare the church for greater suffering and to equip the church to be faithful followers of Jesus. Peter, by making use of the OT, reminds us that the good life is not temporary and earthly. It reaches beyond the here and now and into eternity. It is grounded in our future hope—the promise of new and abundant life in Jesus when we see him face to face and enjoy the fullness of His presence. This good life can be experienced in part here and now as we faithfully follow him and pursue a life of submission to him.

The good life is not ultimately about this life, it is about knowing and walking with Jesus. You can taste the good life now, only when you believe the best life is yet to come! So let us exercise the love that defines us, employ the logic that drives us, and embrace the Lord that delights us, enjoying the good life now, while we eagerly await the fullness of the good life to come!

## CHAPTER 8

### HOUSE RULES: 1 PETER 5:1-14

#### **Sermon Introduction**

Every household has rules. Principles to live by; codes of conduct. In fact, it is common these days to walk into someone's home and see some kind of decorative piece that outlines the house rules. Most are decorative, slightly poetic, and often homemade with a bit of a rustic feel to them. They often state in a pithy way the values most important and even necessary to create the kind of environment or culture that is advantageous for flourishing relationships and harmonious living. Whether stated or not, displayed on a mantle or painted on a wall, every household has rules.

The Scriptures speak of the church as a household and God's people as His children. It is a fitting and helpful metaphor that instructs the members of God's family on the kind of atmosphere they are seeking to create or embrace. We do not set the rules, God our Father does. He lays out the rules that, when embraced and employed, will lead to healthy relationships and spiritual flourishing in His family.

#### **Text**

First Peter 5:1-14 reads,

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing

that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

## **Need**

As God refines His people through suffering, they will need to be well organized and mobilized to both suffer well together and grow in sanctification together. God must give clear instructions to the members of his household so that they will know how to work together in order to stand firm in the faith and advance the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## **Main Point**

In 1 Peter 5:1-14, the church is exhorted to focus on how they operate in the household of God. While they endure suffering from those outside the church, they must know how to live within the church in order to thrive as God's people. The leaders and members of the church must understand their roles and their responsibilities, knowing that God will judge both those outside and inside the church. To avoid the judgment reserved for those outside the church, believers must make right judgments now about how to please God.

## **Context and Preview**

The dominant theme of suffering in this letter continues to emerge and take center stage. First Peter 4 continues to describe the suffering experienced by those who follow Christ (4:1, 4, 12-14, 16-19). Peter is preparing believers to suffer well, to suffer like Christ the one for whom they suffer. Throughout chapter 4, he addresses this suffering at the hands of those outside the church and he continues to encourage the church to be a place of solace, of comfort, and a place of refuge where those who are suffering can serve one another and strengthen those in need (4:7-11). As Peter weaves these two themes

together, he instructs believers on how to navigate the challenges presented for following Jesus but also the benefits and blessings of following Jesus and being used by Him to minister to one another.

Peter draws heavily in chapter 4 upon the Old Testament book of Ezekiel. Drawing upon Ezekiel 9:6, Peter states in 1 Peter 4:17, “For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” This intriguing statement indicates a kind of judgment for Christians that results not in their destruction but in their sanctification.<sup>1</sup> Now in 1 Peter 5:1-14, Peter elaborates on what that refining looks like and how the people of God must work together to be a holy temple, purified and cleansed by the suffering they experience. There is a purifying judgment that believers experience now through suffering for Christ. But this purification will lead to the great reward of full and final salvation. This purification occurs when the household of God is organized and mobilized to both withstand the onslaught from the world and advance the gospel of Jesus Christ. Peter first addresses the leaders in verses 1-4 and then all members in verses 5-14.

#### **First Peter 5:1-4: Exhortations for the Elders**

Peter now shifts away from the external hostility from those outside the family of God to internal dynamics in the household of God. Although the word *household* is not present in this section, the idea is being carried forward from chapter 4. Peter begins in verse 1 saying, “so,” “so then,” or “therefore.” He is making a logical connection back to what he has previously said. Part of Peter’s goal is to mobilize the church so that they are able to weather the storms of suffering they will face.<sup>2</sup> To be properly organized and

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<sup>1</sup> Schreiner states, “The language is similar, but the theology is actually quite different, for in Ezekiel rebellious sinners are being destroyed, but in Peter the judgment does not involve the destruction of the godly but their refinement and purification.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 227.

<sup>2</sup> Achtemeier notes, “Although the consecutive force of the οὖν (“so then,” “therefore”) is not immediately apparent, it does link in a general way the discussion about the problems Christians face from

mobilized there is a sifting and sorting of the church that must occur, and suffering serves this purpose.<sup>3</sup> In 4:17-19 Peter stated that “it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God.” The judgment first starts with those charged to lead the people of God and, as we will see, Peter has the book of Ezekiel in mind as he instructs the church. He gives the elders three exhortations followed by one general exhortation to all the members.

### **Embrace The Call of God (v. 1)**

First, Peter exhorts the elders to embrace their God given role among the people of God. The word “elders” is used of those who are leaders in the church. This term is not unique to the New Testament but is being carried forward from the Old Testament. Peter has Ezekiel on his mind. In chapter 4 he has been drawing heavily upon chapter 9 where judgment begins with the elders who are in front of the temple. The elders of Ezekiel’s day were not fulfilling their God given role and as a result the people they were supposed to lead were not following God faithfully. The adage “as Priest goes so the people go” is a biblical principle (Hos 4:9). Perhaps more appropriate to the church context, “as the pastors go, so go the people.” So, Peter begins with the elders to help them set the trajectory for the rest of the people of God.

But Peter does not stand above them as an apostle, he stands with them as “a fellow elder.” While he has been given a unique role as an apostle, he is also able to sympathize with these men in their role as a fellow elder. Peter is identifying with them. He understands their role intimately and can therefore speak to it personally and specifically. He knows not only what the work entails, but the cost it requires. He has experienced the pressure, the problems, and the persecution. He knows the difficulties, demands, and sacrifices. He has endured much for the name of Jesus. There is something

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external social pressure to the need for sound internal organization if the community is to survive those onslaughts.” Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 322.

<sup>3</sup> Jobes writes, “Persecution of the church is the beginning of the sorting process by which those who are truly God’s are separated from those who are not.” Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 299.

about being instructed by someone who not only knows theoretically what they are talking about but has practically lived it. They can speak to it in a different way and often it seems like they are not just speaking to their audience, but to themselves as well. Peter is not calling them to do anything or suffer anything that he himself is not willing to do or suffer. He is not only a fellow elder but also “a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed” (v. 1). He watched Jesus himself suffer before going to glory and has spent much time processing what this means for the Christian life. He knows that this is the pattern for all who follow Christ. He has given his life to this calling and will one day give his life for this calling. But what exactly is the calling?

Drawing once again upon Old Testament imagery, Peter reminds these elders of their calling to “Shepherd the flock of God that is among you.” This is the main imperative for these elders and therefore the calling God has placed on their lives. This simple phrase would instantly evoke all kinds of imagery and biblical texts. Perhaps they were reminded of Ezekiel 34 and the negative example of the shepherds who treated the flock so poorly, not strengthening the weak or healing the sick, leaving them lost and wandering to suffer injury through harsh treatment from the shepherds who were supposed to care for them (Ezek 34:4). Or, perhaps they thought of Jeremiah 3:15 and the promise of God: “And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.” Peter is calling them to be faithful shepherds, doing everything that shepherding requires. To feed the sheep and tend the sheep, knowing well the condition of their flocks (Prov 27:23). I remember a seminary professor telling me that “shepherds must smell like sheep.” You cannot care for the sheep if you do not spend any time around them. The shepherd must be with and among his sheep to know their needs, to feed them the truth, and to care for their souls.

Sitting on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus charged Peter to be a good shepherd. After denying Jesus three times, Jesus restores Peter with a threefold exhortation.

Peter, do you love me? Yes, Lord; You know that I love you! Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, these words of Jesus were ringing in his ears as he exhorted these elders. The time in Peter’s life when he had felt most inadequate Jesus had exhorted him. Jesus is not looking for perfect men; he is looking for humble men who love Jesus and His church—men who are called, qualified, and faithful to do what He commands. At the heart of this great calling is a love for Jesus because you cannot love the sheep well if you do not love the Savior well. This calling comes with an unequalled responsibility before the Lord because it is the “flock of God.” It is His precious possession, the flock that he purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28). Peter goes on to elaborate on what shepherding God’s flock entails.

### **Exercise The Care of Serving (vv. 2-3)**

The call to shepherd is the call to care. Peter says they must be “exercising oversight.” They must watch over the flock to provide the care they require for them to flourish.<sup>5</sup> The term here for “oversight” also helps us see that the offices of elder and overseer were one and the same. The different terms for the same office help to flesh out what the role and responsibilities must look like and the way they must be done.<sup>6</sup> Peter gives three pitfalls that elders must avoid and then gives the contrasting counterparts they must employ. These three vices and three virtues are critical to understand for all who desire the office of overseer as God is preeminently concerned about the motives and attitudes that characterize the elders called to lead His church.

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<sup>4</sup> Michaels notes, “The command to “shepherd the flock of God” echoes the command of Jesus to Peter himself according to John 21:16: “Shepherd my sheep” (ποιμαίνει τὰ πρόβατά μου ; cf “Feed my lambs” in 21:15, and “Feed my sheep” in 21:17). J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 282.

<sup>5</sup> Michaels states, “More simply, its effect is to interpret the metaphor of “shepherding the flock” as the responsibility to oversee and care for the needs of a Christian congregation.” Michaels, *1 Peter*, 282.

<sup>6</sup> For a helpful discussion on this see, Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 234.

First, he tells them that they must exercise oversight “not under compulsion, but willingly.” God is looking for men who are not coerced by external pressure but by internal compulsion. No one can be forced into this role but must willingly accept the call of God with all its challenges and difficulties. Elders must not be like a mule that has to have a bit and a bridle to be moved or like a soldier who has been drafted rather than volunteered for service. He is looking for men who are compelled to care for God’s flock; men who are passionate about Him, His church, and his glory. God wants men who want the ministry. Why? As Tom Schreiner says, “Those who serve only because they feel they must will lose their joy, and the church will suffer as a consequence.”<sup>7</sup> It is also true that those who take up the mantle of leadership in the church place a target on their back. The enemy knows that if they can take down a leader, they can do greater damage to the church. It was Jesus who said, “He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep” (John 10:12-13). Those who are coerced into leadership will inevitably compromise and capitulate at the first sign of personal cost. They must exercise the care of God’s flock willingly as God would have them.

Next, Peter says they must exercise this care, “not for shameful gain, but eagerly.” God’s shepherds are not hired hands. Yes, some are paid to do the work of the ministry in accordance with the Scriptures (1 Cor 9:6-7; 1 Tim 5:18), but this is not to be a motivating factor in ministry. Peter warns elders against greed—the lust for money. The ministry is not a means for accumulating material gain. Those who desire to use the ministry to get rich off the back of God’s flock are not true Shepherds. In fact, false shepherds are condemned for taking from the flock to feed themselves rather than giving of themselves to feed the flock. Ezekiel writes these stunning words that are almost certainly the backdrop for Peter’s exhortation to the elders: “Son of man, prophesy against

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<sup>7</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 234.

the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep” (Ezek 34:2-3). This is indeed “shameful gain” and has no place among the elders. Greed has destroyed many men who once aspired to lead God’s people well. Instead, godly leaders must lead “eagerly.”<sup>8</sup> Spiritual leadership is not about what you can get from God’s people, but what you can give to God’s people. It is not about greed, but generosity. This term implies an eagerness to be of service to God and His people. Leadership requires great sacrifice, and that sacrifice must be an eager offering of worship unto the Lord.

The final phrase continues to expand on the shepherding responsibilities as elders are called to exercise oversight, “not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock” (5:3). It is easy to use positions of authority to oppress those who are under that authority. This is the kind of leadership that is common in the world (Mark 10:42), but must not characterize leaders of the church.<sup>9</sup> The contrast here is important. Instead of using their authority to oppress, elders must use their authority to set an example.<sup>10</sup> They must show the people of God the kind of leadership exemplified by Jesus himself who came “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). The goal of spiritual leadership is to emulate Jesus as supremely

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<sup>8</sup> Achtemeier explains, “The second antithesis qualifies the first, in that the second term, *προθύμως* (“eagerly”), is virtually a synonym for *ἐκουσίως*, and the first term, *μὴ αἰσχροκερδῶς* (“not in a way characterized by desire for base gain”), may be a concrete instance of the kind of compulsion to be avoided” Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 326.

<sup>9</sup> Michaels argues that Peter is likely not trying to contrast leadership in the church with oppressive leadership in the culture stating,

Although no direct connection can be proven, Peter’s emphasis on servanthood is wholly consistent with the teaching attributed to Jesus in Mark 10:42–45//Matt 20:25–28//Luke 22:25–27, especially when account is taken of his appeal to Jesus as example in 2:21–23. It is doubtful, however, in light of his respect for secular authority (cf 2:13–17), that Peter is making a point of contrasting (as in Mark 10:42) the behavior of Christian leaders with that of secular authorities. (Michaels, *1 Peter*, 285)

<sup>10</sup> Jobes notes, “In a culture where status is cherished and authority is asserted to preserve honor, this call to humbly serve others is no doubt a special challenge.” Jobes, *1 Peter*, 306.

displayed in the gospel. Every leader in God's church must recognize that they are called to live a life that serves as an example for others to follow. While the elder does not have a different standard of living, they do have a different accountability before God. Those that they lead are "in [their] charge." They have been entrusted to them as a stewardship and are responsible for how they point the congregation to Jesus. There is no doubt that these warnings and admonitions are intended to be weighty. Those called to this office must not treat it carelessly or foolishly, but rather with great care and reverence toward God. While the responsibility is great, so too is the reward for those who are faithful.

#### **Expect The Crown of Glory (v. 4)**

It is clear that sinful motivation must be rejected, but Peter provides the proper motivation for faithful elders. He writes in verse 4: "And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." The elders of the church are undershepherds, and while their role is patterned after Jesus, they do not take the place of Jesus. Jesus is the Chief Shepherd (2:25) who owns the sheep and has entrusted local flocks to local elders. Jesus will one day appear and will reward faithful elders with an unfading crown of glory. Christ will recognize and reward those who worked for him and not themselves. This is a stunning reminder that if you are seeking glory in this life for your efforts then you will forfeit the greater glory of the promised crown.

The reward will certainly be worth all the labor. Every sacrifice and struggle will seem small in comparison to what awaits, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:17, "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." Temporal crowns will eventually fade, wither, or rust, but this crown of glory will last forever. It is a crown of glory that all faithful servants of the Lord can expect to receive. Since that is the case, this crown of glory, this future hope, must be the great motivator for the elders. This great labor will be met with great reward. Therefore, elders must keep their hand to the plow and press on toward the upward call of God in

Christ Jesus. Lead, feed, guard, and guide the flock of God entrusted to you. As you do, trust that the flock will faithfully follow you as you follow Christ.

### **First Peter 5:5-14: Commands for the Community**

Peter now shifts gears from the elders to the congregation. The term *elder* does not speak primarily to physical age but rather spiritual maturity.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the “younger” that Peter now addresses are those who are not elders and make up the rest of the congregation or church community. While it is true that those who are older in age are often more qualified for the office of the elder, that is not always the case nor is it necessary. What is necessary is spiritual maturity. I became an elder at the age of twenty-seven. I would often hear, “Wow, you’re young to be the pastor!” While I am starting to miss hearing that, back then I would find myself clinging to Paul’s words to Timothy who was likely around the age of thirty and the pastor of the church in Ephesus. Paul encouraged him in 1 Timothy 4:12, exhorting him to “let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” Jesus himself was approximately thirty to thirty-three years old during his earthly ministry. Spiritual age is far more important than physical age. You can be young but have many spiritual wrinkles, many spiritual streaks of gray in your hair and beard. You can have spiritual aches and pains, wounds, and limps—yes from walking long with the Lord but more importantly from walking deep with the Lord. Herein lies the key to spiritual maturity: daily walking deeply with the Lord in communion, fellowship, and intimacy. Deep in the truth of His Word which is buried deep in your heart; deep in holy living and in joyful service to your master. While this is required of an elder to be qualified for the

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<sup>11</sup> Jobes states,

The contrast is not between the older men and the younger men of the church. . . . Rather it is between those who have the seniority and the commensurate standing that qualifies them to be *presbyteroi* in contrast to those who, for whatever reason, do not. Official elders of the church were naturally chosen from those who held seniority in the faith, which most often also corresponded to physical age. Those not (yet) qualified to be elders were ‘younger’ in standing in the church. (Jobes, *1 Peter*, 307)

role, it is expected of all who follow Jesus. So, what does God expect from the congregation?

### **Humility in His Household (vv. 5-7)**

The words of Peter to “the younger” should be heeded by all those who are not the elders of the church. To the church he gives this blanket statement: “Be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble’” (5:5). This is God’s heart for God’s children. He calls believers first to express humility toward the elders. This is crucial for harmonious relationships in the church. There must be a willingness to be submissive to those leading in accordance with God’s Word and this requires great humility. The congregation must willingly choose to come under the leadership of the elders so that the church can be mobilized and bear much fruit. Peter quickly moves from humility before others to humility before God. The proud person does not just set himself against man, but against God. The key to humility before man is humility before God. Since humility is so essential to the health of the church, Peter elaborates on what this humility looks like in the family of God.

First, he points out that it is a decision. The call is to “clothe yourselves” and “humble yourselves.”<sup>12</sup> Peter assumes that we know how to do this. It implies that it is a willing choice to put others first since that is the way Jesus modeled humility (Phil 2:4-8). There is a mutuality to this humility that when present fosters a healthy gospel environment where believers can be cared for and strengthened in the faith. Not only is it a decision, but it is also a conviction. The conviction is that God will reward and bless those who humble themselves. Peter draws this biblical conviction from Proverbs 3:34. God is actively opposed or against those who are proud, but he showers his grace upon those who are

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<sup>12</sup> Jobes notes, “The concept of ‘clothing’ oneself in the Christian virtues is a common image in the NT (e.g., Rom. 13:12, 14; Eph. 6:11, 14; Col. 3:12, 14; 1 Thess. 5:8).” Jobes, *1 Peter*, 309. She goes on to explain that the verb used here by Peter is found only here in the New Testament. Peter seems to be emphasizing that humility in relationships is a paramount Christian virtue.

humble. God's people willingly choose to humble themselves "under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you" (5:6). The Christian's humility is grounded in the conviction that God is sovereign over all things, even suffering for His name's sake.<sup>13</sup> He is not only able to vindicate those who suffer but to supply the grace necessary to endure in a way that brings Him glory. Peter speaks here of God's "mighty hand" and in so doing alludes to the numerous passages throughout the Old Testament that speak to God delivering his people out of Egypt.<sup>14</sup> Peter calls believers to look back across the history of God's people to see that their God is the God who saves and delivers. When this conviction grips their hearts and minds, they will be able to endure until the very end. Pride is thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to. Though, that is the result of not thinking highly enough of God. A big me leads to a small God, but a big God leads to a small me. This formula is the key to both exercising humility and accessing God's sustaining power. This conviction is manifested in action.

Humility is not simply a theological concept; it is a Christian virtue displayed in action. Here, Peter tells us that our humility is displayed when we are "casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."<sup>15</sup> Humility requires active dependence. Pride is demonstrated by self-sufficiency and independence. As a pastor I will often hear people say, "I would have told you about my struggles but I didn't want to be a burden to anyone." Instead of seeking help, people pridefully try to solve their own problems and often end

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<sup>13</sup> Schreiner states, "The humbling enjoined probably means that they are to accept the suffering God has ordained as his will instead of resisting and chafing against his will while suffering." Schreiner, *1, 2, Peter, Jude*, 239.

<sup>14</sup> See for example Exod 3:19; 32:11; Deut 4:34; 5:15; 6:21; 7:8, 19; 9:26; 11:2; 26:8; Dan 9:15.

<sup>15</sup> Schreiner notes, Peter's words here remind us of Jesus' exhortation to avoid anxiety (Matt 6:25-34), and some even see an allusion to Jesus' words. More probably, the allusion is to Ps 55:22. Psalm 55 fits nicely with Peter's theme, for the psalmist implored God to help him because the wicked were attempting to destroy him, and even his close friend had turned against him. Verses 4-8 express the anguish and torment he felt in the midst of such opposition. Again we see evidence that Peter considered the thematic context of the Old Testament when he alluded to it. We find the allusion in v. 22 (Ps 54:23, LXX), "Cast your anxiety upon the Lord, and he will sustain you" (*epiripson epi kyrion tēn merimnan sou, kai autos se diathrepsei*). (Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 241)

up in more trouble than when they started. However, humble people recognize that they cannot face suffering on their own and that they need God's help and sustaining grace. How fitting are the words of Peter for today's culture that is inundated with fear and worry and heavily medicates anyone who struggles with anxiety. Peter calls believers to humbly cast their anxieties on him because he cares for us. Instead of holding on to our anxieties or casting them on someone or something that cannot bear the weight of them, we are invited to throw them onto God who truly cares for us. How humbling it is to realize that we need help, but how freeing it is to receive the help of God in our time of need. Whatever you are struggling with today, let Peter's words encourage you to humbly cast them on to God.

### **Perseverance in His People (vv. 8-9)**

As Peter draws his letter to a close, he gives some final commands for the church. He is calling believers to "be sober-minded" and "watchful." The people of God should be characterized by spiritual alertness. The reason is clear: "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (5:8). Christians can easily lose focus and quickly be lulled into spiritual sleep. Peter had personal experience with spiritual lethargy and was himself warned by Jesus. On the night that Jesus was betrayed, Peter had gone with him to the Garden of Gethsemane. It was there that Jesus instructed him to watch and pray but instead he drifted off into sleep. When Jesus returned, he gently rebuked him, saying, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14:37-38). His physical sleep was a sign of his spiritual drowsiness. Where Peter once failed, he now calls us to succeed. The stakes are high, and the enemy is ferocious. The devil roars like a lion to induce fear in the people of God. He tries to intimidate believers in the hope that they will capitulate at the prospect of suffering. If believers deny their faith, then the devil has devoured them, damaging the church and destroying their witness. As Tom Schreiner powerfully states, "The devil's

aim is not to comfort but to terrify believers. He does not want to deliver them from fear but to devour their faith. Peter warned believers to be vigilant. The roaring of the devil is the crazed anger of a defeated enemy, and if they do not fear his ferocious bark, they will never be consumed by his bite.”<sup>16</sup> So how must we respond?

Peter says in verse 9, “Resist him, firm in your faith.” This is the constant call. The posture is one of resistance. Resisting the devil means that believers remain firm in their faith, that is, in their trust in God. Christians triumph over the devil as they continue to trust God, believing that he truly cares for them and will sustain them until the end. Perseverance until the last day is accomplished by faith. Countering the lies of Satan with the truth of God’s Word. Persevering in faith, not capitulating in fear. Satan wants you to give up and give in. He wants you to believe you are alone, that it is not worth it, you deserve a break, and you deserve better! God’s not good! Satan wants you to believe that if you just give in then the pain will end, and all will be well. But suffering for Jesus is nothing new and Peter makes that abundantly clear. Satan is trying these tactics all over the world (5:9). Suffering for Jesus is not the exception, it is the norm. When we suffer, we need to be reminded that we do not suffer alone but in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who have put their hope in The Suffering Servant. Those who suffer look forward with anticipation of what is to come.

### **Expectation in His Elect (vv. 10-11)**

The temptation is to seek relief in this world and from this world. However, what this world provides is never enough and never truly satisfies. If we can hold on and persevere a little while longer, then we will not be disappointed. God is growing the longing and expectation in our souls for eternity as we suffer for His name’s sake here and now. Suffering in this life can feel like it is never going to end, but Peter reminds believers that in the grand scheme of eternity, it is only “for a little while” (5:10). That

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<sup>16</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 242.

means that this suffering will soon come to an end and then the fullness of the promise will be realized and enjoyed by his children. God holds out the expectation of future reward to produce faithful perseverance of his people. Peter thereby emphasized that God's saving calling is effectual in and through Christ. This reminds believers that the future final salvation is sure. As the rest of the verse declares, God will certainly complete what he has started. Whatever loss you may have suffered in this life for following Jesus, God will "restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you" (5:10). In the end you will be fully vindicated, and your faith and hope will not have been in vain! So, both now and for eternity, those who are the elect exiles of the dispersion must believe and declare, "to him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen" (5:11).

#### **Faithfulness in His Followers (vv. 12-14)**

As Peter gives his final greetings, he mentions Silvanus, "a faithful brother." He mentions Mark as well, who was once full of fear and had abandoned the work of the ministry in the face of persecution but now was a faithful "son" to Paul. The letter comes by Silvanus, the faithful brother, to help produce faithfulness in the people of God. Here is Peter's summation of the entire letter: "I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God" (5:12). The grace of God is God's protection and provision for the church, it is the grace of the gospel, the grace needed for living out the gospel in the world and in the church. It is the grace necessary to endure until the end and so he calls believers to "stand firm in it" (5:12).

He mentions one other term that is worth noting: "She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings" (5:13). Again, we see the emphasis on God's divine election. The church is made up of those who have chosen Jesus, only because God has first chosen them. But who is he speaking of when he says, "She who is at Babylon?" (5:13). This cryptic language is deeply theological. Peter is using the name Babylon symbolically to refer to Rome. Babylon was the great city of world empire to which the people of God were carried captive. Peter writes to the new Diaspora (1:1), the

“captivity” of the people of God living under the empire of Rome, the new Babylon. This is done as well in the book of Revelation. The name “Babylon” also suggests the judgment of this world by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a vivid reminder that they are still exiles in a land that opposes God. They must therefore live as exiles who constantly remember that this world is not their home.

As he leaves them with instructions to greet one another with a holy kiss, the church is reminded that they are a family. They find refuge from the world as they gather together and rest in the peace that is for all who are in Christ. May we as the church do the same, being strengthened and built up by the true grace of God that has come by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit through the pen of the apostle Peter.

### **Conclusion**

House rules exist to make sure the house functions the way it should. God has given his children his house rules. He speaks clearly to those who are leading on his behalf and must set the example to follow. But he also speaks clearly to the rest of the community that must come under the leadership of the elders and strive to live in harmony with one another. When the world stands against the church, the church must be a place of solace from the world. Together, the people of God can withstand the hostility they face through the support they find in the household of God. God’s heart is for his children. May our hearts be for our God and as a result for one another.

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## ABSTRACT

### ANCHORED IN IDENTITY: OPPOSITION AND THE IDENTITY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN 1 PETER

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The message of 1 Peter is increasingly more relevant to the church in North America and will help to preserve the faith of believers as well as increase the witness of the church. Chapter 1 lays out the basis for this project and gives an overview of the texts that are covered. Chapter 2 grounds the believers' identity as exiles, creating a deep connection to the Old Testament. Chapter 3 helps establish continuity between the Old and New in relation to the hope of the gospel, while chapter 4 details the call for holiness as God's children. Chapter 5 looks at a cluster of Old Testament imagery that forms identity and chapter 6 speaks to the Christian identity as servants. Chapter 7 provides an Old Testament exhortation and example, and chapter 8 looks at the identity of the church as the household of God.

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