

BECAUSE YOU'LL PROBABLY NEVER HAVE MORE DISCRETIONARY TIME THAN YOU'LL HAVE IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS...

Work through these questions 1 Peter 1:1-5 raises.

(Pastor Kyle's sermon and Pastor Bob's commentary below will help you.)

1. What are some things God did in your life to initiate a relationship with you? (Think of circumstances, people, difficulties, emotions that played a role) What's He been doing lately?
2. Your inheritance is the opportunity you will have to live forever in a world in which everything done happens God's way. What are you looking forward to most about that life?
3. It is always good to be reminded of the never-stopping, never-ending, never-giving-up love of God! How is He leading you to show this love of His more clearly to others?
4. There are things that creep into our lives and take the place of our hope in our inheritance? In the last ten days what are some things you realized can easily do that to you?
5. Who is someone you know who is far from Jesus that you could start or continue to faithfully pray for?

A HIGH-YIELDING, BONUS ACTIVITY

A great activity for you to engage this week is to read the short book of Joel in the Old Testament. Here's what it's about. Joel was witnessing a catastrophic plague of locust. The hungry horde was destroying all the edible food in Israel and surrounding areas. Israel would survive. But Joel pondered the plague and viewed it as a picture of the warning of the Law of Moses, that two things lay in store for Israel and the entire world. First, the plague of locust pictured a time in the future when Israel would be overrun by foreign armies. This would happen as a consequence of their neglect of Yahweh's words. Second, the plague of locust also pictured a world wide era in the future when the entire world would face the consequence of centuries of spiritual negligence (see Isaiah 2:12-22).

Read Joel! Think about all that our current crisis might be picturing of the world's appointment with Yahweh our Creator. A memory of Joel's words will continually give you a healthy kind of respect for Yahweh's word whatever your present life holds.

1 PETER COMMENTARY

A number of years ago I started the habit of journaling my way through various books of the Bible. My goal was to enhance my own understanding of all God has made known to us and placed in writing. I did not try to summarize all that had been written on the verses and the subjects they dealt with. I only wanted to record what my understanding of the meaning of each key word and each phrase of the text had come to be. So you'll find the words of each verse written in bold letters as it appears in the New American Standard Version. This is followed by my thoughts on each phrase of that verse. I do not claim to be right! I do think the positions you will read all fall within the boundaries of healthy theological thought.

I did not mean for my writings to be read by the general public. That means you will find grammatical errors, etc. I simply started the habit for myself and my kids, for them to have my words on something after I hit the compost pile! My thought was, what better thing for them to hear my voice on than the things of Yahweh? It is in that spirit I share with you in the weeks ahead my understanding of 1 Peter. May my thinking on His words become a source of healthy thought and strength to you! — Bob

1:1—Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who are chosen . . .

Peter was one sent by a commission of Jesus Christ. This was the authority under which he was writing and how he wished his words to be taken. Many have been called by God to places of authority in the Church since that time. But the Apostles were those officially commissioned by Christ for the establishment of the Church and the articulation of truth and sound doctrine. They were unique in their authority, and all who have since been called to spiritual authority function under the umbrella of the faith as articulated by the apostles. No one has taken their place. Their words still are to be the standard to which all other words must conform.

The readers are addressed as “those who reside as aliens.” The term alien is packed with meaning. We know that Peter’s ministry was aimed primarily at the Jews (Galatians 2:7-8). We know that Jews were scattered throughout the provinces of Asia Minor mentioned here. They were aliens in the sense that they lived outside their homeland. But the term “aliens” was likely a way of addressing a particular group of Jews, who were in most locations the first converts. This was due to the apostolic pattern of presenting truth first to the Jews and having it spread from there (see Acts 13:46-47).

It seems likely as well that Peter knew that a fair number of Gentiles would read this letter. It is certainly true of all Christians, regardless of ethnicity, that they reside as aliens in this world. And so the term was appropriate on every count, both in the figurative and literal sense. The provinces mentioned in which these “aliens” resided are all Roman provinces in the north of Asia Minor, present day Turkey.

Peter recognizes the recipients in another way, as being chosen. Paul’s word used in greetings was “saints,” meaning literally “holy ones.” Peter designates his readers as “chosen ones.” Both men are expressing the same idea. This is clearly in line with the teaching of Jesus that individuals become part of His family because He initiates a relationship with them (John. 6:44, 15:16). This has been called “the doctrine of election” in Christian circles. It must be held to have a Biblical Theology.

The doctrine of election must be held in tension as well, to have a Biblical Theology. The following statements in verse 2 are some important ones that should always factor in to our statements about election and Yahweh’s choosing of us.. This doctrine must not be built on any one passage but on the teaching of Scripture as a whole. What we can say positively is that if you are a child of God it is because He initiated a relationship with you. That much is undeniable.

Now the Jews were a unique people, all of them chosen in a sense by God. They were a chosen people in that God had chosen to place His presence uniquely in their culture. Their culture was to be different from all others in that it was prescribed by Yahweh Himself. Now, all cultures reflect their particular dominant religion. But there was to be no Jewish culture, no Jewish law, no Jewish social practice, no Jewish history, no Jewish government apart from what Yahweh laid out. There was no distinct ethnicity in Abram that made him unique when he was called out. It is said of Israel that their father was an Amorite, their mother a Hitite (Ezekiel 16:3).

Jewish ethnicity came about only by the calling of God and the things He specifically defined and laid out for Abram’s descendents. It is not that they were a people who created a God and named Him Yahweh, based on their understanding of Him. They were a people created by God, defined by God, organized by God, and unified by God. So the Jews were unique in that sense, and in that sense all of them were chosen by God, entrusted with much from the hand of Yahweh (Romans 9:1-5).

All Jews were in this sense unique. But the Jews who were alive at the time of Christ had a very unique responsibility. We must say that it was theoretically possible for them to be devout Jews, in the sense of observing all the outward customs God had instituted in Israel, and then to become “undevout” in God’s eyes by rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. This was a generation who had to change the focus of their faith and think differently. They had to set aside a whole way of worship and take hold of a new way.

Now many have had to make the choice that these first century Jews had to make. Many have had to repent of former errant beliefs and place faith in Christ. But in this case the old way was right and proper until the new way was brought about in the plan of God. Their ability to make this switch depended on their being chosen of God in the sense Peter uses the word here. They were part of a chosen people in the sense of their culture being the host culture of revelation. This did not mean they were chosen for eternal life with Yahweh.

All of this is to say that the Apostles and those Jews of their generation who accepted Christ were “aliens” in the truest sense. They had no country politically, most were scattered into areas other than Palestine. They had a faith radically different from the pagans and as a result of Christ, different even from the Jews. They were alienated from everyone except each other.

1:2—according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

This verse makes some additional statements about our election, the act of God whereby He selected us to be His children. It is said that our election was according to the foreknowledge of God. Some take this to mean that Yahweh chose us based on what He knew ahead of time about us and specifically that He foresaw in us, before time, faith. This way of understanding election has much about it that is attractive, particularly the fact that it makes the idea of choosing some instead of others seem more just. But it has the greater difficulty of contradicting other statements of Scripture that indicated clearly that God’s choice of us is not based on our merit or any choosing on our part of Him (Romans 9:16, Ephesians 2:1-10, Titus 3:5-6).

What Peter’s statement actually affirms is that God’s choice of us was in harmony with what He knew before time. This could mean simply that His choice of us for salvation fit His plan. But it is more likely that it is a statement that His choosing of us was the result of an even earlier decision to “know” us, or relate Himself closely to us. This interpretation is not without problems, but it does have the advantage of harmonizing well with the frequent Hebrew usage of knowledge of someone meaning to relate oneself to that person (Genesis 4:1). When we think of knowing someone ahead of time we think of knowledge about them. The Hebrews likely thought of such a statement meaning having in some way intimate relationship with them. God’s choosing of us then, is based on some earlier decision He made to relate Himself to us. He was for some reason that clearly does not relate to our performance, drawn to us.

Whatever the nature of this decision by God was, it was worked into reality by means of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. That is, this covenant relationship with Yahweh that was based on some earlier decision He made to have intimate relationship with us, was actually consummated when He placed inside of us His Spirit and became one with our spirits. There was now something of Him in us so that we were set apart and different from the normal person.

This all was done for a purpose that Peter states in this verse. God had a two-fold end in mind. First, it was that we might become obedient to Jesus Christ. He wanted us to believe that He was who He said He was. He taught that to believe Him is to believe the Father (John 8:19). This was the primary command that Jesus gave, to believe in Him. Obedience to Him is primarily trust that He is who He said He is (John 6:28-29). To trust His teachings and obey Him is simply the outworking of this greater foundational work of trusting He is who He claimed to be.

The second purpose Peter says Yahweh had in relating Himself to us was that we might have our sin atoned for by Christ's blood. God provided the sacrifice for our sin. His will was that this sacrifice be applied to us, that the blood of Christ be sprinkled in this way on us and so atone for our sins. Yahweh wished to remove our guilt and so meet the requirement of His justice in our behalf.

Having said these great things that have such profound theological significance, Peter gives to his readers a greeting that is a blessing. He writes, "May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure." This recalls the classic Jewish blessing/greeting, "shalom," a gesture of wishing on someone the peace and tranquility of Yahweh Himself. It is coupled with the word that was quickly becoming the classic word of those who came to believe in Christ, grace.

The Law was given through Moses. It was a formula for peace with God and others. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:14,17). Jesus provided the means by which the righteous requirement of the Law could be met in sinful humans. There is no greater need in the human soul than our need for grace and peace. These bring about the restoration of that which was lost in the fall of Adam.

Humankind was not meant to live as they now naturally live, apart from God. They need do so no longer. Grace and peace to the fullest measure can be ours because of God's choice to relate Himself to us through the sacrifice of Christ and God's ensuing gift of His indwelling Spirit. We have only to avail ourselves of the free gift of grace that rightly relates us to our Creator, that gives Divine strength in each moment, to restore our harmony with Him.

The optative mood is used in the original by Peter to express this wish and prayer of his soul. This construction is a grammatical way of showing that grace and peace are not automatic. They are possible as we faithfully trust and put confidence in the truth by the power of the Holy Spirit.

1:3—Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

This is a statement full of truth, but it is first of all a statement of worship and gratitude. When we ascribe the quality of blessedness (literally, praise), to someone, we are attributing honor to them and acclaim. This is such an acclamation by Peter to his readers. God the Father has done something great and deserves a place of honor in our hearts. He has done many such things but the action Peter singles out is His bringing about our rebirth, and it is a rebirth to something.

What God has done enables us to have something Peter calls a "living hope." There are many hopes we can grasp hold of that have no basis in reality. They are fantasies. There is no evidence that would allow us to believe with any certainty that we will ever realize them. Other hopes may be more realistic but they are simply ideas or dreams that fall within the range of normal human thinking. Peter indicates that our new existence is distinct from this because of something we are moving toward that is different from these customary human dreams and visions. It is a hope that is said to be "living" in that it springs from the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit who God has placed in us. It is not sourced in our own imagination. It is sourced in God Himself, breathed into the deepest part of our being.

This hope is not mere mental activity. It is “living” in that it does not die when evidence against it is processed by our minds and mounts up against it. It is different from illusions and delusions in that it relates to what is true and real and will actually come about. It is not like so many of our hopes that we must let go of in the course of our lives and that die with us. This hope we realize beyond our death. This hope is brought about by our being “born again.”

This being “born again” is a concept that Peter had no doubt heard from Jesus even as Nicodemus had (John 3). There is a transformation that happens through belief in Jesus Christ. Our spirit is united through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to God so that we can experience a whole different dimension of life. We are different. This does not insure that we will live every moment differently, but it insures that we can. Through the Holy Spirit the hope of living life as it was meant to be lived begins to happen. Not only that, we are assured by the Holy Spirit that the full experience of that life will be realized and we are insured by His presence in us that this hope can not be taken from us. We are “sealed” by Him for such a destiny.

This new life that is brought about by the Holy Spirit and characterized by this living hope is caused by the mercy of God. Nothing else explains its coming into being. Our having such hope is solely attributable to that in Yahweh’s essence and character which refuses to give us what we deserve. There is that in Him that restrains Him from carrying out His justice toward us, and so it has driven Him to provide the means whereby He can justly have mercy on us.

All this Yahweh accomplished through the work of His Christ. Jesus is THE Christ. The term means “the anointed one” Jesus is the one Yahweh has anointed as THE King over all that is. Such a significant One as this is the One asking us to simply trust Him, specifically that He is willing and able to deliver for us.

Jesus’ resurrection from the dead proves that the sacrifice of His life atoned for our sin. When God’s power allowed Jesus to overcome death, it was proof that the sin that had been placed on Him and allowed for His death was now gone. So it is proper to speak, as Peter does, of the fact that our “living hope” comes through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. His resurrection is the fact that allows us to dare to trust and so have hope. If He was not raised from the dead we are still in our sins. As Paul says, if there is no resurrection “Let us eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die” (1 Corinthians 15:29-32). Apart from the resurrection of Jesus, we have no living hope. But we do, because He did!

1:4—to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

This verse states the purpose of God’s plan in our behalf. It is not all being done just to give us a satisfying life on earth. It was not all done simply to get us “in the pearly gates.” God wants us to escape and be preserved from His judgment of sin and evil, which judgment is awful and will be devastating. But Yahweh also wants us to experience His commendation, the other role He carries out as judge where He rewards those who are obedient and faithful to the truth. So we are born again to escape judgment and to be equipped to live in such a way that we can receive commendation and compensation from Him.

Our inheritance is undefiled. It is composed of things unaffected by evil and the evil one. There is nothing in it that will be such that it is impacted by Adam’s sin. What God holds for us is of a different nature than those things that are a part of this world. Because of that it is imperishable. There is not that thing innate in the world in which we will live that our inheritance will in time perish or deteriorate as does everything on this earth and in this life.

All of the present world is corruptible. All of it runs its course and reaches the end of its usefulness, just as does the human body. This is the great reality of all that is a part of this life. There are also those things in this life that are not such that they break down physically, but they do fade away. Experiences we once craved lose their luster. Values we held dear lose their significance. Who is to say that what gives meaning and purpose today, whether a thing of physical substance or an ideal of some sort, will have any meaning tomorrow? It is almost certain we will live to see in our days that it does not. It is a certainty that nothing will be shown to have meaning unless assigned so by Him in the age to come.

Our inheritance that God intends for us to lay hold of is different from all else that is. This is an important idea to hold onto. Whatever Scripture reveals about our inheritance one truth must be held onto. It is that what we finally obtain from our Lord will be of a character and nature that it will endure in meaning and value to us, forever!.

Now does this idea of permanence contradict the ability we have as humans to impact our own inheritance by negligence to the truth? This question must be answered with care. Our membership in the family of God is unaffected by our diligence in the faith. We are embraced and loved by God, and this standing has only to do with the fact that He unconditionally loves us and has embraced us through the merit of Christ. If one views this standing as part of the inheritance, then certainly it cannot be taken away.

However, the term “inheritance” usually has nothing to do with family membership. It has to do with our share of the family assets. We understand that we enter into the experience of the assets of the family of God by exercising our faith, trusting in the truth and deciding to follow it. Our experience is varied, from child to child. This verse is referencing the fact that our eternal experience of those assets of the family will be assigned sovereignly by God based on His evaluation of our faithfulness. All of Scripture teaches that God’s will is that we lay hold of all He wants to freely give us.

1:5—who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

This verse adds to the previous verse’s teachings that we ourselves cannot become separated from God. We are protected by Him from that. We can freely experience that life in the present. He is working to see us through to the day when we enter into the fullness of that experience by being separated fully from the evil that has infected this present creation.

That coming event is neither a mystical experience nor is it a purely spiritual one. It is an event that will take place in future time and space. It has a day and a time and it will become a visible reality. It is something that has been planned and prepared for and it will be revealed or unveiled so that all see it. It will be a work that becomes plain and visible. So we are protected as a result of our faith for this eventuality.

We are protected by nothing less than the power of God. Our rescue and soundness, things that are inherent in the meaning of the word “salvation,” are the results He has in mind for us. That event is ready. All that awaits is for the right time for it to be unveiled.