

# 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

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## 1 PETER 1

### **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.

**1:6—In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials.**

That which gives joy is our salvation and our inheritance. It is not what we are experiencing now. Even when we walk with the Lord through it, this life itself will not be satisfying. We must remember this in our day.

Too often we make promises to people about what their experience in this life will yield if they live it with the Lord, that the Lord Himself does not make. The fact is that our joy will be full when we enter into our inheritance, and before then we will groan (Romans 8:23). It is true that we taste of that life now. But what we are living is still this life in a fallen, sinful world and in failing bodies. Each day we groan, all others groan and the creation all around us groans.

Peter says we greatly rejoice in what awaits this. We do so even though as we wait we are troubled. The glory of what awaits is what we must look at. The present life is temporary and it holds trying times for us. The word here for "various" is the one used to express "many colored." We never get to the point where we have seen it all in terms of trials. They are multiple and come from all directions.

We must remember that these trials are only for "a while." This situation is temporary. Our years, however long, are "a while" compared to eternity. Even days and seasons that seem endless will be looked back on as fleeting.

We can be certain that such trials are "necessary." We should not simply view them as a "necessary evil." The thing we can be assured of is that all the evil will be shown in the end to have been used to bring about good by God. He is that powerful. The thought of such a day and event when this great reversal is brought about, must cause us to "rejoice greatly." Faith when it is alive and working, produces joy and rejoicing because it looks at what is unseen (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

**1:7—that the proof of your faith, being much more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;**

That our trust in Jesus can be such that it documents itself is inspiring! Peter is teaching that our trust is proved legitimate and well-placed to others by becoming visible in our deeds. We do what others cannot do because Jesus is personally present, alive, and active in us each moment of each day.

There is no greater use of our lives than this. It is not that the Lord needs our faith authenticated for Himself. He knows our hearts. He is not, through trial, trying to discern if we trust Him. He knows we do because He is the one who gave us that trust (Ephesians 2:10). But He is seeking to prove our faith to others. He is seeking to prepare us to be an undeniable example for all eternity of ones who trusted God in the midst of an evil empire. He is helping us demonstrate faithfulness with respect to the truth in the midst of lies.

The ultimate thing of value that this planet offers us is gold. It is buried in the earth and we find it. We have learned to refine it and bring greater value to it. There are a number of parallels between gold and our faith. Truthfully, our faith is of greater value than gold. But like gold it is made purer by subjecting it to the refining process. Unlike gold it is not perishable. The day will come when our gold will do us no good even though of the most precious sort, having been refined to the highest degree the technology of our lifetime might allow. Our faith is much more precious. Unlike gold it will be taken with us and will be found to yield what gold was thought to yield.

Three things are mentioned that refined faith will yield. They are praise and glory and honor. These are three things that humans have destroyed each other and all that stood in their paths to get their hands on. Praise is the affirmation that comes from others that makes us feel worthwhile and valuable. Glory is that which distinguishes us from the crowd and gives us a sense of personal significance. Honor is that which others bestow on us that makes the glory and praise “official.” All three are the real things humans crave. They have historically traded, spent or invested their gold to gain these.

Trust in Yahweh that has matured and become seasoned eclipses gold in value. It is the ultimate commodity. It is the kernel that yields the wisdom and substance that equips beyond this life into eternity. It is itself something that must be hung on to in faith because its value will not be revealed until the time of the revelation of Jesus Christ. When the veil is removed and all of humanity views Him and comes to understand who He is, then the real value of all else will be known. With that event praise, glory and honor from Him, the ruler of the universe, will be the sweet possession of those who have persevered in their trust through trial and doubt.

**1:8—“and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.”**

Peter had seen Christ. He was among those who had seen, examined and touched the God-man, Jesus. He was writing to those who had not. There were likely times when their lack of faith frustrated him. But there were, no doubt, times when the presence of faith in people astounded Peter. Though he had been a close companion and friend of Jesus, trusting Him had come hard for Peter!

These loved Christ, though they had never seen Him. The Hebrew concept of love expressed a distinct choosing of someone as one who would receive affection, loyalty, special care, all the thoughts and actions associated with love.. The reader's choice of Christ was distinct and definite, so that they endured trial and difficulty because of it. They lived this faith though they had never seen the object of it, Jesus Christ. They had not seen Him and they did not see Him. The time of understanding the value of faith, at the revelation of Jesus Christ, had not come. The truth about Him had not been made plain, yet they believed.

Their trust in Jesus was such that it led to a high level of experience with Him, as He had promised. They had remained "in Him" and so drew life from Him. His promise, that their joy would be full (John 15:11, 16:24) had been fulfilled in them.

Peter uses two words to describe the joy of these people. They are said to rejoice greatly. Theirs was not described as being ordinary joy and rejoicing. It was distinct because of its magnitude. They are said to have joy that is inexpressible. Their joy was distinct because of its breadth and depth. Wherever Christianity has gone, though its followers have not seen Christ, they experience joy as if they have. They grow in joy as they follow His Spirit and come to know Him. There is a reality to their experience with Jesus.

If we have no joy we can be certain that our experience of Christ is the reason. One thing is certain, He gives joy. It is felt by all who seek His presence and companionship. Wherever Christianity has been practiced, joy has been the result. When our joy weakens our first response should be to turn to Him. To seek joy apart from seeking Him is the great dead end.

Peter observes that the joy of these believers is "inexpressible and it had been filled (perfect tense) with glory." The force of this last little phrase is interesting. They have arrived at a state in their experience of Christ where their joy is said to be in the sphere of glorious. There is not just a glory about their experience, where it might be said that glory had rubbed off on them. They had entered into and been immersed in the glory of their faith. It had become theirs in the fullest possible way. Experiencing this glory of the reality of Christ living within is an unparalleled one. It can be matched by no other experience in life.

This expression of Peter's of the life he observes in them is the life Paul spoke of in 1 Corinthians 2:6-10 and 2 Corinthians 3:7-11. There is a glory that has accompanied and gone alongside people's experience of God. But Christ residing in us through the Holy Spirit has resulted in an experience so much richer that it can only be said to be "in glory" rather than "with glory." Other things have a sprinkling of glory that accompanies them. Peter is proclaiming to us that there is an experience of Christ in day-to-day living that takes one on a journey into the very core of glory.

### **1:9—"obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls."**

We can easily see "soul" as referring to a portion of our being. We understand the usage of the word here in this passage when we realize that it often refers in Scripture to the totality of what we are. When we see it we should assume that it is referring to our being in its entirety unless there is a reason in the context to assign any other meaning to it. So this usage here we take to be a reference to God's plan to ransom our entire being from the fall, to rescue us from its effects in our inner and our outer being.

Peter uses the present tense, “obtaining,” and that is significant. Now a present tense can be used to express something that is absolutely certain. This could be the thrust of this statement, a statement of a virtual certainty in God’s future plan. More likely however it is a statement of an ongoing action, what we are experiencing as we live in the midst of God’s continuous and ongoing action in our lives. Taking the statement in this way allows it to fit well with the previous verses. We are daily seeing our beings “saved” from what they once were and who we would instinctively be. We are being tested and refined by the fire of trial so that our faith is being strengthened and spurs us to different actions and reactions than we once would have had. Our former way of life is being increasingly abandoned. We are becoming more like Christ each day.

One day we will be completely changed in our bodies by the miraculous work of God. This will be the final outcome of our faith, but for today we are experiencing a significant work that will have a significant impact on all that we later become. The words of the next verse build on this particular interpretation of this verse.

### **1:10—“As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry,”**

The old Testament prophets knew of a time when man’s experience of salvation would be very different, richer and fuller. Beginning with Moses (Deuteronomy 5:29, 29:4, 30:1-6), they recorded words of God that spoke of a work of the Spirit in the hearts of man that would lift men to radical new levels of obedience and conformity to the holiness of God (Isaiah 54:13, Jerermiah 29:4-7, 31:31-34, 32:36-41, Ezekiel 11:14-20, 37:11-14). Their burden was always to bring about the obedience of God’s people.

To a certain degree the work of these prophets was futile (Ezekiel 3:4-9). And so they made the careful search Peter describes here for the time when God would “save” His people from their rebellion and pour out His Spirit on them (Joel 2:28-33). It would be an age of grace, when God would come nearer humanity and bless them with spiritual blessing to a whole new magnitude and degree. It was much anticipated by all with a heart for God.

### **1:11—“seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.”**

The Old Testament saints sought for a person and for a time, based on what the Holy Spirit was revealing to them. Peter could see in the writers of the Old Testament this burden and inquiry. The prophets knew of a person, one chosen to suffer in behalf of the people’s sin. His death would atone for their sin. All the symbols of their worship pointed to this.

From our perspective, we see Christ as somewhat inactive in the lives of those in the Old Testament. We are uncertain of His role. Because the leaders at the time of Christ missed Him as their Messiah, we tend to conclude that the idea of a suffering Christ was unknown. Peter, from his perspective in time, from his own study of Scripture, and from what he had learned from Christ tells us that this was not the case. Christ had been actively revealing Himself to the prophets and they had both understood and had written the truth about Him down. They had gotten the message loud and clear and were searching for the person and the time.

The message was consistent among these various writers. The sin of Israel would be atoned for, the Holy Spirit would be poured out on humanity, then the earth would move toward a day of an appointment with its Creator. Through miraculous and glorious displays of power, He would become its king (Joel 2:28-32, Isaiah 2:5-22, Zephaniah 1:7-18, Malachi 4:1-6). They looked for the who and the when of these glorious events. Who would not be looking for the person and the events when the results would be so glorious?

Now who was this “spirit of Christ” that revealed these things to them? It was the third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit. This is an example of a verse that has led us to believe in the doctrine of the trinity. The idea that there are three distinct persons that make up the God-head, all of whom are of the same essence, is very difficult to comprehend. We embrace it not because we understand it or can fathom it. We embrace it because it is the only explanation of God that is harmonious with all the statements made about God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures. We recognize that this doctrine is not explicit in the Scriptures, but it is implicit through a host of statements of which this is one. Here the Holy Spirit is clearly equated with Christ.

What is said here about the ministry of the Holy Spirit during Old Testament times? We often understand the Holy Spirit as having been “with” the people of faith in the Old Testament, but of being “in” the believers of the Church after the time of Christ. This is probably a helpful way to understand this issue. But this simple idea can be understood in a way that makes it an oversimplification (though it is the way Jesus explained it in John 14:7). Here in 1 Peter 1:11 the text clearly states that the Spirit of Christ was “within” the Old Testament prophets? If this is true, what was the change in His ministry after the death of Christ?

We must remember that this verse is not talking about all the saints of the Old Testament. It is speaking of the prophets. The office of prophet was established by God (Deuteronomy 18:15-22), and few were called to it. In and through these individuals the Holy Spirit worked and ministered in unique ways that the average person did not experience (Numbers 11:16-30, 1 Samuel 10:1-13). It is best to understand that He did indwell these men at key times and others as well, but that this indwelling was not the same as the experience that we know. So this is the phenomenon that Peter is speaking of here. Words were orchestrated in the minds of the prophets by Christ, through the Holy Spirit. They were recorded in writing and then pondered deeply by those who wrote them and who read them attentively. Understanding their significance, these individuals searched to know more about the person these words spoke of and about the time these words applied to. Their search was careful, deliberated and persistent. It was also successful.

**1:12—“It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.”**

As the prophets searched for the person who would bring about the “salvation promise,” that work of God’s Spirit in the innermost being of believers that would lead to greater obedience of God, they learned it was for a future time. It could only come about once God’s lamb had been provided (Genesis 22:8, John 1:29), after His grace had provided for the atoning sacrifice for sin. Then the Holy Spirit could take up permanent residence in the innermost being of those whose sin had been justly covered and forgiven. So the prophet’s projections had to do with all who lived after the time of Christ’s death.

These things, the forgiveness extended to mankind through the cross and the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell believers so that they were joined to God at the deepest level of their beings all were part of the gospel message announced by the Apostles. They themselves were the first to experience His transforming power as He worked in them. They then passed it on to all who would listen as the prophets had predicted, and the new way of living began to spread throughout the earth.

Peter gives us words that express the wonder of this whole experience that is now ours through the Holy Spirit when he says, “things into which angels long to look.” The sight of God joined to man, accomplishing a divine work through imperfect and ruined vessels is a wonder to the angels. The plan and the work excites them. Of the many wonders God has brought about, this is a big one. Just as the prophets realized the import of this phenomenon before it happened and longed to know more about it, now the angels long to witness it and to know more about it. It is a happening of universal proportions. Any being that understands what it is, God joining Himself to humans so as to bring about His own thoughts and deeds among them, knows it is an absolutely staggering miracle that is being worked.

Too often we who are in the middle of it don't see its significance and we give ourselves to the pursuit of life's things rather than this that IS life. In the words of Jesus, this is the bread of life, that which sustains life as it was designed to be lived. It is living water, that which quenches that thirst in us for significance and meaning. This is the vine from which true life is sustained, that which makes a river of living water flow out from our innermost being.

**1:13—“Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”**

There are “glories” that accompany salvation. There is the glory of heaven and our heavenly home, but there is the glory of experiencing the process of a changed life as well. There is a joy in an experience of pleasure and rest that awaits us in heaven. There is the glory and joy of walking with God today. Today's walk with God consists of tackling the difficult, of struggling with and conquering challenging problems, of being stretched to one's limit and succeeding and winning. That is the glory of the salvation process that we enjoy in this life.

Peter charges his readers with respect to how to enter in to the process that is this latter glory. His charge appears to consist of three commands in the English rendering of the text. There is really only one command, and that is the command to “fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

The statement “gird your minds for action” is a participle. It is action that must take place first, the manner one must employ to focus their hopes completely on what they should. “Girding up” was an expression used of gathering up one's flowing robe, tucking the cloth that flowed toward the ground into one's belt, or girdle as it was called, so that one could engage themselves more easily in physical work and activity. It transformed a flowing robe into shorts! To “gird up” one's mind for action would be to adopt a mindset free from the things that impede responsiveness with respect to the things of the Spirit.

Many Christians have a mindset that leads to inactivity. They hear the truth that leads others to act but they do not act. It is a mind set on things that are of the earth rather than of heaven. Sometimes these are immoral and sinful by their very nature. Sometimes they are evil because they are good but not best—not God’s will for the moment. In either case they keep us from that which He wants us to do at that moment and so our minds are not girded for Godly action. We must remember that Christianity is about action. It is not just about a body of facts, though that is certainly the entry point and the rational for our focus on the eternal. We experience the glory of our salvation when we determine to act. To do so there is this pointing of our minds toward action that we need to see to. Every day we need to anticipate that God will lead us to do certain things. That is what the moments of each day are really about.

There is a second action that we must take that is prerequisite to us focusing our hopes completely on the grace to be revealed with Christ. We must have the soberness in spirit that we need to have. The word rendered “sober” spoke initially of being wine-free, but assumed a broader meaning as it was used. It came to speak of being under proper control, not given to extremes or to the whims of the wrong forces. To be sober in spirit means to give one’s entire being to the control of the Holy Spirit. It involves arresting those feelings and moods that arise within us that do not line up properly with the truth. It involves denying certain things and rejecting them as untrue or as part of the old way of living. It involves setting aside restlessness and promoting and initiating thoughts of what is pure, true and of good reputation (Philippians 4:8).

In doing these two things, girding our minds for action and being of sober spirit we prepare ourselves to execute Peter’s command to fix our hope completely on the glory that will be ours through Jesus Christ. We must intentionally embrace one thing as that which is our hope, as that which will fill, re-fill and fulfill our lives. We are, to a large degree, shaped by our hopes. What we look to for happiness, fulfillment and pleasure will have an enormous impact on what our lives become.

By commanding us to focus our hopes completely on the grace that will come to us when Christ is revealed Peter is telling us that we are to burn some bridges. There is to be a sense in which all our eggs must be in one basket so that we are hopeless if eternity is just a myth. Our hope for our lives is that which will be ours when Christ is revealed.

Our hope is not in anything related to this life. It is not in ourselves, this life’s experiences, or the world’s goods. Those will, in fact, fail us completely. Our health will be lost, our life’s work may be lost, our loved ones may be lost, and we may wind up suffering deeply physically and emotionally. None of that touches our real treasure. That is the way we should strive to think and invest.

We must seek to implement this mindset: there is no relationship, or experience, or status, or achievement I will look to for my satisfaction or peace. Those will come to me on the day when Christ stands on earth and the divine order of things is established. Until then I will likely remain to some degree un-affirmed and unfulfilled. That mindset is the force of this command and it can be carried out only by those of sober spirit who have girded their minds for action.

**1:14—“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in ignorance.”**

The things that keep us from action with regard to the faith, that control our spirits and that we stake our hopes to, mold and shape our lives. Left unchanged these conform us to something other than Christ. Previously we had an excuse—ignorance. When we don't know the truth we cannot be shaped by it and instead are simply shaped by life. This is where obedient children of God are distinct and unique.

Obedient children of God have one thing in common. They are not simply being shaped by their times or following the course that comes naturally. They are being conformed to a different shape, that of Christ. They are becoming more aware of the truth and responding to its implications. As a result their former way of living and thinking is becoming more and more a thing of the past.

We must remember that this is the challenge of the Christian life, expressed in a nutshell in this verse. If it happened naturally, without our diligent effort, this command and the myriads like it that fill the pages of the New Testament would not need to have been written to us. The reality is that something is required of us that allows us to experience His overwhelming grace that then enables us to rise above what would naturally be our course. It is a great discipline to ask ourselves in all situations, “What am I being conformed to?”

**1:15—but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior;**

The word “holy” is a very important word in terms of our faith. It is the word we often think of when we are describing God and it is the word that comes to mind often when we think about what we should be. When we think of holy we generally think of righteous. That is accurate to a certain degree, but only captures a little of what the word implies.

The word means to set aside when used as a verb. As an adjective it means set apart. It came to be used of things that were set aside and reserved for service to God or in the worship of God. It is the word chosen by New Testament writers to use of members of the body of Christ. The word rendered “saints” is literally “holy ones.” And so when we speak of holiness we are speaking of uniqueness. “Distinctiveness” is a key part of the concept of holiness. It is a fairly straight-forward idea when we use it of things and people, because we understand that God has acted on them to set them aside and declare them reserved for His use.

It is a little more profound when we think of God as being holy. In His case no one declared Him such, He simply was and is holy. What this means is that by virtue of His essence He is wholly unique and separate from all that is. This is true of His moral makeup, what we usually think of when we think of holiness, but it is true of virtually everything about Him. When we think in terms of intelligence, power, authority, patience, love or virtually any category of traits or abilities, God is unique. There is no one or no thing like Him! When He says He is holy this is the idea. He is wholly unique, without peer in all that He is.

God is to be viewed by us, revered and treated as sacred because He is in every sense wholly unique. In every imaginable category of description, He is worlds beyond anything we can possibly conceive of. So He is not holy because He is for some reason sacred, He is sacred because He is holy, and that is an important distinction.

We are to become holy. We are to show ourselves to be “set aside” from the rest of humanity. We are to be traveling toward a way of thinking that leads to a different way of living that distinguishes us from the masses living by mere instinct. We do this as we mimic Him. His holiness is defined by His consistency within His own nature. He is holy by virtue of His essence. He is perfectly behaving in line with His perfect character at all times. Our holiness is innate only in the sense that God has joined Himself to us. It is not something we would naturally do apart from Him.

We must learn to think and behave in line with His character, through His Spirit that He has placed in us. We can become holy only because He has joined Himself to our spirits. That which is holy is now in us, and as we live by the leading of His Spirit, we will reflect His holiness. Peter can command this only because of this fundamental change in our makeup that God has brought about.

### **1:16—because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”**

The best reason for pursuing anything is that it is admonished in the Scriptures. Here Peter cites Scripture as the reason we should pursue holiness. Holiness has always been the agenda of God for His people. God desires those He has set aside as His to be a reflection of who He is and who they now are. The fact is that God’s choosing of us makes us unique (holy). We are to live in such a way that this uniqueness demonstrates itself. Our actions are to reflect the fact that we are joined to God and that we walk and talk with Him. They should reflect wisdom, restraint, righteousness, all the things we would hope to draw from being around the perfect One who has told us He will freely give us all things (Romans 8:32). There should be a noticeable beauty and order to our lives.

### **1:17—And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth.**

There is an appearance before the judgment seat of Christ that Christians make. Not with respect to our sin. That has been judged at the cross. It is why Jesus died and He removed all our guilt. But, there is something real at stake in this judgment of Christians by God. We might argue the exact nature of the judgment of believers in terms of its timing, but one thing is certain, we will be held accountable with respect to our work.

Paul spoke of this judgment. He indicated that the judgment of God would be concerned with our contribution to the Church, the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:9-15), and likely even to a specific local church. Both Peter and Paul use the term “works” when speaking of what we will be judged for. It seems best to see this as harmonious with Jesus’ teaching regarding the talents (Matt. 25:14-30), or the minas (Luke 19:12-27). We will be held accountable for how we managed everything we have been given from the truth to our material things.

Peter begins this statement with the phrase “if you address as Father . . .” The word “if,” in this case, could be rendered “since.” Peter is referring to our connectedness to God and our acknowledgment that He is both a source to us of care and resource as well as an authority. Since we see Him in this way and publicly speak of Him in these terms our lives should be lived in a way that reflects this belief. Our lives should be marked by care with respect to His interests and resources. There should be evidence that His household and kingdom is what we consider to be our real home and that we regard our time here as a temporary stay.

**1:18—knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers,**

There are some things in this verse that must motivate us and shape our thinking in this life. They are our understanding of three things that Peter's words here bring to mind. History shows that created things, including humans need to be actively guided and managed with the Creator's wisdom. Apart from His guidance the creation groans. And, the groaning gets louder. It was never meant to be lived any other way. Changing this will change us, change the Christian movement and could change the world.

Peter refers to our lives as "futile." The first thing to note is that there IS a futility that comes with the life that we have inherited as humans. This refers in part to the fact that life requires much effort that, if not expended wisely, only worsens existing challenges. The wisdom of Yahweh the Creator can change that. Apart from Him we do not have the wisdom to match our intellectual ability. We leave the world worse than it was when we entered it.

The writers of Scripture did not suggest that a mere belief in God is what we need, though that is where we start. Rather, we need intimate relationship with Him, a relationship and companionship of trust. By that we are helped each moment by His Spirit to discern the voice of wisdom in the midst of all the voices we hear. Apart from divine guidance we solve problems only to create others and all aspects of our world deteriorate.

This is true of both the conservative and the liberal. We must note that the "forefathers" Peter references refers to were those of his own Jewish heritage and that of his readers. Judaism delivered a futile way of life. There was not an absence of religion in that heritage. There was a lack of God's presence. This was true of the conservative Israelites, the Pharisees, who killed God's Son Jesus. It was also true of the liberal Israelites, the Sadducees, who joined the Pharisees in killing Jesus and also denied the resurrection and most miraculous elements God wishes to bring to bear on human problems. Ideology alone isn't what makes humans rise to living well. We rise as we practice a moment by moment relationship with our Creator. That is what He Himself has provided for us. It is what He desires and that we need. Creation needs it from us!

A second idea conveyed by "futile" is the inability of the things of this life to make any substantive difference in the quality of our lives. Things do not impart our more subjective needs for happiness and satisfaction. Nor does our ability to lengthen our lives. Yahweh's wisdom and companionship makes things like our marriages and other relationships work. Yahweh's wisdom and companionship enables us to manage wealth well. Yahweh's wisdom and companionship helps us derive what matters from our experiences, rather than just having experiences. It is in living our lives in partnership with Him that we receive a new kind of life. But life itself, even when lived with all the trappings of western civilization including religion, cannot deliver real life. It is futile to expect life lived by our own instincts to satisfy and fulfill us.

Third, we have the great opportunity to live life WITH Yahweh the Creator because we have been redeemed. Payment has been made in our behalf to buy us out of our slavery to sin and life lives in hostility to Him. But that payment was not merely money, as it would have been for a slave in the ancient world in Peter's day. The payment was made with something of value to God that will be named in the next verse.

Knowledge of these three things should help us turn continually in reverence to God. Simply knowing what He has done should shape our agenda and our years on this planet. It is this life of trust in Him and continual submission to Him that will fill us up.

**1:19—but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.**

Our redemption, our release from the futility of this life, came about through the blood of Christ. All blood is precious in God's sight. Whenever someone dies something precious has been lost. The life of Christ was uniquely precious because it was a sinless life. He was without blemish. There was nothing about His life that was wrong and there was nothing about His life that was not wise and exemplary. It was a unique life in that it was the life of the God/man, God's one and only Son.

A human life has never been constituted as that life was, the perfect union of human and divine nature. It was a physical and spiritual marvel and miracle. Life has never been lived as that life was lived. It was the perfect life both in terms of how it was genetically composed and how it was experientially lived. Jesus was rightly related to God, to creation, and to people. His lifeblood was given for us. His life was uniquely composed and uniquely exploited. Our redemption and freedom required it by the Laws of God and God provided it.

**1:20—For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for you.**

The word rendered "foreknown" in the NASB is one about which two observations should be made. First, it is a perfect tense, signifying action that took place in past time with a result that continues to the present time. Second, it is a word that expresses not simply knowledge of someone's existence or the facts about them, but knowing them in the sense of having a relationship with them. So Christ, before His appearance on earth and before the appearance of the earth was "known" in this sense by God.

God related Himself to Christ in a way that continues to the present. We understand this because we believe in the trinity, that Christ shares the same essence as the Father. Peter's purpose here is not to teach or even reinforce that particular doctrine, but his statement is such that the doctrine of the trinity is affirmed.

Another subject that can be commented on in passing because of these verses is the reference to "the foundation of the world." In the cosmogony of the day that referred to the thing upon which a flat earth was set. There were various theories about how this was composed. By our understanding of the "foundation of the world" we think more of the fundamental elements of which things created are composed—of atoms with their protons neutrons and electrons. We think of natural law. So we confront language chosen by the human author based on incomplete understanding of the earth. At the same time it would accommodate the understanding of the original readers. This was allowed by the Spirit because it is language that would rightly accommodate natural revelation once it was more fully understood.

This difficulty of giving special revelation that would be absolutely true through human authors whose understanding of natural revelation was quite limited, was handled often in this way by God to maintain the character of the Scriptures. God placing His truth in understandable, readable form was no easy feat. But His method resulted in an authoritative and timeless book that will be shown to be in absolute harmony with natural revelation, once the latter is thoroughly understood. It is also an example of a statement that likely was intended by the human author to be plain literal, and ends up to be more of a figuratively literal one.

But so far, we have spoken of things which are cast alongside the main point of this verse which is Christ. The point of this verse is that the plan and person of redemption are prehistoric in terms of earth's history. So before God made the earth and before He created humanity, He knew about Satan's work in creation and the predicament humans would fall into. He embraced the Son, the second person of His own being as the Redeemer, the one who would become a man, appear on earth and die as a substitute for humans.

We who live today have come to exist on earth after Jesus appeared as that redeemer. Our faith and trust in the plan of God and in His faithfulness in executing it should be unwaivering. He has appeared "for us," literally "because of us." There was no other reason for God to become a human. This verse emphasizes the wonder of this plan and the actuality of it. The Greek expresses a contrast between what Christ was to God "on the one hand," and what He became because of us "on the other hand."

### **1:21—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.**

It is through Christ that we have come to know and believe in God. This verse states the benefit we have received, and also states from whom and through whom it came. We have become believers in God, people whose hope for their "nakedness" (the lost blessing) is God. The human dream, since the fall of Adam has been persistently identifiable yet wrongly focused. People ache for more. There is in our deepest being a need to be restored to fellowship with our Maker. We feel it. Each human can identify a search they are on, though few would identify it as this. But this is what it is, the ultimate cause of every discontent that we experience.

Because of the work of God that He has carried out through Christ we have come to place our faith in God in such matters. Our hope is in His plan, that through Christ's death, burial, and resurrection we who believe will one day share in Christ's glory. Christ's life and teaching have made known to us this great plan of God. His resurrection is the clear and unmistakable sign that He was who He claimed to be and that His teaching was true (John 2:13-22). So through Christ our faith has come to rest in the plan of God to undo our spiritual death and so to destroy the sting of physical death. He will restore the glory lost to humanity in the fall of Adam and Eve. It will, in fact, be a greater glory than the glory lost. We have come to have hope though living in a hopeless world.

### **1:22—Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart.**

Acts of love are neither natural nor easy. They come about consistently only through the greatest intentionality. This is reflected in the wording orchestrated here by the Holy Spirit through Peter. He notes that they have "purified" their inner beings in accordance with the admonishment of truth. "Purified" is in the perfect tense, indicating that it is something they have done and that there is the abiding result that goes with that action.

This purifying likely does not refer to their salvation, but to subsequent acts of obedience after it. This is most likely because it is represented as something done with a desired result in mind, that of love for fellow believers. It is doubtful that this would be a motive in seeking salvation. It is likely a part of their spiritual growth after salvation because it involves casting aside old prejudices and personal likes and dislikes. Such things are strongholds in us. They tend to die a slow death. But they must be made to do so.

In the context of that culture, Peter was likely talking about classic dislikes between Jew and Gentile, free men and slaves, rich and poor and the like. The fact that they had cast these distinctions off was no small feat and these words are a great commendation with respect to their progress in the faith.

But even with this progress firmly in place they had to be commanded by Peter to ratchet up their love. They had to be certain that they actually followed through and that they did so with fervency. “Love one another” is in the imperative, a command. It is an aorist imperative indicating that they are to “start loving one another.” Peter recognized a deficiency in some sense in their fellowship and saw this as essential. So acts of love persist only when we have purified our hearts of all the old baggage, the ways of thinking and the selfish motives that dictate against selfless action. Acts of love then can begin in earnest. The Holy Spirit adds these. They are intentional acts that express love in concrete, unmitigated ways. Loving others is no easy or natural process.

**1:23—for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.**

This thought is linked to the previous one by the conjunction “for.” This indicates that it is providing further information that explains the previous idea. Love, as opposed to self-gratification, is to be that which regulates our conduct toward each other because of the source of our present lives in Christ. We are different people than we once were. There is that within us that does not wind down but grows to produce the eternal. That planting is to be nurtured by us, sought and enhanced in every way possible so that its fruit is produced in us.

The seed is said here to be “the living and abiding word of God.” This likely is a reference to more than what we call the Bible. It IS that which God has given us in writing. It likely also includes the decrees of God associated with salvation, all of which bring about our new birth. So, it is a reference to His decrees about Christ and the Holy Spirit. But it is still more. It is the extensive, thorough and complete work of God, from our election and predestination to our eventual glorification. It brought about our birth into the family of God. It is all that falls in between God’s choice of us in eternity past and our future glorification. This includes our coming to understand the great truths of God that He has made clear through revelation. These bring about in us a steady process of change if we show diligence toward them.

The great decisions and actions of Yahweh are seeds that never lose their capacity to produce life. They are more certain than wildflower seeds in the desert that may lie dormant for years, but will spring to life once conditions are right. They are seeds that are imperishable, like all that God has decreed. Our new birth places within us capacity for new life that never expires. Though we are slowly dying physically, that seed continues to reproduce itself and the process can move along in us unless we become distracted or indifferent.

**1:24—“For ‘All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord abides forever.’”**

This is a quotation of Isaiah 40:6-9 from the Septuagint. It came to Isaiah as a message that was to be cried out, or spread and proclaimed. It remains a message that teaches and emphasizes three things. There is a glory to humanity but it passes. There is an order humans establish but it passes. There is a decree of God that causes this, and that decree stands forever unalterable.

This is a quotation that supports what Peter has said in the previous verse about the imperishable seed that brings about our new birth. There is a glory and splendor to humanity and their works that we must not allow to deceive us. What a person desires for themselves and what they decide to accept as true can motivate a string of impressive achievements. Their execution might be a thing of beauty. Don't be fooled. It will not endure.

**1:25—“But the word of the Lord abides forever.’ And this is the word which was preached to you.”**

What God has decreed is absolutely unalterable. There is no law that He is subject to, except that of His own character. What He desires is always good and right because of His infinite perfection. What He desires to do He has infinite power to do and what He has power to do He has the infinite moral right to do. In this He is like no other ruler. He is truly sovereign.

The truth of God that is preached by His followers brings this to the lives of those who believe. It is truth upon which a life can be firmly founded. It is the foundation that will never fail no matter what the seasons of life may bring. It abides forever, and it is in the possession of all who will hear and listen. It is why Jesus persistently said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” There is nothing of greater value than the truth.

## 1 PETER 2

### **2:1—Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander,**

There are thought patterns and living patterns we must set aside if we are to experience salvation from sin in this life. This setting aside is called the sanctification process. Allowing that process to be freely carried out by the Holy Spirit allows us to experience salvation to the fullness of God's plan for us. His power and grace have made available to us everything that pertains to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), so that we can say that we have only to take up those weapons and our fight will be won.

But to take up we must first set aside. To think rightly we must turn from thinking wrongly. Peter names five things that thwart our progress and growth in the faith. The first is malice. The Greek word is κακιαω, meaning badness, which refers to what is intrinsically bad (as opposed to what has a bad effect). It is rendered in various ways in the New Testament and refers to depravity, malignity or what is troublesome. We must say "no" to that within us that we know to be the fruit of our depravity. Our depravity expresses itself in ways that vary from person to person. We must put aside the particular habits in our life that spring from our depravity.

The second thing mentioned is guile. This word is δολω. It likely comes from an obsolete word δελλω, which meant to decoy. It referred to a trick or a bait. It includes what we refer to as hidden agendas, or manipulation and con jobs. It is duplicity, saying and doing what appears to be one thing while all the while embracing the other. We must separate ourselves from that human tendency to work things to our own advantage and to "cover our tracks" so as to appear good. Guile was the sin of Annanias and Saphira (Acts 5), that Peter dealt decisively with.

The third thing we must put aside is hypocrisy. The word is υποκρισεισ, which comes from two words, the preposition for "under," and the word for "judgment." It is easy to respond incompletely to the Lord's conviction and judgment. We can easily deal with some visible part of our sin and yet hold on to the sin. The term "under judgment" describes us perfectly in that case, because we have obviously been convicted, but we have not really dealt with the issue, so we are still "under judgment." It is important that we deal with those matters about which we are convicted.

The fourth thing we must put aside is envy. The word φθονουσ is used. It is from a word that means to pine or waste away, shrivel or wither. It means to spoil or ruin by moral influence. So this idea was incorporated into a word that expresses a thinking pattern that brings ruin in and around us. It is a thinking pattern that occupies itself with the things or the state others have been blessed with, and then with the feeling "that should be true of me as well." It is the feeling that things should have turned out different for me. As all sin is, this is a lack of faith in the plan and goodness of God. It is seeking the blessing rather than the blessing.

The fifth thing we are to put aside is slander. The word is καταλαλια. It is composed of the preposition meaning down or against, and the word for speech. It is easy for us to "speak down" others. We do it to make them look worse, make us look better, to "settle a score," and for a host of other reasons. What we need to realize is that when we do this we are a direct reflection of Satan. He is a slanderer. Slander is in the meaning of his name (the word rendered devil is διαβαλλο, meaning one who accuses, maligns or slanders). When we speak against someone in order to damage them for selfish reasons we are slandering them. Now there are times when we must state the truth about someone, but we must be careful that we do not hide behind this pious sounding excuse. It is far easier to sin when we open our mouths than when we keep them shut. It is more typical of human nature to say too much than it is to say too little.

If we desire to grow with respect to our salvation these are the things we must continually separate ourselves from. They are directly disobedient to that which God is trying to do within us. We fall into them by listening to the flesh rather than the Spirit. But it is not just a question of putting off some things. We do not understand Christianity fully if we view it as a matter of not doing certain things. In fact, the “not doing” is something we engage in so as to do certain things that are more noble and are God’s heart. The motive for setting aside is the glory of what we are then free to do. That is what the next verse speaks of. It is a continuation of the sentence and thought of this verse.

## **2:2—like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,**

This verse continues the sentence started in the previous verse but does not complete it. It is more thought on what we should do in light of the truth spoken of at the start of Peter’s letter. The previous verse speaks of a “putting off” that we must do. This verse takes up the idea of what should fill the void. Verse two speaks of what should govern our thoughts instead of the fleshly instincts of verse one that we distance ourselves from.

We are told to behave like babies. This is the only time in the Bible we are told to behave like babies! The reason for this switch in the normal metaphor is that Peter wishes to identify and emphasize that which nourishes growth. His concern is that his readers grow up, that they not remain the same, stagnated in their Christian life. To do this we must put aside the things that stunt the process of God in our lives, the things that tend to “lock us on” to the voice of the flesh and the desire of the devil. We must crave something else like a baby craves milk. This thing will do for us what milk does for a newborn. It will provide all that we need to sustain and advance spiritual life.

What is this thing we are to crave? The NASB renders it “the pure milk of the word.” This rendering translates the adjective, λογικον, with the English phrase “of the word.” That is a legitimate rendering, the adjective conveying the essential character of the particular nourishment Peter has in mind.

It is important to consider why this rendering is to be preferred. Other renderings inject the word “spiritual” into the text. This word λογικον occurs only one other place in the New Testament, in Romans 12:1. There we are told to give our bodies as a living sacrifice and that this is our “λογικον” service. In that text there is the same challenge. What English word represents the idea of this Greek word best. The English translations vary, many using the word “spiritual,” some using the word “reasonable.” Since the word occurs only on these two occasions in the New Testament, it is of value to consider how it was used in secular Greek literature.

In Greek literature we see that λογικον was almost exclusively used to express the idea of “rational.” It was used in particular of those fundamental principles that govern the behavior of all things. To the stoics, god was rationality embodied in an actual substance, called λογος. Λογος was understood not as a person but as reason or what was rational thought. As a substance it was everywhere present. This god-force/substance as it reacted with the substances of other things gave those things definition and explained their essential properties. Another way of saying this would be to say that the λογος explained the reason things were as they were. It was the basis of reality and to the Greeks, all should strive to understand this essential thing, reason or rationality, that shaped reality. In this striving, understanding of rational wisdom was to be found. Rational wisdom was logic that made things logical or at least acceptable.

So the Greek's use of this word had to do with underlying rational explanations of things, mysterious in nature, but nevertheless rational. Λογικον was something that had the character or nature of the λογος about it. It described what was germane or foundational to the understanding of reality. This usage would cause us to favor a rendering in this text that in some way reflected this idea of logical or reasonable, as the King James Version did in Romans 12:1.

Now if we move backward in the context of this 1 Peter passage to the end of chapter 1, we find that the subject at hand is "the word of God." Its living character and its enduring character is emphasized. It is likely that by the phrase "the word of God" Peter was not thinking of the Bible as we would, it not having been completed yet. He was thinking of all that God had revealed about Himself in the Old Testament and in the life of Christ and all that God had decreed that shaped and maintained His creation. The chapter ends with these words, "And this is the word that was preached to you." So Peter is speaking of the truth of God as it was being proclaimed by himself and others. The word "therefore" begins chapter 2 and so connects the thoughts. So the thought of "the word" (λογος), in chapter 1 and the adjectival form of that same word (λογικον) in chapter 2 are connected. The revelation of Yahweh as it has been made known to us by Him should figure definitively into our definition of what the phrase "the pure milk" is. It is what nurtures our faith. A condensed treatment of this "milk" that nurtures faith is found in Psalm 19.

Our placing of the word "spiritual" in the English text, as for example in the NIV, creates a couple of problems. The first is that the word "spiritual" to most Americans conveys an activity that is other than rational. This violates the clear usage of the Greek word in the era of Peter's writing, when it meant "rational," and referred to the principles that governed and explained the universe and made things behave as they do. Second, the term "spiritual" leaves wide open what the "milk" actually is that nourishes our growth. It would be difficult to imagine Peter telling his readers to crave something the nature of which was uncertain. He was not telling them to simply engage themselves in spiritual activity. He had a specific body of truth they were to be immersed in. The pure milk Peter wants us to crave is "of-the-word" milk.

So it is best to understand the word λογικον as an adjective meant to specify, along with "pure," the specific nature of the milk that induces growth. The pure milk is the objective revelation of God about Himself. It is His message about Himself, us, the world, its affairs, its fallenness and a host of other things. This revelation in its pure form when understood and applied, produces spiritual growth. It also guides the more subjective aspect that is part of a healthy relationship to God, the activity of listening for the voice of His Spirit.

The last part of the verse states succinctly what that milk will yield as it does its work in us. It is of the nature that it produces growth with respect to our salvation. This too is an important point. We view our salvation properly when we view it completely, as referring to justification, sanctification, and glorification. One of the misnomers of American nomenclature is that we have used the word "salvation" and "saved" to speak exclusively of justification. We view "salvation" as an event. God means for that event to begin a process that continues for the rest of our lives. If we wish to enter into the full experience of our salvation we must grow with respect to it. We will advance and make progress in it through the pure, of-the-word milk.

This is why every Christian should have a habit with regard to the Bible. It is the purest form we have of God's message about Himself and His creation, including us. It is better than books about the Bible and it is better than books based on the Bible.

## **2:3—if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.**

This phrase is added on at the end of this long sentence that started in verse one. It is really intended to be the motivation for obeying all that both verses command. It re-captures the thoughts of chapter one and sums up the work of grace and what some have called “irresistible grace.”

The writing styles of the apostle’s varied, but their understanding of sanctification was uniform. They saw it as a partnership that flowed from a proper understanding of what God had done in our behalf. They seemed to approach a lack of sanctification with reminders of who we are in Christ. In their writings this seems to be uniform, a concern with the linkage between understanding grace and all its various expressions and responding obediently to God’s commands. This allusion to the kindness of the Lord is just such a ploy by Peter.

The force of the statement is simple and down to earth. If you have tasted the food and it is good, why not return for the whole meal? Worded in more theological terms, if justification was a sweet experience of God’s grace, why not continue in that grace and experience sanctification?

In this verse we encounter the whole tactic of God in His desire to restore man’s glory. His tactic is, to put it very simply, kindness. He seeks to woo us back to right relationship with Him. This is perhaps to demonstrate His great power in the face of the evil one’s rebellion. He recruited us to his cause by deceit. God in the end will showcase a family re-gathered by love out of the kingdom of evil marked by fear, by rivalry, jealousy, and all the abuses of evil.

## **2:4—And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God,**

There has been considerable interest over the years in the stone from which the water flowed that quenched the thirst of the Israelites on two occasions that we know of (Exodus 17, Numbers 20). There are two traditions, one that the stone was a large rock formation, and the second that the stone was “portable,” of a size that it could be transported with the Israelites on their journeys. There is a rock used in the ceremony of the coronation of the kings and queens of Scotland that is supposedly the rock carried by the Israelites in the wilderness. That particular tradition holds that the rock found its way into the British Isles through the 10 tribes who migrated northward following the Assyrian captivity. Like every tradition it has led to its excesses. The first tradition is the one usually held in the minds of most evangelicals. There doesn’t seem to be Biblical data that would absolutely refute either of these traditions.

Aside from such traditions, the fact that the Israelites drank water that flowed from a rock, provided powerful imagery. This imagery is in view in the Old Testament passages when God is seen as a rock. We know the real power was not in the rock, but in God, and specifically in Christ who in His pre-incarnate state protected and provided for Israel in their journeys in the wilderness.

Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 10:4 tell us that Christ was a “spiritual rock,” whose presence was their provision in the wilderness. There was in Paul’s words a different understanding of those events in the wilderness than we might have just from the Old Testament account. His imagery is similar to that used by Peter in calling Christ a “living stone.” All of this likely contributed to Peter’s thoughts, even though the figure here seems to have more to do with a quarried rock used for a cornerstone in a building. That imagery was also used in the Old Testament.

The provider of Israel's sustenance in the Old Testament became the cornerstone of the Church in the New Testament. We come to Him not as a lifeless memory or a dead heroic martyr. He is alive and is still the source of the life that we seek to live and experience. He was rejected by men, the very ones whom He came to save. But He is chosen by God and He is precious to God. He is God's chosen ruler of the universe, the one chosen to deliver mankind, the chosen redeemer of God's family. As such a one who brings about the will of the Father, He is uniquely precious and valuable.

**2:5—you also as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**

What is true of Christ is true of us, because we are united with Him. This is the essence of a covenant relationship. Nothing is held independent of the other party. That is a remarkable thought. We can easily understand His being called a "living stone." It is more of a wonder that here we are seen as such. But that is the life that flows from God through Christ and because of Christ to us.

Through this work carried out by Christ we are made like Him, and God is fitting us together and shaping us together into a living house. We are together a living organism that does two important things. First we are a priesthood, a special order of servants that represent God to people and people to God. We become a visible entity of the things of God in this world. Second, we do a sacrificial work on earth that is acceptable to God, in accordance with His will and mind. We present our bodies for His use, to whatever purpose He has in each moment. As we give ourselves to Him, He is pleased to carry out actions through us that bring about the furtherance of His plan and His glory.

It is important to remember that this all happens in community. In its essence and effectiveness, the spiritual process in us is a matter of our functioning as part of a "spiritual house." This involves activity whereby we minister to others and strengthen them and whereby we are ministered to. It generally is not two distinctly separate activities, ministering to and being ministered to. It is best to understand them as happening simultaneously, like the behavior of electricity in an AC appliance. It flows both directions and switches 60 times per second.

**2:6—For this is contained in Scripture: 'Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious stone, and he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed.'**

Christ is a rock. He is that from which spiritual life flows, like water from the rock in the wilderness. He is a place of refuge, a natural fortress. He is also that from which a life can be build because He is truth, and in His earthly life the perfect embodiment of truth who always spoke truth.

This is as God has intentionally planned it to be. His design before time itself was created was that He would become a man and supply that which was lost in humanity when they fell into sin. He would come into the human experience through Abraham's children, those to whom Zion was given. It was a special and strategic place at the crossroads of three continents where east meets west. There in that special place He would live. His life that would reveal truth. There He would die as God's sacrifice for humanity's sin. He would be the cornerstone, the beginning, that person through whom all people in all places who believed would escape the empty way of life that sin had imposed on humanity. All who believe in Him will in Him find a life that fills and fulfills, when one day all things are subjected to Him. He is a choice stone—the one chosen by God to do for humanity what humanity could not do for themselves and to make known to humanity what they otherwise could not have known.

Because He is chosen and marked out for these things Jesus is precious to us. But He could do these things because He was inherently, by His very essence, precious. He is not precious because of what He did, but because it is part of His being. He did what He did because of who He is.

**2:7—This precious value, then, is for you who believe. But for those who disbelieve, “The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very cornerstone,”**

What we have gained in Christ through belief is precious. That is the greatest of understatements. It is the greatest of values. There is such little cost to us and so very much to be gained.

Because of this it is beyond belief that there are those who do not believe. But there are. They are building something for themselves. They, like the builders of Babel, have decided they want nothing of God’s building or its process. They want it their way. The cornerstone that God has laid down, the implications of it, the type of building so far established in line with it, holds no interest to them. They believe nothing about its supposed significance and value. To them it is all a mere human effort and a feeble one at that. They want to build something better for themselves and so they reject Christ and set out to do it.

In this verse it is reinforced that their unbelief does not change the reality of the truth one iota. To those who disbelieve, Christ is still the cornerstone. He is still the one to which they must be conformed, the standard by which they will be judged and the One to whom they must answer, and to which they must bow.

Verses six and seven are Old Testament prophecies. Verse six is from Isaiah 28:16. Verse seven is from Psalm 118:22. God’s plan foresaw and predicted that not all would believe. But it made certain to proclaim clearly ahead of time the consequences of both belief and disbelief. This proclamation can only be seen as an effort of grace to draw people into the family of God.

**2:8—and “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense;” for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.**

Whatever a person’s response, Christ is a rock. Here Peter combines Scripture from Isaiah 8:14 with what He has said from Isaiah and Psalms to speak to the kind of rock Christ becomes to those who disbelieve. He is to them a stone of stumbling. They cannot get past His presence in their path successfully. They stumble and go on stumbling. He is to them just something that impedes their pursuit of their agenda. Their disdain for Him can often increase as time goes by.

In other places Christ’s suffering is presented as that which disinterests people (1 Corinthians 1:23). People want a savior, a deliverer and a conquering king who serves their interests, but not one who speaks to their sin and seeks their obedience. Christ is in this way offensive. His message offends before it endears. One must be obedient to the word before they find comfort in it. Until then they find in it all manner of things that offend them intellectually, personally and even “morally.”

Peter adds that “to this doom they were also appointed.” Some Christians adopt and embrace a doctrine of preterition. This teaches that certain people are chosen to be condemned. These summon both logical and Scriptural support (see for example Romans 9:6-32). But Scripture does not demand such a doctrine.

In this verse for example, the word “doom” does not appear in the original language. If we remove this particular word the statement reads simply “and to this they were also appointed.” The word “this” can simply be understood as their stumbling, to which they are appointed due to their failure to believe. The thing they are specifically appointed to is not disbelief, but stumbling in this case. They are appointed to this because it is the God-ordained consequence of their unbelief. They have exercised their will under the sovereignty of God and so experience their appointment. It is an appointment of consequence, one they have brought on themselves by their own choice.

So the doctrine of election which says that God has chosen certain ones for salvation, does not demand the doctrine of preterition, that says that God has chosen others to be eternally punished. Election teaches simply that all were condemned and God chose some to be saved, period. And it need not say that. One can believe as many do, that God chose to save all people and provided for that, but that many choose not to accept His free offer.

In addition, it seems that to add a doctrine of preterition implies that humanity is morally neutral. Scripture teaches that they are not. They are born sinners, condemned by their very essence to separation from God.

It is best to keep the lines drawn quite precisely in the matter of election and to say no more than Scripture demands. A healthy position demands that a tension be maintained between the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. A healthy position is what should be sought rather than a “right” position in this matter.

**2:9—But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;**

Four privileges are cited here by Peter that are true of those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. They are referred to as a chosen race, even though individually they come from many races. The New Testament writers, though mostly Jews, all embraced the idea that faith in Christ superseded ethnic origin. They speak with one voice on this matter.

Believers are chosen, a select group and a group that therefore owes its existence to the choice made by God. They are not a select group due to their own moral, intellectual or physical merits. They are said to be a royal priesthood. This also was the consistent message of the apostles that all believers are priests and that all will rule with Christ. This is because we are united with Him and He is both a king and a priest. These two roles were separate opportunities originally presented to certain ethnic Israelites and from certain family lines within that ethnicity until Christ (see Ex. 19:5-6). We share Christ’s privilege of priest and king with Him.

We are a holy nation, set apart and unique. Every people group is unique, but together we are unique in that we are uniquely loved and uniquely designated by God for special use in His plan, and that makes us holy. The word holy means separated, or set aside. It came to be used to describe the “unique uniqueness” of God and those things and people that were specially designated by Him for honorable use. To say someone is holy or some thing is holy is to give it a very special designation. It is to say that God has embraced that thing or person as exclusively His.

The fourth privilege expresses that standing, we are people for God’s own possession. He has marked us out as His own, to be objects of His love and goodness and examples of His mercy and power for all eternity. We are those through whom He will demonstrate the fact that He is all in all.

Our transformation from objects of wrath to “living stones” who are a part of a kingdom that functions in the midst of the kingdom of darkness and a fallen creation stands as an eternal testimony to the greatness of His many excellencies. Our lives are to be a proclamation each day of all that is excellent in Him, from His mercy to His justice, from His righteous anger to His compassion, from His forgiveness to His zeal to make wrongs right. This is the goal of our salvation, that we should be “becoming” a living example of these perfections of God to all, for His glory.

**2:10—for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.**

The people of God were not different at birth than others. They have never been genetically superior so as to be more capable morally. This is everywhere taught in Scripture. Abraham’s offspring were eventually assigned by Yahweh the name Israel, which means “he fights with God.” Rather than being selected due to moral superiority, we are gathered up by God from among the rank-and-file of normal worldly, immoral people. By His grace we are made to belong to His family. We were indistinguishable from the masses before this great act of grace. Now we are uniquely His, united to Him and to each other by His Spirit. That is what it means to be the people of God.

We were objects of wrath (Eph. 2:1-4). We have, by His grace, become objects of mercy. We no longer receive from Him what we deserve, either as payment for past deeds or present deeds. We are right with Him. He will take corrective action towards us as a loving father would, and we will inherit the consequences of our deeds, but He will not take punitive action against us. This is all true because of the kindness of the Lord that we have tasted (verse 2).

Peter wishes to remind us of all this and does so frequently as he instructs us in how we should live. We have been blessed beyond what we can possibly comprehend as Yahweh’s people and as objects of His mercy. In this we are very different from most of those surrounding us. As we grasp who we are our lives will reflect that difference. And that is what Peter will describe next.

**2:11—Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.**

What is going on inside us is of tremendous importance. There is a battle for control of our inner being, our soul. We belong to Christ, but we have been conditioned in a fallen world to think in a certain way. We must learn and respond to truth as the Holy Spirit uses it to transform our minds. In addition to living in a fallen world, we are fallen people living in that fallen world. We have desires that are fleshly, that is, they are centered on us and advancing our agenda and bringing profit to us. These can easily shape how we invest our strength. We must abstain from that which is of our own flesh, all that has its source in us rather than in God.

We are called three things in this verse. We are called beloved, aliens, and strangers. The words each highlight the fact that we are different than the rest of humanity. By God’s plan, His design, and His grace we are no longer to be creatures of instinct and habit that fit right into the world system in a predictable and logical way.

This does not mean being such creatures of instinct is an impossibility for us. If that were true, Peter would not have to urge us to live differently. What it does mean is that God has made available to us all that we need to rise above such a lifestyle. What shapes others need not shape us. What is predictable behavior in others need never be seen in us. That is what Peter is calling for here, and it is because of who we are. Christian behavior, behavior like Christ, is not absolutely foreign behavior to us. Because of who is in us we are capable of rising to it. It is in that sense natural and logical in that it is the only reasonable response to what we know to be the truth about ourselves and the world we are in.

**2:12—Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.**

There has always been suspicion and distrust among unbelievers of those who embrace the Christian faith. We are not absolutely certain of the range of those suspicions during the first century. We do know that there was concern about their loyalty to the empire of Rome and to all governing authorities. We know that there was suspicion surrounding their communion services which were closed to those who had not been baptized. There was concern over a possible slave revolt spurred on by Christian teaching that obviously laid down all the principles that would lead eventually to its abolition.

Peter's solution to these suspicions was what God's solution often is, to overcome evil with good. Christians were to be of such reputation that such accusations fell on deaf ears and found no basis. That is a fascinating thought, a solution so simple yet to our shame, so illusive. If Christians simply lived out excellent behavior a number of their PR problems would go away.

But Peter was envisioning us assisting God's mission through such behavior as well. He was asking the Christians to behave with moral excellence so that gentiles would "glorify God in the day of visitation." The term "visit," is a verb form of the word which we have rendered "bishopric," the sphere of an Elder or bishop's ministry. So the verb form conveys the meaning of inspecting or scrutinizing as leaders do in their sphere of influence. He was speaking of a day when Christ would visit to inspect the condition of His ministry.

Now what day was Peter speaking of? There are two primary options. The first is that he was referring to the day when Christ returns to earth as its king. Peter taught of such a day (1 Peter 4:13, 5:4, 10-11, 2 Peter 3:8-14), and expected that his readers would experience it. The idea of God visiting us is most commonly used in the Old Testament of some special work or intervention of God (Genesis 21:1; Exodus 3:16; 4:31; Ruth 1:6; 1 Samuel 2:21; Psalm 17:3), so that there is strong scriptural basis for understanding this phrase in this way.

The second option is that he is talking about a personal day, that time when God makes clear to an individual the reality of the truth and that individual comes to embrace Christ and glorify God. So the question is whether or not Peter is speaking of an eschatological event, the second coming of Christ to earth, or a spiritual visit sensed by individuals in their own beings.

The first option has much to commend it, since all of Scripture speaks of a day when God will intervene in the affairs of man on earth. He will do so personally and powerfully (Isaiah 2:12-24). The idea that gentiles would glorify God on that day fits with Old Testament projections. I think Peter may have had both of these ideas in mind when he wrote these words. It is quite likely that he is thinking of the ongoing work he was witnessing among the gentiles, beginning with Cornelius (Acts 10), in which God was making Himself known to more and more of them. Peter had a good grasp of the fact that God's kingdom is here, though not in its fullest sense. We are seeing its lead edge, and experiencing some of its characteristics, though in germ form. God has visited, is visiting, and will yet visit in the fullest sense when He comes as the earth's rightful ruler and judge. It seems best to view Peter making here a statement that has a present fulfillment and a future one.

We are here commanded to carry out our sanctification and we are told by doing so we will add to the progress of faith in others. As God's plan moves toward completion, that day when He comes to earth to establish His kingdom, that day when He will clearly be established as Lord of the earth, we contribute to the preparation of the hearts of humanity for that event by the way we live. When they see Him, the light of truth will enable them to understand the implications of all that they have seen in us, and they will glorify Him. The verses that follow describe some of the specifics of this excellent behavior that we are to display.

### **2:13—Submit yourself for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as to the one in authority,**

It is an important idea that for the Lord's sake we submit to human institutions. His purposes are advanced through human institution. Elsewhere (Romans 13), we are explicitly told that all authority is of God, instituted by Him for His purposes. Here such authority is called "human institution" because God's will in civil matters is brought about through human means and agency. From all appearance it is human institution and bears the marks of human imperfection. But regardless of this marred appearance, it serves the Lord's purposes and is superintended by Him. Human authority rises and falls by His plan, that much is clear in Scripture (Isaiah 40).

Our Christian faith will not progress far until we learn submission. The person who has not yet learned it will be taken by God through situations that are designed to conform him in this way to Christ. It is impossible to achieve God's purposes in one's life apart from submission. So as Peter begins to describe the excellent behavior that will help bring about the transformation of evil men (see verse 12), the first word that he uses is "submit." That theme will continue into chapter three.

We are to submit to various institutions of human authority, or what we might call lines of authority, for the Lord's sake. This means to advance His interests, what is dear to His heart. In verse 18 slaves are told to submit to their master's authority. Verses 21-25 describe the submission of Christ to the insults and injustices of godless men. Chapter 3 begins with instructions to wives to submit to their husbands. Husbands are then told to love their wives. This love is a selfless one that involves submitting one's own desires and needs to those desires and needs of the one you love. And so this idea of submission is a primary subject of concern to Peter which he wants to make sure is applied in very personal and practical ways.

Peter's instructions do not include all areas in which we are to be submissive. The applications were likely given as key examples to simply support the idea of verse 12, that they were to keep their behavior excellent among the gentiles to combat the suspicions that were rampant, specifically, the fear that culture was going to be undermined by this new way of living.

There is in each of these particular instructions regarding submission a cultural element that must be factored in. One has considerable freedom to protest and to dissent in America, without being considered outside the laws of the land. Those boundaries would not be permissible in China today or in ancient Rome in Peter's day. In our western culture we do not legally have slavery, but we apply the principles given regarding submission to masters to our employer/employee relationships. Submission of wives to husbands is expressed differently as well in our culture. Peter's point is that for the sake of the advancement of God's agenda, we should not undermine culture but respect its boundaries. We should be at peace knowing that the various boundaries seemingly imposed by humans within culture are not only known to Him, but have been permitted by Him for at least a season to accomplish a purpose that is important to His plan. In this sense they are ordained by Him.

The list of such human institutions ordained in this way by Him begins right at the top with Kings. One thing is certain from the Scripture. No king has ever reigned on earth without the permission of God (Daniel 2:21, 4:28-37; Isaiah 40:23-26; John 19:11; Romans 13:1). We can completely depend on this, whether from our perspective the king is evil or good, cruel or benevolent, we can be certain that without God's permission he would not be ruling. Therefore to rebel against him is to be working against God's plan and His purposes. For His sake we are to submit. We do not submit because it is expedient, or because we agree, or because our submission is deserved by the character of the king. We submit for the Lord's sake, to further His work.

We assume from Scripture that there are also acts of insubmission that are God's will. Moses was directed by God to lead Israel out from under Pharaoh's rule. Various individuals were directed by God to overthrow established kings. The apostles did not submit themselves to the ruling religious leaders among the Israelites. But we are to view submission as the norm. We are to start from a position of submission in our lives. Only when we have learned submission can we be trusted and used to bring about change. The individual who is not themselves submissive should not be trusted to lead and influence others, or to speak against established order. Such a person is merely a rebel, doing what the flesh naturally orchestrates. They are simply self-willed, and there is no limit to the excesses they will fall into. They can only lead, who are being led themselves.

### **2:14—or to governors as sent by Him for the punishment of evil doers and the praise of those who do right.**

This is an important verse because it shows that God's sovereign ordination of authority does not stop with the king but extends through the whole regime, down to the various agents of the king. This too is a principle of Scripture that there is present in all authority the hand of God. Such authority is in place to maintain order, for it is when there is domestic order that God's people can freely carry out His work.

God also seeks moral order and legal order so that justice prevails. He establishes earthly authorities so that evil will be punished and good will be reinforced. It never happens to perfection, but we must trust in His sovereign plan in the working out of this in a fallen world with fallen men.

There are regimes that come to power and prominence where the opposite seems to happen. That will always remain an enigma to us. We will never be able to justify God's sovereignty with the existence of seemingly godless and cruel empires. We must trust that He will right such wrongs and repay the down-trodden and abused on the day when He establishes truth and justice and reveals all things to us.

We must also remember the context from which these words were written. They came from a man who was under a regime that 21st century Christians would certainly view as oppressive, vile, and unjust. Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, embraces this principle of submission. We must trust it as well.

**2:15—For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.**

Again, we do not know what was being said about Christians. They were in some way being slandered as a threat to the established order of things. They were being wrongly accused as to their agenda and their motives. Peter reveals the Lord's strategy in the matter, and this is often His strategy. Yahweh would not vindicate Christians through some miraculous intervention. Not yet. He would not remove the perpetrators of this false notion so that it would die out. Not yet. Instead, Christians are charged with vindicating themselves. They would of course have the help of God's grace in doing so, but they would have to intentionally rule themselves in the matter by His power and grace and persist so that in time they would prove their detractors wrong.

It is a principle of Scripture that good can overcome evil when we persist in it (Romans 12:21; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Peter 3:8-17). There are many times when we witness this outcome. There are those times when we do not, but will when the final judgment has been completed. It is an important rule to institute in one's life and a must for those who wish to lead themselves well. God's will often involves us being committed to a process of gradual erosion, slowly eroding the resistance in the hearts of others through love and good deeds.

**2:16—Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.**

This verse is one that is full and rich. It alludes to all in us that is holy and good and all that is perverted, twisted and evil. We are free. Grace has given us a free pass. We are absolutely forgiven for all sins, past, present, and future, and so we are free from sin's claim (Romans 6:17-23). We are free from the law because we are joined in union to the giver of all law, God Himself (Romans 7:4-6, 8:1-2; Galatians 2:19; 1 Timothy 1:19). We are related to the King of all that is and in a sense bear no obligation or responsibility to the kings of this world (Matthew 18:24-27).

We are also still fully capable of sin and rebellion against God. We are capable of all deviousness so as to intentionally live as hypocrites, skillfully hiding behind our belief while all the while seeking to gratify our own desires. We can twist our beliefs to justify our sin. And so we can use our freedom as a covering for evil. We can embrace with joy the doctrine of grace only because we see in it license to do as we please. This is never presented as a viable lifestyle in Scripture, though it seems to be everywhere considered a distinct danger that we can slip into. That can only mean that it is a trap true Christians, not just "professing ones" as some have suggested, can fall into. We must guard against our evil hearts coming up with such a scheme, because such a thought can occur in every redeemed but fallen mind.

Instead of falling into the trap of abusing our freedom we are to use our freedom purposefully and strategically. We are to seize the opportunity that being set free from sin affords us. The opportunity is to submit ourselves to God, to become chained to Him, servants for the bringing about of all that is dear to Him.

It is bizarre that submission leads to freedom, but it does. To do anything other than to submit to God is to not act like a free person. It is to be enslaved in the same way an unbeliever is enslaved. It is to lose one's opportunity at freedom. It is a choice we continually make at the prompting of the Holy Spirit,. This choice explains why some Christians can have a life like that of Lot, where they never really get free from their earthly desires and their life follows a course which is, at its very best, mediocre.

### **2:17—Honor all men, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.**

These are the things that characterize a “free” person. There is honor extended by them to all men. They see all as uniquely valued and loved by God. They do not merely tolerate people, they seek to be a blessing to them. They habitually place others ahead of themselves.

They have a special love for their fellow-believers. Whereas they honor all people, they extend themselves in special ways for those who have embraced the truth. They have dedicated themselves to the body of Christ and so sacrificially give themselves for its good.

They fear God. They properly reverence Him by holding before Him even the minute details of their lives. They have given Him His rightful place at the controls. This is the fear of God and to one who practices this, it very soon becomes intimacy with God.

They also honor the king. They see him as a tool in the hand of God, for better or for worse. Their submission to God is proven by their submission to earthly authority.

These four commands are specific ways in which we demonstrate that we are free from what we would have naturally become. The first and last of the four concern those we are to honor. The middle two just may be the heart of the matter, the love of our brothers in Christ and our reverence for God. Together these four commands prescribe behavior which makes for a submissive lifestyle, and they describe a kind of “spirit” that can be detected in those dedicated to the truth.

### **2:18—Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.**

With this phrase Peter further applies the principle of verse 12 that we must demonstrate excellent behavior that lends credibility to the truth. Once again submission is the key to the specific command. The Christian life is a life of submission. Submission produces a certain “spirit” about someone that permeates their various roles and relationships in life.

We must for the most part be gainfully employed. It is a fact of our existence in this life and is endorsed by the Bible as one of our key responsibilities (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). Therefore one of our most important relationships is to those who direct our work.

In the culture of the New Testament world many were servants. The word used here for servant means just that, a house servant. It was not the term used for a slave who was chained to his work. By speaking to this relationship, neither the human nor the divine author is condoning the institution. Whatever its trappings, slavery has always been full of abuses. It is certain that the principles of the Bible have led to the eventual abolition of slavery in much of the world. By those principles the groundwork was laid that brought about a transition in the slave master relationship to the employee employer relationship. But for His own reasons and as in much that He has done, God allowed this to be a process and for us to be stewards of that process. The result is that the process of doing away with slavery took a rather deliberate course. That is the greatest of understatements. To any who were enslaved it was painfully slow. It enslaved multitudes for their entire lifetimes. The failure of Christians to submit themselves to God's truth impeded this process. But there is no doubt that as the Church was formed we find that both servants and their masters were under certain obligations by apostolic teaching. These led to its demise.

Peter's words here describe the obligations of servants to submit themselves to their masters. Most important is the spirit in which this submission was to be carried out. It was not to be done grudgingly or resentfully. It was to be done with respect. And this did not depend on how respectable the masters were. Here servants are to be submissive even to those masters that are unreasonable, not simply to those who are good and gentle. A good employee is a powerful witness to a boss. That does not mean the boss will respond. It simply means that an employee can fill a strategic spot in a life by God's providence and plan. That is the thing we are to ultimately strive to do, and so it is critical that in our occupation we fill our roll in a way that we fill our more significant role and purpose in God's eternal plan as it is carried out in the lives of those around us.

It should be noted that by the voice of Scripture, our behavior seldom is to be regulated and shaped by the respect and dignity afforded us. We are to have a standard we cling and adhere to because of our submission to Christ

**2:19—For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.**

God never misses our sacrifice. He holds it dear and knows of each moment when, out of concern for His objectives and plan, we have died even a little to ourselves and given up just a little more. He looks with favor on those who are willing to be His servants in this way and He bestows favor on them. The time when we are unjustly treated is just the time when we must submit to Him. It is not just when submission is easy. It is to be true especially when it makes us vulnerable.

In truth, we should look for ways to serve such that men do not repay us. Then we can be certain that God will repay us (Luke 6:27-36). As long as we live by the rule of treating others as they deserve, we will never know the ways of God and never experience the immensity of His blessing. We will inherit simply what earthly profit our own schemes and efforts bring about.

Our challenge is to rise above what is merely normal behavior. That is what the world conditions of Peter's day demanded of Christians, and it is true to this very day. An extraordinary cause and an extraordinary need require an extraordinary effort, and make possible an extraordinary reward.

**2:20—For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.**

There is no credit due us if we patiently endure consequences of our own making, by our mistakes and errors. That is simply taking responsibility for our own actions. There is no reward in that. It is the very least we can do and it is what we owe. No one but a criminal would judge it otherwise. It is when we suffer for doing good that we are doing something noble and notable. We are at that point distinguishing ourselves. Our service is at that point above and beyond the call of duty. Most importantly, God looks on it as favorable. It gives us special standing in His eyes. We are serving with distinction, and He will take note and reward us accordingly.

This is one of only a few times in the Scripture when the possibility is raised of individuals finding favor with God. Elsewhere it is faith that brings such favorable standing about, and that is the underlying reason here as well. It is an act of faith and trust in God to endure harsh treatment and such faith He always responds to.

If we wish to send something ahead to eternity, we should not moan and groan at those situations where we are overlooked or taken advantage of. We should leap at the opportunity they afford and secretly find great joy in them.

**2:21—For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving an example for you to follow in His steps,**

We have been summoned to a certain kind of life. We have been given an example of that life. The word rendered here by our word “example,” is used of a writing sample placed in front of a student to be used as a pattern. The student’s formation of letters was to be such that it conformed to the pattern. That’s what Christ’s life is to us. The outstanding mark of Christ’s life is that He suffered unjustly for our benefit. We must be willing to suffer unjustly as He did, for His good. Therefore, in all our relationships this is the rule for us, that we are not looking for our own advantage or comfort. We are not looking to gain but to give so as to further the progress of truth in that individual’s life.

No one has stooped lower than Christ. We can be certain that no injustice or even abuse we endure will begin to compare to what Christ has endured for us.

**2:22—“Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth;”**

This verse is a quote from Isaiah 53:7. Peter had witnessed day in and day out Christ in real life. He had been one of Christ’s closest companions and friends. He quotes Isaiah’s words and so affirms Christ’s character and identity. The person of Isaiah 53 had been a great mystery to the Jews until the sacrificial death of Jesus fulfilled it. The apostle’s teaching focused first on the Jews to show them that the Old Testament Scripture spoke of Jesus and that they should believe in Him as their Savior and Messiah. In the flow of the context these words establish that Christ did nothing at all that justified the abuse and punishment inflicted on Him by God’s permission. It was all borne in behalf of us, for our good.

**2:23—and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;**

There is much to be noted and reflected on in this verse. We must remember that these verses do not stand alone, but occur as part of an exhortation to a certain kind of conduct. The words are specifically addressed to servants to inspire them to be good servants who give credibility to the faith by means of their distinguished service to their masters. There is wonderful doctrine that occurs in them. But the subject is behavior and conduct. That is always the intention of doctrine. It is as D. L. Moody said, “The Scriptures were given not to increase our knowledge, but to change our lives.” So it is here.

A right understanding of Christ should make us better employees, not just more religious employees. It should increase our value to our employer, not just increase our piety. The verse concerns what Christ did while He was being reviled. That is valuable information. It tells us not only what He did, but how He thought and the latter is always the key to the former. If we can think like Christ we can behave like Him.

Christ’s actions have already been alluded to. Here they are clearly stated. He did not react and allow His conduct to be determined by that of His attackers. He resisted the temptation to give them what they deserved. To give what is deserved is the great human tendency. It is the normal way in which courses of behavior are determined among humans. Christ avoided that pitfall, lived in the moment on a higher plane, and so accomplished a grand and noble work.

The key to His behavior was His thinking while this was going on. “He kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.” We are to believe that God is a righteous judge who is able and willing to hold every being accountable. We must not allow ourselves in our despair to stop believing that. There in the moment of trial, many times each minute, we must entrust ourselves to Him. We must do so in quiet prayer repeatedly, and allow our minds to reflect on the fact that true justice will be served. If we allow ourselves to be comforted by this truth we will be afforded the strength to endure the temporary injustice of the moment.

**2:24—and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.**

This is the noble work accomplished by Christ because He was submissive, and willing to be submissive in the face of abuse. He made Himself a servant. He had the righteous Judge in mind, and He had us in mind. The example of Christ involves restraint and pain, but it also offers achievement.

This verse is a tremendous theological statement, a concise reminder of the Gospel. None less than Christ, the anointed Messiah, the son of God, bore our sins. His own body became God’s appointed instrument of atonement. All of the sins of humanity were placed on His account and He was forsaken by God because of them. As a result of being given over by God, and because of who He was recognized to be, His abusive death was quickly brought about by Satan through the hands of evil men. This was all because He bore our sins in his own body. Those sins put Him on the cross. That is the story of the crucifixion from heaven’s point of view.

God, of course, had an objective in this chain of events. We can be confident that He always does. Our suffering is always a means of bringing about things of ultimate value and worth, things relating to matters of eternity rather than the mundane matters of this life.

God's objective was not simply our justification, but our sanctification as well. It was not simply to deal with the penalty sin had laid on us, it was to break sin's power and spell over us. God's plan is that we be forgiven through Christ's work on the cross and that through our new privilege of fellowship with God we act out our righteousness just as we use to act out our sinfulness. Just as our sinfulness identified us as separated from God, so, once we believe, God desires that righteous deeds identify us as those who are in fellowship with God. This is because the sufferings of Christ, His wounds on the cross bring healing to us. We who once were spiritually impaired, unable to realize a relationship to God are now forever joined to him and inhabited by His Spirit.

Some have sought to apply this healing to our physical beings, suggesting that sickness no longer has power over us. There are times we will experience the physical healing of God in answer to our prayers and the prayers of others. But the healing of our physical bodies that is to be found in the atonement will come about in the absolute sense only when God clothes us with our new bodies. This is when our final victory over sin's power will be fully realized. The healing we experience now is primarily a spiritual one where we are forgiven and are freed from that awful isolation from our God. There are instances throughout our lives when we experience healing. But in the end sickness wins this particular round of our existence.

**2:25—For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.**

These words confirm that Peter is speaking of spiritual healing that comes to us through Christ's sacrifice. Here he describes the before and after state of things in our lives. Before we had nothing that drew us to God. We simply wandered and did whatever our instincts suggested we do. But through belief that has changed.

In saying "yes" to the Holy Spirit's initial work of grace in us, His invitation conviction and call, we gave the Holy Spirit permanent residence in us. Now He is always there to do the ongoing work of grace that leads us on the path of obedience. The relationship forfeited by Adam has been recovered for us by God. We have entered into a process that will yield continued experiences of fellowship with our Creator. Then one day the work will be completed and our fellowship will become continuous and unbroken with our God, even as Adam experienced in the garden. We have presently returned, and we await the time when our healing will be completed.

## 1 PETER 3

**3:1—In the same way, you wives be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives.**

The verse begins with the words, “In the same way.” This shows that it is a continuation of the thought given in the previous chapter. In the same way that we are to submit to government, in the same way that servants were to submit to their masters, in the same way that Christ carried out His role with submission, wives are to behave with submission to their own husbands. Submission is both appropriate and Christ-like in Christ centered relationships.

Just as the words addressed to the servants can now in western culture be adapted to fit the role of the employee so we can allow that times have changed in the husband/wife relationship. A wife’s submission may be expressed differently today, but it cannot be discarded.

This charge given to wives is greatly contested today in Christian circles and the practice of obeying this command could disappear. It will continue to be presence in the Scriptures. Such submission, whether to God, to government, to employers, or to husbands acquires cultural trappings in terms of how it is expressed. Those vary. But it is the order of God for homes, and it is cast aside at great peril. God’s order for the home, though twisted by society and in particular by disobedient men, is not to be entirely discarded. It is to be affirmed though with an entirely different spirit.

There is practical purpose attached to Peter’s words. It is that such behavior will impact disobedient husbands. In this case actions do speak louder than words, so loud in fact, that words will be unnecessary. So this is a command with an end of actually restoring the marriages of fallen people. It is one that also addresses the concern of 1:12 that had to do with fears among the gentiles that Christianity would bring about a kind of political and social anarchy.

This submission can be construed to imply a number of different behaviors, but the next verse will reveal the two primary areas in which submission to husband’s should be evidenced by wives.

**3:2—“as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.”**

A wife’s submission has, over the course of the centuries, been expressed in a number of different ways. A number of different expectations have been raised by men as they in their fleshliness seek to gain some selfish advantage through this teaching. On the other hand, women in their own fleshliness have sought all manners of ways to jettison this command from the teaching of the Church.

Submission, when embraced in the proper spirit by both the husband and the wife does not result in subservience and indignity. It results in what this verse teaches. It is expressed by chaste behavior in the wife. Submissive means she is a one-man-woman, and that is to be clearly seen by all. She has no inappropriate conduct toward other men. This chastity eliminates not only physical acts but all the emotional games that can be played between men and women to gratify the flesh and meet various emotional needs. A woman who submits to her husband casts these aside.

Submission also means respectfulness, a quality that is not unique to the wife in a marriage. By respectful it is meant that her husband's feelings, his personal rights, and his dignity are important to her. She does not behave in a way that violates these. This does not mean she does not disagree, or that she does not press him to act in harmony with the way of God's leading. It has reference to the tone she exhibits in carrying out her role in the relationship. She sees him as head of the home, even if he is not a believer. She does not demean his lack of faith or his disobedience or his incomplete sanctification.

The implication of these verses is that there is something in the authority of the husband in the home that is ordained of God, just as there is in other authority figures in society (see 2:13-14). We set aside this idea of a divine "anointing" at great peril. So in this case, even if a husband is not a godly man, there is still in his authority that which is to be respected.

### **3:3—"And let not your adornment be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses;"**

The word "merely" has been inserted by the translators and captures the meaning of this command by Peter. Without understanding the idea inherent in Peter's thinking that is conveyed by that word, various movements have arisen that do not allow women to wear jewelry, or to style their hair. The problem is that if that logic was to be followed consistently with all that is mentioned here by Peter, women would not be allowed to put on clothes either!

The word "merely" helps us capture the intended impact of Peter's words. Peter did not want Christian women to work merely on their appearance. He did not want the value of physical beauty to prevail in Christian culture. The next verse will delineate the importance of them cultivating Christ-like character. Society has always tended to emphasize outward beauty and this is especially true of females. Peter is breaking with this norm. He is not prohibiting the things mentioned. He is reacting to culture's emphasis of these things at the expense of the more complex and important issues of personal character.

### **3:4—"but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God."**

This is the main point of Peter's statement on women adorning themselves. They are to expend effort on developing who they really are, not just on the outer trappings. That was a radical position in that day and in that culture. We can only imagine how such an idea might have sounded to the men of that day, who viewed wives as property.

Scripture consistently teaches that both male and female are created in God's image and that their real beauty is found in how they are able to reflect Him in their attitudes and actions. That which was marred by Adam's fall is restored to them and that is their value as human beings. As their inner being is engaged intimately with God, it is changed. There is peace that comes over their own spirits. That brings an inner beauty that works its way outward. It is unmistakable and it leads to a life lived as it was meant to be lived. These words then are a clear mandate that women are to travel the road to spiritual maturity with men, not as baggage, but as those through whom He wishes to touch the world.

Now, what is a gentle and quiet spirit? That is an important question, because developing it is the force of this whole series of commands given to women by Peter. Whatever it is, it is of great value to God. That much comes through loud and clear in the words of the text.

A “gently and quiet spirit” has been spoken of in various ways over the years, at times accurately and wisely and at times with seemingly little wisdom. It would seem that we should avoid describing it in terms of the things associated with personality. If introversion or soft-spokenness, or passivity, or any such things that are innate personality traits were in mind, then we would be faced with the problem of God liking something other than that which He had designed and woven into the fabric of a person’s being.

This quality of a gentle and quiet spirit seems to be more a matter of the part of our beings we, with the help of the Holy Spirit, shape and control. We can and must control our personality’s expression and its extremes. The Spirit is to shape our behavior. Our behavior is not simply to be a product of our personalities with their various excesses and weaknesses due to sin.

The word gentle is the rendering of *praewus*. This word refers to temperateness, living in the “golden mean” instead of being given to extremes. The word rendered quiet is *hsciuo*. This word means “sedentary” in the plain literal sense. It came to be used in the figuratively literal sense of being composed. So a gentle and quiet spirit refers to an inner being that is mastered and under control.

Integrating these words with our theology of sanctification, a meek and quiet spirit develops in one whose will is submitted to the control of the Holy Spirit. It describes an inner refusal to simply blurt out reactive words or act out of one’s instincts. It is the moment by moment subjection of thoughts and attitudes to the truth. It is not a quality that is to be unique in God’s mind to women, though the command is worded in this text only to them. The witness of all of Scripture is of God desiring this in men as well. But here it is an appropriate word to women whose behavior must be “chaste and respectful.”

Flirtatious, promiscuous, and disrespectful behavior and any other kind of self-serving or reactive behavior is not orchestrated by the Holy Spirit. It is fleshly and earthy in either male or female. It comes when one’s personality is simply allowed to drift into instinct and excess. These and all excesses must be ruled and they are so ruled in the being of one whose spirit is subjected to the Holy Spirit.

A gentle and quiet spirit is precious in the sight of God because it is the result of a mature faith and trust in Him. Trusting Him absolutely is what makes chaste and respectful behavior possible. It is an inner activity that causes the glory of God to be demonstrated through all the various personality types.

**3:5—“For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands.”**

Our instincts revolt against any rule that would force particular roles on us. This is true of both male and female. As Peter thinks about the broader subject of convincing those outside the faith that Christianity was not a threat to social order, he cites Christian history. Before citing a specific person he speaks in general terms in this verse of holy women in former times. He speaks of holy women who hoped in God, that is women who had faith and lived by faith. That is what it means to hope in God. In stating this he again links the inner submission of one’s spirit to the outward act of submission to one’s husband. The one accompanies the other in his mind and always has.

In the case of these women Peter was pointing to, their adorning was not merely outward. Their goal was not merely external beauty. They were concerned that they display a certain spirit, the essence of their holiness that was their submission to God. They did that by submitting to their husbands. It was as obvious to observers as the clothes they wore. It was, as their lives were viewed historically, what made their lives notable and was such that it came through in the record of history.

**3:6—“Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.”**

The verse ends with the words that literally could be rendered “not fearing any terror.” Though our current understanding of the word terror may be slightly different, it is not altogether distinct from what is being conveyed here. Quite often the thing which has shaped the behavior of individuals is their fears and their desire to preserve themselves. This is especially true when it comes to obedience to the way of life prescribed by God. It is uncanny how we fear humans and somehow cast aside fear of the Almighty. So common is this reflex in human behavior that we need to constantly ask ourselves what we are fearing by the course of behavior we are choosing (Luke 12:4-12).

In this verse Peter moves from the general to the specific, from the tradition of women of faith in submitting to their husbands, to a specific example. He chooses Sarah, the wife of the one who is consistently pictured in Scripture as the “father” of the faithful. It is not that he was the first to exercise faith (See Heb. 12). It is that His faith marked a distinguishable beginning of a particular family who would be entrusted with truth and revelation, who would experience a special covenant relationship with God, and through whom the redeemer and sin-bearer would come into the world, the designated ruler of God’s creation.

So Sarah was the mother of the “first family” or royal family. In a sense her and her husband modeled the faith. In them the faith was present, though not in its fully developed form, but in its essential form. Peter appeals to Sarah’s example as authoritative in this matter. This shows that we should exercise great care in dismissing this command to wives as “cultural.” A great deal had changed culturally from the nomadic lifestyle of Sarah and Abraham, to the greater sophistication of Roman and Greek culture, but God’s order was the same.

The example Peter gives is from Genesis 18:12 and it is not an occasion when Sarah was at her best, nor is it a quote of public or formal address. It is, in fact, a record of her words to herself, perhaps not even audible and with sarcastic questioning of God in view. Her respect for Abraham was genuine and authentic not contrived or put on.

The respect God is calling for here is not to be one of mere formality. It is to be rooted in the reality of what a husband is in God’s eyes in a home, even an unbelieving husband. There is an anointing of sorts that goes with all authority established by God that must be humbly acknowledged. It is set aside at great peril in matters of civil government, of the Church, and of the home.

God help us in western culture! We have become those whose fears have led us to question authority in so many matters and view it a virtuous. With respect to God we have come to continually ask, “What will happen to me if I obey these commands? What will it cost me? What will I lose?” Instead we should ponder what failure to obey has cost us and what it will ultimately cost us when we stand in His presence.

**3:7—“You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”**

The husband's behavior is to be submissive as well. The word “likewise” is *omoiws* and is the same word that prefaced the instruction to wives in verse 1. There it linked their behavior back to the example of Christ, perhaps even back to the command to servants and to the overall concern that a submissive kind of behavior was essential to give credibility to the Christian message (see 2:12). The grammatical construction of this verse further points to this interpretation.

The word rendered “live” in the NASB is *anastrofhn*, a participle. The verb “grant” further down in the verse is also a participle. There is not a main verb supplied. It is supplied by the context and dictated by the adverb *omoiws*, in like manner. In most such cases the main verb is to be understood as simply “be.” So what Christ did is what husbands are to be, that is submissive to the will of God. This spirit will be further clarified in verses 8-10 where various behaviors will be associated with it. “Be living in like manner” is the idea behind this construction.

The principles of Christianity are to be applied in our varying roles so that we will always be found to be imitators of Christ. The instructions to Christian citizens (2:12-17), to Christian servants (2:18-20), to Christian wives (3:1-6), and now to Christian husbands all have this in common. They all involve submission and they all are aimed at making credible the Christian message.

A husband's role as head of the home is not mentioned here. It is perhaps because Peter wants to emphasize the spirit in which the man is to carry out that role. It is not to be done in an authoritarian way or in a heavy-handed manner. Instead the husband is to lead in an “understanding” way. The word implies empathetic. Christ rules us in an empathetic way, mindful of our weakness. Peter is calling on men to be ruled by empathy and understanding in relating to their wives, and this was certainly “against the grain” in terms of the cultural norm.

Here Peter reminds the men that their wives are “weaker vessels.” By this term he means that they are weaker in terms of physical strength. The term “vessel” refers to the physical body, it being the “container” for the spirit which is what God Himself provides to give a body life. In a time when life made so many physical demands, Peter reminds men not to have expectations that demanded of their wives the physical strength they themselves had. The idea of “weaker vessel” can only refer to the physical body, and this is not to say every woman is weaker physically than every man, nor is it to say they are inferior so as to be more susceptible to disease, or any other of the various things that might be read into this phrase.

Husbands were to take their cue from Christ, from the example of servants, from the example of citizens submitting to their king, and submit themselves to a certain tone in leading their homes. They were to grant a certain honor, or dignity to their wives. Their tone, because wives are generally weaker in terms of physical strength, could easily become a condescending, domineering one. They were not to allow this but were to rule themselves well in this matter and hold their wives in high regard, as their equals in terms of what Peter calls “the grace of life.”

This phrase, “the grace of life,” seems to be one that is intended to refer to all the graces supplied in Christ to humanity for their well being in this life. It refers to all those things that sustain physical health and spiritual health along with special capacities to understand, apply, and implement the truth in the practical matters of life. A wife is to be regarded as an asset and an equal in this matter, her words and concerns carefully sought out, listened to, and pondered. It is a wise man who does so, but it is also the mark of an obedient man who is himself listening to God. The man who believes his physical strength and the role conferred on him by God as leader of the home means that his wife is inferior in some way in her spiritual power has lost sight of truth and is on dangerous ground. He has become a law unto himself and this will hinder his prayers.

Peter speaks of this and does not give further explanation. The word rendered hinder is literally “cut into.” We know that prayers that lack faith and that are out of harmony with God’s will are not answered (James 1:5-8; Matthew 7:7, 21:22; Mark 11:24). It must therefore be that our wives are “help-mates” (Genesis 2:18), in this important matter of understanding God’s will and His leading in the practical matters of life. They are an aid to our faith. They help us believe and keep believing and help us “stay the course.” They help us pray rightly. If we are not honoring them, viewing them as having in their possession the “grace of life,” we rob ourselves of one of the very things that equip us to be effective leaders. The man who persists in this fleshliness will likely still rule, but by threats and intimidation and all that is sordid. It will be a harsh rule and will so bring the full impact of the curse to rest on his most important work, his home.

God’s word to husbands here is short. One should not be fooled by the more lengthy instruction given to the wife. These words to the husband are of profound depth. Heeding them establishes the very core of the chemistry that makes a successful home. They are words that will help keep us from a fleshly backlash, such as that which has arisen in the extreme forms of the women’s movement. That movement is itself likely a reaction to men’s failure to implement this teaching. A man who understands he is to be the leader of the home has come to understand just a portion of the picture. A man who lives by this verse, knowing and respecting his wife’s ability, will be equipped to lead.

### **3:8—“To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit,”**

This verse provides the readers with a more detailed description of what God wants their behavior to be exemplified by in their varying roles. Whether carrying out our role in public, as servants or employees, or as husbands and wives, certain things are to mark us. There is to be a consistency in who we are in public and in private. If individuals grasped this and pursued such consistency it would change their own homes and entire communities.

The respect accorded a person who exemplifies these things is such that it is packed with potential. On the other hand, the disrespect for those who do not pursue this consistency is usually expressed in contempt and great anger. Though all Christians reflect Christ in unique ways, there is to be a sense in which they are all the same.

The NASB text speaks of living in harmony. It is the rendering chosen for a word that means “same mindedness.” There is a standard of conduct that should be a visible part of our community, all of us. We are to be harmonious, bent on getting along rather than quarrelsome. Simply being agreeable will put us on the road to exemplifying Christ. A person who believes in Christ should not allow themselves to be hard to please. They should not allow themselves to be one who others are constantly appeasing and trying to placate so as not to upset them. There is a sense in which we should be flexible and easy about everything except a handful of non-negotiables, and even in these we should not be bullies.

As people we should be those in whom others can find legitimate sympathy in times of pain and need. We should not be aloof, distant, indifferent or unmoved. We should be among the first to show sympathy where there are legitimate needs. Our American culture is such that there are those who make a living off of those who are sympathetic. But we must not allow this to harden us and to cause us to abandon the compassion that Christ seeks to stir in us and that leads to execution of the mission (Luke 19:41-44, Mark 6:34).

In our various roles we are to be brotherly. This word evokes visions of a certain kind of relationship, a level of involvement in and connection to the life of others. There is to be a spiritual kinship that we are to foster and respond to. It involves loyalty, protection, special care, and sacrifice that goes beyond normal human kindness.

We are to be kind-hearted. It is amazing how many Christian people forget to be kind, even in their marriages. They can be people with all the right beliefs, but they allow themselves to degenerate into an unparalleled level of meanness. We are not just to be kind, but kind-hearted. This captures the meaning of the Greek word *eisplagnoi*, which is a compound word composed of the word for good and the word for intestines. The kidneys were thought to be the seat of the emotions, and were spoken of as we speak of the heart being the seat of the emotions. Kind-hearted then is a good way to explain the thought expressed by this word. It is an inner life we are to hold ourselves to by the power of the Holy Spirit. We must not allow ourselves to dwell on thoughts of unkindness. A kind heart always behaves kindly. But mere kind behavior can be deceptive. In all things we are to guard our hearts, because we become what we allow to reside in them. It is imperative that we sweep our thoughts clean of unkindness.

Our lives are to be marked by a humble spirit. Humility is a true understanding of who we are and who we are in Christ. It involves understanding ourselves rightly according to the truth of Scripture, that we bear the image of God, that we are marred by sin, that we are of infinite worth, that we have practical abilities that are assets to God's Church. A humble spirit also involves understanding ourselves rightly according to the truth about us. The Holy Spirit reveals this to us. He reveals to one who dares to face themselves honestly what their real motives are. He reveals to us through other people of the Spirit what we are really capable of in terms of our gifting and affirmable talents? They help us know at what level God uses us and when we are out functioning out of the realm of His design for us. A person with a humble spirit avoids the pain that comes to those who over-sell or under-sell themselves. Such a person has nothing to prove and no image to promote.

The people who embrace these things named in this verse avoid certain games that people play, spoken of in the next verse.

### **3:9—"not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for this very purpose that you might inherit a blessing."**

This verse might be entitled "games Christians don't play." But they do play them. It is the toughest of all human challenges to live on the level this verse calls us to. Christians, if they fully embrace what they believe, will be the most blest of all people. The following verses will detail that blessing.

When we get into the realm of returning to others what they have given to us, we have set down what is holy and taken hold of what is evil. We are now trafficking in evil and cannot experience God's blessing. We're simply in the wrong business to expect that return. We are sowing the wrong seed to create the kind of harvest we expect. So we must sow seeds of blessing so that we will harvest blessing. We must not leave off blessing to sow seeds of revenge. That is unholy work.

We must remember not to allow ourselves to be so distracted by hurt that we change the crop we are meant to plant and harvest. We were called to harvest blessing and that is what we should sow and cultivate. The business we have inherited from our Father is that of blessing and that is the business we must be about.

**3:10—“For, ‘Let him who means to love life and see good days refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile,’”**

This verse begins to outline what we must do to experience God’s blessing. We have been granted free access to it (Ephesians 1:3). How do we live so as to see it fall all around us? Verses 10-12 are a quote of Psalm 34:12-16. It is a Psalm that bears the testimony of one who has walked with God and experienced His blessing and faithfulness. It is an invitation to learn the fear of the Lord, to taste His goodness.

The quote begins with an invitation to a certain kind of life. It is the life that every human being that has ever lived has desired. It is that for which wars have been fought and treasures sought. It is not just a right life, it is a good life. That is a significant part of the message Peter is conveying.

The advice begins with counsel about control of the tongue. That which is impossible for humans to do (James 3) is the command first given. The control of our tongues is the point of much that has gone before. That which we embrace and proclaim as true becomes credible to others when it makes a difference. Nowhere is a difference more apparent than when a person’s speech is under control.

We must refrain from speaking evil. This includes a broad range of sins from untruth to perversity. Speaking guile is likely a reference to what we would call poisonous speech. It is a call to refrain from saying things that destroy people and relationships. The tongue is the world of evil in each of us that the Holy Spirit seeks to transform and use for His purposes. It is the tongue that can ruin us as citizens, as employees, and as spouses. Seeking, submitting to and then speaking the Holy Spirit’s message for the moment lead to transformed speech.

**3:11—“And let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.”**

God honors a certain course that we can choose to take in relationships. It does not require absolute perfection to experience His blessing. His grace allows us to experience His blessing even when our walk falls short of perfection. The pathway of blessing is one that turns away from evil to do good. This is true because it is a pathway of companionship with Him. If we stay with Him the path we’re on does not lead into evil. To stray from good is to prove that we have strayed from Him.

The same is true of quarrels. When we get caught up in quarrels we can be certain that we have somewhere left off of walking with and listening to Him. If we wish to enjoy His company, we must turn away from these things to do what is good and what makes for peace.

**3:12—“For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”**

This is the reason why Christians should be diligent regarding the truth. The idea this verse is driving home can be stated well in the form of a question. Why would you want to choose a course of action in life that God is dead set against? How much better it is to live in a way so that the wind of His Spirit is at your back.

Peter speaks of the eyes of the Lord being on the righteous. It is not that He doesn't see the unrighteous. There is nothing hidden from His sight. But His eye of care is on the righteous. He has special concern for their well-being and progress, for their concerns and prayers.

In describing the Lord's face as being against those who do evil, Peter does not mean that they receive no benefit from Him. We know that all men receive the results of God's mercy and goodness. It is rather that God will thwart their ways rather than helping them prosper in their endeavors. Whatever they do might prosper in the short term, but it will eventually be undone.

**3:13—“And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?”**

It is a rare occurrence when people suffer for doing good. Generally, if we do the things Peter has outlined earlier, beginning in 2:11, we will find that we are not singled out and treated badly. We tend to experience peace with both God and man. Peter is reinforcing that generality, though he in the next verse he will acknowledge that the scenario of suffering for good can come about. But to people who display zeal for what is good, and in particular living in harmony, with sympathy, kindness and humility (vs. 8-9), there will generally be the response of good will. We can generally influence the response of those around us by how we treat them.

**3:14—“But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled.”**

Notwithstanding the general rule of verse 12, there are those who suffer because of the righteous thing they represent and do so throughout their years on earth. There are seasons of suffering for each child of God. To some, because of what God has led them to stand for and because of the spiritual condition of those they must stand against, there is persecution. Isaiah was one such man, who was said to have been sawn in two for his words to Manasseh the evil King.

The second half of this verse written by Peter is a quote from Isaiah 8:12-13 of the words God had spoken to him as he embarked on the mission of representing God to a stubborn and rebellious people. With this verse Peter is carried along by the Spirit to give a series of instructions to all who find themselves suffering for the sake of righteousness. This is an important distinction. Often we suffer for our method or our manner. Peter's previous words have been meant to eliminate this. There is no nobility in suffering because you are a fool, or disobedient to the practical words of instruction about our manner that Peter has given.

**3:15—“but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;”**

Peter calls those who find themselves suffering for good to “sanctify Christ as Lord.” This is very interesting. The word sanctify means to set apart for special use or to reserve for special use. At the moment we begin to suffer we must re-affirm Christ as our Lord. Peter himself had practiced this (Acts 5:29-32). We must do this for our own benefit, to recommit ourselves to what is good and right. We must also do it verbally for the benefit of those persecuting us, because it does strike at the heart of the matter (see Acts 5:33), and is the matter our persecutors themselves are struggling with. We must not forget who really matters in such situations. It is not us. Eternal matters are at stake between our Lord and our persecutors.

After re-affirming our own commitment to obedience to Him, we are to be prepared to make a defense of our belief. Here Peter refers to it as our “hope.” Our beliefs are our hope. Apart from what we believe in we have little hope. This hope others sense in us is very often what offends them. There is that which is disconcerting about hope. Someone’s hope in truth and in God can in its own way be condemning and convicting.

We should be always ready. This means we should be bold. It is not so much a matter of a mind set as it is simply being alert for opportunities. They come disguised in many ways including hostility. It is also a matter of determination to seize the moment and speak the truth in love no matter what the response.

Peter refers to the importance of gentleness and reverence (literally fear) in terms of the tone we give our words. “With humility and respect” would be a good way to understand Peter’s words. Our boldness must not cross over into arrogance. What is fleshly is certain to draw a fleshly response. Our goal is to do spiritual work even when suffering injustice. Our only hope of achieving something spiritual in our detractors is if we sow spiritual seed. So we must respond gently and reverently.

**3:16—“and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”**

What Peter has been addressing is the whole matter of what we would call “P.R.” The early church was widely misunderstood. As its beliefs spread so did the rumors about what those beliefs were. The result was that they were perceived as a threat to the empire, to civil law and government, and to established social order. They were being slandered in these ways.

Peter had walked with Christ and had seen the life as it was to be lived. He knew that it was no threat. All that had to happen was for it to be lived as it was to be lived and these rumors and fears would be put to rest. So he says to Christians “keep a good conscience.” A good conscience is one that is rightly programmed, and that is actively regulating actions. Our consciences must be programmed by the truth. It is not enough to feel guilt or commendation or justification. We must rightly feel those things. We must feel them in a way that harmonizes with God’s truth, because there is both false guilt and false peace. So when Peter says to keep a good conscience he is referring to a conscience that is healthy, guiding our actions with respect to the truth.

He also means a conscience that is listened to. It is not enough to feel guilt or peace rightly we must actually implement the dictates of our conscience. There must be no disconnect between what we know to be true and what our lives embody. If we have a conscience that is in these ways good, we will not have to worry about “P.R.” Our actions will be such that we are seen and known as people of character and integrity. If someone accuses us falsely, that accusation will have no substance to it.

Again, this is a general principle. Christ’s conscience was perfect. He still suffered at the hands of unbelievers. But the general rule is that a good conscience will put us at peace with God and man. It will silence our critics.

**3:17—“For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.”**

There are times when, similar to Christ, God’s plan cannot come about apart from our suffering. So there are seasons of suffering in every life. If we focus on embracing the truth and living by its dictates, we can be fully assured that when suffering comes our way it is because our sacrifice is essential to the progress of God’s work. We are in good company if this is our lot. There is no shame in suffering for what is good and right.

There is shame in suffering for what is sinful. That is the lot of the criminal. Live by the dictates of a healthy conscience. Then if you suffer, it is a noble suffering. To ignore matters of conscience will lead to suffering but it will be of a sort that is just and punitive. It produces an inner agony and regret.

**3:18—“For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.”**

There are times when in the plan of God our lot is to suffer in order for God to accomplish an objective that is important to His plan. We might never understand what that objective is until the day we stand before Him and He explains it. We most certainly will not understand it fully until then.

We must not be so locked in to the general rule that God blesses His own that when suffering comes our way we think something has gone wrong or that we have done wrong. We must at those moments remember Christ. He was just, absolutely just. There was nothing in Him that made Him deserve what He suffered except His absolute submission to the plan of God and His absolute love for humanity. It was in fact, His absolute goodness that so locked Him on the objectives of God the Father and those required that He suffer at the hands of sinful men. He became their substitute. What should have been our suffering, became His. He bore it so that we would not have to.

He did it once, because that was God’s plan, to pay for all the sin of mankind once for all. That is why Jesus could say as He died, “It is finished.” Never again would humanity’s sin need to keep them from having fellowship with God. The way was opened by Christ’s death to restore what Adam had lost in Eden. The only thing that could keep humans from God was their stubborn refusal to admit their guilt. So Christ suffered to bring humanity to God. There are times we must suffer to bring them to God. Our role is not the same as Christ’s. But we are part of the same mission, drawing humanity back to God. Suffering is simply a part of working to restore fallen humanity.

We will at times suffer though we are doing exactly what God wants us to do. Our objectives are not those that relate to this life. And so our body, which epitomizes all that relates to this life becomes something we lay down for the sake of things that are of the Spirit and related to the spirits, ours and others. Christ's body was put to death, His spirit was not. Eventually, at just the right time as orchestrated by God the Father, it returned to give life to His body. So for a period Christ's spirit and body were separated.

Our spirit will be separated from our body's also by physical death. That is in fact what physical death is, the departure of the spirit from the body. We should not view that event however as final, nor does it handicap us, in terms of being actively involved in God's plan and His work. The next verse in fact, reports a part of the activity of Christ in spirit, what He did, and was aware of doing, while His body lay in the garden tomb.

We must never allow ourselves to believe that our lives can be taken. Our physical lives can be, but that which is our true life, that through which we accomplish work for God and experience being part of His plan, cannot be taken from us. In fact, there is a sense in which our spirit could become more alive at physical death. It is certain that more options are available for service to God because the limitations of the spheres of time and space are now broken. We are speculating on this. There is very limited biblical data on this intermediate state of our existence.

We see next an amazing mission Christ was able to embark on in His spirit, even as His body was being "embalmed." If we believe this, and believe that we will be like Him in death, death has lost its sting! If the most that can be taken from us is our physical bodies, then nothing can be done to harm us in terms of our enjoyment of God and our involvement in His work.

### **3:19—"in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison."**

We do not know the exact nature of this that Peter is about to report. We assume that He knew it by Christ's actual report to the eleven when He appeared to them after the resurrection. Somewhere in their various dialogs with Him He told them of this experience.

Much speculation surrounds verses 19 and 20, and we would profit greatly from a question and answer time with Peter and Jesus on this matter! Information is available in the words Peter uses. If we take the words as they are given then we are not entirely in the dark in understanding these verses.

We know that whatever this is reporting Christ to have done, it says He did it "in spirit." By this is meant that His spirit, by the work of the Holy Spirit, went someplace His body did not. At this point they were separated. But "in spirit," without a body He went somewhere. So we can say that this is possible because Christ did it. At death therefore, our bodies can be one place and our spirits free to go elsewhere.

We know what Jesus did. He went, but He didn't just journey somewhere. He went to do something and He did it. What He did was to "make proclamation." Everywhere this word is used it means to proclaim a verbal message, concrete ideas. It means to preach. So Christ was able "in spirit" to communicate in some way concrete ideas, and it was part of God's plan, program and purpose to use Him to do that very thing. There was a mission of preaching which could only be carried out "in spirit" that God had Christ do. We could be busy from the moment we die!

We know some things about Christ's audience. They were spirits. The next verse will tell us more about their identity, but we do know that Christ was Himself at this point without a body and His audience was other body-less beings. How do such beings communicate? We do not know, but it is quite likely that it is without sound. The activity of Christ was proclamation, so communication among spirits is possible however it occurs and that is what is being reported here, the spirit of Christ communicating with other spirits.

We know something about the place of this communication. It occurred in a prison. This is mysterious to us. How can a spirit be imprisoned? What sort of a prison would that be? We simply do not know. It could be something as simple as the command and word of God. Our spirits are somehow confined in this way to our bodies so we know that such confinement is possible, but we don't know how. So Christ's audience was an audience of spirits, beings without bodies, confined in some location that we know nothing about.

We do not know the nature of Christ's proclamation. We should not leap to the conclusion that Christ proclaimed the gospel, or that there was in this event some opportunity for salvation. Peter does not say that, nor do any of his words infer that. We are simply told that Christ made a proclamation to imprisoned spirits on location.

The purpose of Peter's remarks are to better prepare us for suffering unjustly. He likely wants to remove from us any fear that we can be robbed of anything by those who chose to inflict suffering on us. He wants us to know that they robbed Christ of nothing by ending His experience of normal physical life. His life went on and His proclamation of truth went. They neither silenced His message nor thwarted His achievement by their actions. They in fact, advanced both. He accomplished greater objectives and made proclamation to a broader audience by death than if He would have remained alive.

**3:20—"who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water."**

These spirit beings are identified as being a specific group from a specific time period. This proclamation made by Jesus may relate to another mysterious passage of Scripture found in Genesis 6:1-8. There we find that at the time of Noah "sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves . . ." There is much debate over what exactly is being described in those words. Some suggest that previously fallen angels became disobedient to boundaries previously set by God and entered into relationships with humanity. This idea has the difficulty of such beings somehow gaining a body so as to co-habit with humans. This is not an insurmountable difficulty, but it is a difficulty. It gets weird. It suggests things that there is no biblical evidence for.

Others say these "sons of God" were simply men from the godly line of Seth who lost their way, intermarried, and so the way of God was gradually lost. This seems the more likely explanation. This would indicate a spiritual work being done against righteousness and righteous people by evil beings intent on eliminating faith. The rest of the Genesis passage explains the results of their efforts, and how corruption came to be spread. It is said that the evil was so great that only Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

Peter's words record the patience of God in this matter. He allowed such evil to persist for a number of years as the ark was being prepared, likely most of a century. Peter's record in these verses, along with what may be a veiled reference to the same spiritual rebellion in Jude 6, indicates that there could well have been a great spiritual crises that brought about the depraved conditions on earth at the time of Noah. It made the sweeping response of God in judgment essential. At the same time as the judgment of the flood on earth, there was judgment against the spiritual beings who had rebelled against God's rule by leaving boundaries previously established. This resulted in these beings being confined so as to do no more damage in creation.

There are several other passages that speak of spiritual beings being bound or in some way confined. Two of these scriptures occur in the description of the judgment of the trumpets in Revelation 9. In that chapter "locust" are described as swarming out of something called "the bottomless pit." Upon their release they torment these on the earth who do not have the seal of God. Many speculate that these are demonic beings who have been confined in a special prison. It is possible that they are, and that they are the same group mentioned here by Peter. Later in Revelation 9, four evil angels who are said to be "bound at the great river Euphrates" are released. They are said to have been prepared for a specific time when they would kill a third of the Earth's population.

These are spiritual beings whose existence God allowed in order to accomplish a judgment of His in the future. They were created by Him, but at some point rebelled against Him as did Satan. They became so evil that God confined them because in all likelihood not even Satan could control them. When God releases them they will work great havoc on the earth.

The other instance we see of spiritual beings being confined occurs in Revelation 20, where Satan himself is said to be bound for 1,000 years. This we believe will occur in the future during Christ's 1,000 year reign on earth, what is referred to as the millennial kingdom. This will be a time of unprecedented peace and prosperity on earth due to Satan being confined. At the end of the 1,000 years his release will bring about a final rebellion against God, a final judgment of man and all creation, the eternal confinement of all that is evil, and a new creation.

The mention by Peter of confined spirits ends quite abruptly. Most of what we have said about verse 20 is speculative though quite plausible. Peter leaves the subject of the spirits to focus on the few who were saved and the time of this spiritual crisis on earth. He is moving back to the subject of believers being carried by God through times when, like Christ, they become victims of injustice and persecution, when they are persecuted and abused because they are good.

This has been Peter's way of saying that such suffering has often been the experience of the faithful and it is because of the greater spiritual evils that exist beyond the realm of the seen. These evil beings have always been present, but cannot pursue their agenda beyond boundaries established by God. They have an agenda against God and wish to overwhelm and thwart His agenda, but He allows only activity that will function in some way to enhance His glory in the end.

It is possible, and this is very speculative, that Jesus' proclamation to the confined spirits was one of victory. Verse 22 seems to confirm this. Jesus' visit to the confined spirits seems to have served the purpose of introducing creation's new boss. Jesus' message was perhaps a clear declaration of the Messiah's role as sin-bearer that had been shrouded in deep mystery during the era of the Old Testament. God may have kept this part of His plan mysterious for this very purpose, so that His grand purpose could not be thwarted and would actually be carried out in part by the ignorant forces of evil.

Christ's proclamation in this case would have been quite dramatic, a declaration to evil forces celebrating the death of God's anointed ruler of the earth, by that ruler Himself. He would declare to them the real news that their conspiracy against Him and the unjust and inhumane treatment of Him they orchestrated, only served to bring about the very sacrifice that would spell the end of sin and evil.

If this was the nature of Christ's proclamation, it must have been a profound statement of victory to an absolutely stunned audience. As always, evil had risen up against good. As always it could not triumph. God judged the world at the time of Noah. Evil men were wiped out, evil beings confined, but the faith survived through the offspring of Noah. Eight people were brought safely through the water to populate the earth once again and to perpetuate faith in what would still be the realm of the evil one until a pre-determined time. God knows how to preserve His own.

**3:21—"And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."**

God patiently waited during the days of Noah, withholding judgment while the ark was being built. Noah's faith saved him. The ark became the instrument God used. He could have saved Noah in some one of the myriads of ways that His miraculous powers allow. But He chose to wait and allow Noah's faith to be expressed in a visible way to the watching world. It was important enough to the character of God that He was willing to have His Spirit "strive with man" (Gen. 6:3), longer so that saving faith would be clearly and dramatically demonstrated in front of the disobedient.

Baptism is a work we do that "corresponds" to Noah's building of the ark. Both are works that demonstrate faith. Both involve water. Both are meant to send a message to others. Both require obedience. Both require faith. Both displayed belief in a coming judgment. There are distinct similarities, though there are differences as well.

Peter's statement about baptism makes clear the idea that it is not the water that saves us. Some might mistakenly believe that in the act itself there is a cleansing from sin. Rather that cleansing came through the faith, the willingness to believe in God's desire and effort to save. In this belief and trust there is salvation.

Salvation comes when we appeal to God for it, not when we try by our own efforts to gain it. And this is possible because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. His perfect life was substituted for ours. Our sin was placed on His account so that He died. His death paid for our sin and His death came only because of our sins. He had none of His own. Therefore, once our sin was forgiven by His death, death had no power over Him, and He rose from the dead. His resurrection is proof that our sin was paid for and that it has been removed from the record. It exists no more.

Faith in that work of God through Christ saves us. Baptism is the "official" expression of trust in that work of God, just as Noah's construction of the ark was the "official" expression of His faith in God's plan to preserve Him through the coming judgment. His faith and trust in God led him to build the ark. He was then saved. Faith in Yahweh saved Him.

**3:22—“who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.”**

This verse states Christ's present position, and it speaks to the things He did before He assumed this position. In John 20:17, Jesus tells Mary Magdalene that He had not yet ascended to the Father and tells her to go and tell the brethren that He was ascending. During the days ahead He made a number of appearances to His followers and then Acts 1:6-11 records His ascension into heaven some forty days (Acts 1:3) after the resurrection.

We cannot state dogmatically if the ascension He speaks of to Mary in John 20:17 is the one recorded in Acts 1:9. It would seem, all things considered, that it was not. The mention of “going into heaven” in these words of Peter could refer to the ascension recorded in Acts 1:9, when He seemed to permanently take up bodily residence in heaven. They could refer to an earlier ascension, one more closely associated with the event of the resurrection.

All this we say to say this, that we cannot pinpoint the time span Jesus took to do the work mentioned here by Peter of subjecting the various powers. Time is not relevant to Him in this matter since He could do it simply by uttering the word instantly, or He could do it over time. But this verse is of interest because it further clarifies what the “proclamation” of verse 19 was.

That proclamation, as mentioned earlier, was likely a statement of victory and a proclamation of authority by Christ to authorities and powers within the realm of evil. It was not a declaration of the gospel with a second chance at salvation offered to humans. We don't know what other proclamations may have been made by Christ from the moment of death until the time of His ascension but we do know from this verse that He was occupied with some work of an official capacity that conferred on Him His rightful authority as God's appointed ruler. He did some things before the ascension that in some way “officially subjected” authorities and powers to Him.

The text is not specific as to who these angels, authorities, and powers are. It seems most likely that this was an official handing over and perhaps official announcement of all that would come. The actual full realization of the reality of all experiencing this rule still lies in the future. We must not make too much of this nor can we afford to make too little of it. All is under His control, but He is, by a previously ordained plan, exercising that control in a way that allows much evil to exist for a period of time until His purposes in allowing its existence are fulfilled. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. That much is abundantly clear. The day when every knee will bow has not yet arrived.

## 1 PETER 4

**4:1—“Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.”**

Peter has talked a great deal in this letter about the suffering of Christ. He is to be our pattern in the home, the work place, and in all situations where we find ourselves mistreated. We are to be submissive as He was to the intermediate authority, knowing that God is ultimately in control and will hold those accountable who abuse their authority. Christ modeled this submissive spirit. It is not that He enjoyed the abuse. Nor by submitting to it did He condone it. He entrusted His case to a higher judge. He appealed it to a higher authority who has certainly ruled in His favor. We are called to do the same.

Now this verse says that if we embrace this as a purpose, to suffer so as to advance the plan of God, we are “armed.” That is an important statement. By determining to sacrifice ourselves we are prepared to have impact in the battle. That is an idea that all manner of organizations came to realize in the latter half of the 20th century. We are seeing it in its extreme forms in the Moslem world. When practiced outside of the sphere of the truth the results of being willing to sacrifice are tragic and brutal. In such cases brutally self-centered men are able to rally masses to a course of self-destruction to the delight of the evil one who gladly energizes the cause. If it is a powerful force outside the sphere of truth, it is more so when subjected to and governed by the truth.

To arrive at the decision to sacrifice for the cause of Christ, which is God’s plan for the reclamation of humanity, is to let go of sin. Ultimately sin is the desire to control one’s own life and the events of it. No one can grasp the one without letting go of the other. It is the mark of a monumental change when someone arrives at the point of this decision. The one who has embraced the idea of personal suffering so that the plan of God can be advanced through them has made a fundamental choice about what has value. Such a decision is life-changing.

Peter does not mean that those who so arm themselves will never commit acts of sin. It does mean that a number of instances of sin in their life will not happen again, because they have submitted themselves to a spiritual agenda rather than a fleshly one. To sow of the Spirit is to reap of the Spirit and in this sense such a person has ceased from pursuing sin.

This is a significant landmark for Christian people to arrive at. Peter knew it and so instructed these Christians to arm themselves by embracing this purpose. This is the purpose that is to drive Christians. Advancing by their own personal sacrifice the plan of God for the reclamation of people is the highest use of one’s life. It is something we must intentionally do. If it was natural, or if it automatically happened without our effort, Peter would not have had to exhort these Christians to do it. It is a mistake to imagine that this willingness is present in all born-again people. It comes with maturity, with an understanding of the truth and a willingness to trust in it. It is like the building of an ark!

**4:2—“so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.”**

The decision to pay whatever the cost in order to live as God wants us to live is really a decision to make Christ Lord of our lives. It is a decision to bow to His authority even when the price is your personal rights. It yields an eternally important fruit. You begin to live in a way that you set aside normal desires of human existence in favor of accomplishing what is pleasurable to God. Things like the desire for status, for power, for being one’s own master, for unmitigated pleasure, for personal happiness become secondary to the urgency of advancing God’s plan. It is a switch that has been made by millions from a self-focus to an ever-increasing awareness of a cause involving the detail of the lives of millions of their fellow humans.

This decision also changes how time is understood, spent and invested. It is a stewardship of time, things, truth, mind and body. The “rest of the time in the flesh” is no longer seen as something to be clung to and protected. It is seen as that which is to be parlayed into something else of eternal consequence. This all is the result of making Christ our Lord. It happens in a profound moment in some cases and over a period of time in others. Either way, it is life-changing.

**4:3—“For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.”**

Living according to what brings pleasure, to what diverts us from the pain and realities of life is natural. It is an empty way to live, to be in pursuit always of the company of the crowd and the excesses it affords. It is soon accompanied by a pursuit of a theology and spirituality that makes it all seem good and right. There is always the morning after when the haunting voice of conscience persistently asks, “Is that all there is?” It is eternity’s voice that makes us long for more, but until the Eternal One is turned to, we simply live on a merry-go-round. We keep paying a greater price for the same ride, the same scenery and the same result.

Peter says that the time spent on that ride is sufficient. We know it well. We will not miss it. Its futility is never-ending. Whatever can be accomplished and achieved is done. There will be no pleasant surprises or windfalls, just mounting costs. A time in all of our lives arrives for us to stop this bleeding of our souls.

**4:4—“And in all this they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you;”**

Whenever we swim to the side and escape the current and stand on the bank and beckon others in a new direction, there is speculation about what is really up. The one who is safe is maligned as one who is really in trouble. What is wise is said to be foolish, what is prudent is deemed reckless. Generally, when Christ is made Lord in your life you will not be thrown a party by old friends or commended for your progress in discipline and in what is good and right. They will be surprised, and not in a pleasant way.

Peter is saying they will be offended. There is a witness in the conscience of every human being that confirms when they have seen and heard what is true and right. That witness within them creates tension and discomfort. It is the grace of God when it leads to repentance. Usually before it does it produces a season of resistance in which the truth is maligned. To remain in the darkness, where the light of truth does not expose the true nature of things, is more comfortable in the moment. It says that they are okay, as good as everybody else, on the right course.

Light gives a new view of reality. What was just seen needs to be explained. Those without light must speculate, since they are unable to examine intently and thoroughly. They will understand and explain what has happened wrongly. They must be guided gently and lovingly along. They cannot be expected to immediately see. For a time the one who has escaped to safety must endure being maligned and all the misunderstanding, tension and outright abuse that comes with it. They must pray for sight for the blind and for the light of truth to produce the understanding that leads to repentance.

#### **4:5—“but they shall give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”**

That people are not judged and sentenced is not because God is not ready. It is His longsuffering nature that causes the delay. It is His unwavering love for humanity and His own promise with regard to His chosen ones that delay Him. He is not trying to reach a decision. What is true and right and good was established before creation, being resident in His character. It is not that He has insufficient power and control to enter into judgment. It is not that He is trying to discern motives in the defendants. He is in those respects ready. He has selected the day and appointed the time. The time cannot be put aside or delayed by His creation. All will give an account. Not even one's own death can excuse a person from this appointment. It is one they will keep.

The concept of giving an account is an intriguing one. It is for all a judgment of stewardship. It is the Master asking for an accounting. It is a demand for full disclosure of both actions and thoughts with appropriate explanation and justification. The examiner will be armed with the true facts which will be brought to light for all to see. The outcome of the examination will be determined by truth. There will be no false convictions, no unfair assessment, no partiality, no manipulation, no suppression of evidence or any of the things that necessitate appeals or retrials and bring about false convictions within all earthly justice proceedings. All will give an account. Not even death can remove one's responsibility for their lives. And, the judge is ready.

#### **4:6—“For the gospel has for this reason been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God.”**

This is a difficult verse that has been interpreted in a number of different ways. It has given rise to much speculation. There is that in its wording that makes the reader pause to ask if God gives those who die a second chance. It is certainly within His rights and ability to do so. But there is no scriptural evidence that this is the case and to embrace such an idea raises problems with the clearer teaching of two specific texts (Hebrews 9:27, Luke 16:19-31).

Some have seen in this verse a relationship to Christ's journey into the spirit realm recorded in 3:19. Combining the two passages they embrace a belief in an intermediate state that allows further opportunity for salvation. The Roman Catholic Church has embraced this idea in their teaching of a place called Purgatory. Such an idea can find support only here in the Scripture, and it directly violates the teaching of the passages mentioned above. It seems best to avoid those more blatant difficulties and live with some uncertainty about this particular statement by Peter.

Others have suggested that this verse describes the fact that those who were people of faith that lived before Christ, were “imprisoned” in an intermediate state until the death of Christ. Upon dying for their sins, He was presented to them with the full story of the Gospel. They all, because they were of the faith, believed resulting in their being ushered into a different intermediate state. In this sense the gospel was preached “among the dead.” This view is not without problems and difficulty, but it has the advantage of also explaining Ephesians 4:8-10, another “thorny” passage on Christ’s activity between His death and ascension.

It seems best to interpret Peter’s words in this verse in the following way. In the wake of the statement that God stands ready to judge the living and the dead, these words are an explanation of God’s simultaneous activity as He patiently awaits the appointed time of judgment. He orchestrates the proclamation of truth, specifically explaining a course of action that leads to salvation among living and dying humans, so that when they are raised from the dead to face Him bodily they can be pardoned from their sin.

When Peter speaks here of the gospel having been preached among the dead he is talking about those now dead who when they were alive heard the gospel. His words were meant to relate to the concern that those who lived and died before Christ had no opportunity to be saved, not having heard news of Christ’s suffering and death. Peter wants to assure the readers that God has always made salvation available even among those who are now dead. There has been in every age “good news,” specific information made available by God which when believed resulted in personal salvation.

All are faced with physically appearing before Christ to be judged in terms of how we conducted ourselves in our life on earth (2 Corinthians 5:10). For this we will be judged. In our life on earth we also live and experience God’s judgment against sin. It is for this reason that we experience weakness in our bodies and the curse against all creation that ultimately ends our physical lives. Death happens because God has judged sin. In our flesh we experience that judgment. So there are several ways in which it can be said that we are judged in the flesh as men.

But the gospel is good news because it allows something else to be happening in terms of our inner being (2 Corinthians 4:7-18). Spiritual life is happening there in the lives of all who believe the gospel. Ultimately even in physical death all such believers will experience spiritual life. As Christ did (3:18-20), we will serve God even in that state, rendering to Him spiritual service until the day our physical bodies are raised and transformed. Then, like Christ we will have a bodily existence that enables us to fully experience the life that Adam lost, and beyond.

To all generations of humanity this salvation has been offered and God has faithfully orchestrated that work as He patiently waits for the arrival of the day He has appointed for judgment.

#### **4:7—“the end of all things is at hand; therefore be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.”**

The Scriptures were written by a single divine author and a number of human ones. In His inspiration of the text of Scripture God did not violate the style or the understanding of the human authors. They articulated what they knew and their account harmonized with their personal understanding of life, the world, and creation. There are times their language accommodates later discovery, but for the most part they spoke about what they had come to understand and did so in a way that God superintended so that His exact thought for man was revealed through the language and style of the human writer.

When Peter says that “the end of all things is at hand,” we see in his words the understanding that every New Testament author had. Their understanding was that there was no event or events prophesied in Scripture that needed to be fulfilled before the projected events of the last times burst upon us. The writers did embrace this idea of immanency. We can argue about what exact event they expected next, but they had no apparent doubt that the events associated with the end of earthly government and authority could unfold at any moment.

Peter’s belief in this regard is clearly expressed here. In the verses that follow he seemed to be expecting a time of judgment and separation (verse 17), to be a part of this “end.” For this reason he exhorts his readers to a certain mentality characterized by sound judgment and “sobriety.” The word “spirit” has been added in the NASB, but sobriety is a concept common to both Paul and Peter. The word itself meant “without wine,” but came to refer to a mindset that was unimpaired by anything, whether substances, false ideas, material excess, or whatever. He also exhorts them to a certain activity, that of prayer, or what we might call prayerfulness. He was in this calling them to seek the Lord’s mind in every action and reaction and to understand His will in the budgeting of the passing moments.

Our lives should be purposeful, focused by His leading on the matters that relate to His kingdom. The condition of our own processes impacts the effectiveness of our prayers, and we must not expect that casual, half-hearted prayer out of an uninvolved, undisciplined, or inactive mind will bring about spiritual results.

#### **4:8—“Above all, keep fervent in you love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.”**

The phrase “above all” is a significant one that indicates something important that could escape our best attention and effort. It also indicates something of great import to the mission which if left undone could have high impact.

Peter had heard from Jesus the importance of love. Jesus had said that by demonstrating love for one another all men would know they were His disciples (John 13:35). Love is to be kept fervent. It is to be real and obvious. We must resolve those things that destroy love or that dampen its fervor. We must focus on the value of individuals to God. We must understand their pain because in understanding their pain we will to a greater degree understand and look past their idiosyncrasies and even their sins.

By commanding us to keep fervent in love Peter is reminding us that we must check ourselves in this matter. It is easy and natural to stop loving. By telling us to do this “above all” he is reminding us that something too precious to lose is at stake to let love become anything less than fervent.

The ability to weep with others and to rejoice with others must be cultivated, along with all the other “one-another’s” that are commanded in Scripture. These “one-another’s” also must be scheduled in our busy lives. Loving fervently takes time whether time with God, time in prayer for others, or time spent working for and serving others. Love must appear on our schedules or I suspect that it is not fervent.

Peter gives the reason why this fervency must be stirred and fueled. It is because love covers over a multitude of sins. By this he means two things. First of all, knowing that churches and church people are all in process and so are full of imperfections, he was thinking of something we could do to give credibility to our message. Love for one another was Jesus’ solution and strategy in this matter. Love demonstrated by Church people for one another covers over their multiple imperfections that would otherwise rob their message of credibility. When others see love demonstrated they overlook other imperfections.

Second, love demonstrated toward each other helps us within the church overlook one another's imperfections. So love intentionally practiced causes a kind of natural love to grow among people. When we are the objects of love, we tend to overlook the shortcomings of those loving us and we develop a reluctance to focus on them. In fact, very often we cannot be led to do so even when we need to!

Peter knew that we could be insulated against the influence of the evil one who works overtime to destroy unity by intentionally practicing love for each other. So keeping love fervent becomes the critical church activity, the "above all" else focus when we think strategically and more important biblically, about advancing the mission of making disciples of all people.

#### **4:9—"Be hospitable to one another without complaint."**

The Lord will orchestrate genuine caring in His church that will cause each Christian to share all that he has been blessed with. This was particularly important in Peter's day when travel was slow and lodging a challenge. But I suspect that this command had more to do with cultivating church life and ministry than with meals and lodging.

There is no better means of encouraging someone than to have them in your home, to share what is yours with them, and to minister to their needs instead of your own. We are to do this and it is the great scourge of American middleclass life that we are becoming too busy to share our lives at this level with each other. The one who will take time to open their home to other believers will in carrying that out with joy, have great ministry.

Peter says to do this to one another. It is believers who are known to us that he is concerned about and wants us to focus on. He is not asking us here to open our homes to strangers, though we are encouraged to do that elsewhere in Scripture (Hebrews 13:2, 3 John 5). Our love for each other is not fervent (verse 8), if we are not hospitable to each other.

He says we are to do this without complaint. This indicates that our hospitality is to extend beyond our circle of close friends and is to be in some way sacrificial. We are inclined to complain when we do something that stretches us in some way, and so it must be that Peter had in mind situations that might not be most desirable to us. Things like extended stays, financial impact, different forms of inconvenience, inability of someone to reciprocate, all these tend to make us complain and withdraw hospitality. We do so to our own harm and the harm of the Church. We must realize that simple hospitality provided some great moments in the lives of people in Scripture (Genesis 18:1-22, 2 Kings 4:8-17, Acts 10, Luke 10:38-42). It is a small thing with potentially huge impact, and it is something that every person can do in some way.

#### **4:10—"As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."**

From speaking of something all Christians can and should do, Peter moves into speaking of the particular, specific and unique contribution each individual makes for the good of the whole. This is a result of God's design. He has meticulously engineered the Church and each person in it so that they fit in a very practical and specific way into its overall function.

The outcome of this design is that He has given to each person a special gift. A gift is a way of thinking and so a way of responding to others and serving them. It equips each individual to be consistently used of God in a specific way to strengthen others. Each person then, has a primary spiritual gift.

Seven of these gifts are listed in Romans 12:6-8. They are prophesy, service, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, and showing mercy. Each person in the body of Christ is designed so that they think, act, and respond in a way that is characterized by one of these terms. This is their gift and their ability to function in this way makes them a gift to the Church. Our individual giftedness is one aspect of how the Holy Spirit manifests Himself through us (1 Corinthians 12:4).

A second aspect is the specific ministry the Holy Spirit generally summons us to use our gift in (1 Corinthians 12:5). People with the same gift will be called by Him to a different kind of ministry, and this diversity in calling adds to our uniqueness and helps the Church overall have a wider impact.

A third aspect of the Holy Spirit's manifestation through us to others is our "energizing" (1 Cor. 12:6), the scope of our ministry. Different Christians are energized in different ways, some for broad impact across continents, some for more narrow impact. But all are to have some degree of impact through the Spirit's work in them. All can increase that impact by being faithful.

Faithfulness in employing one's giftedness is Peter's main point here. He does not spend time developing the subject of spiritual gifts. The primary thing each person is to do is to faithfully serve other Christians through their gift. Now there is a gift of service, but that is not what Peter is talking about here. Here he says that we should employ our gift, whatever it is, in a way that serves others. By this he means that we are to strengthen them in what was referred to as "the way" (Acts 9:2, 19:23, 22:4, 24:14, 22). It was a way of living that deferred always to the promptings of God, who had joined Himself to every believer through the Holy Spirit.

All that we are, God has by His grace given us for this purpose, serving for the good of others. He has blessed us so that we can have a part in the noble and great work of transformation He is doing. We can in this way taste the past, what Adam enjoyed before the fall, and the future, what we will enjoy to the fullest degree in eternity.

This use of our giftedness to serve others is a matter of stewardship. It is a responsibility for which we will be held accountable. Most use these inherent assets to serve their own interests. We must be different. We must realize that we have these things because of God. They are His and have been entrusted to us. We must manage them in a way that He and His interests benefit. Our challenge is to behave as managers, not owners. We do so when we employ our being as He has made us to help others live the same way we live. We are poor stewards when we leave our gift, or any of the things God has entrusted us with, undeveloped and unused (Matthew 25:24-30).

Whenever the subject of spiritual gifts is mentioned in Scripture, two concepts appear with it. One of these is the idea of diversity. Peter's words express this here through the word rendered "manifold." There are many "looks" to giftedness and ministry. A second concept that always is mentioned with gifts and giftedness is grace. Our value and impact is by Yahweh's favors. It is not a result of our own inherent power of goodness. So this verse commands us to serve others through our giftedness, whatever might be our gift. The next verse will tell us how to make sure such service is carried out through our giftedness.

**4:11—“Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”**

No matter what the gift, it involves speaking and serving. Whether the person is showing mercy or leading, to do as Christ does they must both speak and serve. Rather than understanding this verse in isolation from the context it is best to see it as connected to what Peter has just said about each person having a gift.

Some have seen this verse as referring to two categories of gifts, speaking and serving gifts. They suggest that the various gifts listed in Scripture can be divided into these two categories. This works to some degree but it is hard to imagine any of the gifts not involving serving, especially in light of what Peter has just commanded. He has said that we are to employ our gift, whatever it is, in serving one another. It is equally hard to imagine strengthening others through our gift apart from communicating with them.

Peter is exhorting us to carry out our giftedness with the Spirit's words and actions. Let our words of instruction, mercy, service, or whatever, be orchestrated by God. Don't just talk and converse. Seek to utter God's word for the moment. He always has some message for the moment (Mark 9:50, Ephesians 4:29, Colossians 4:6), that when spoken will communicate the right thing in the right way. Pursue this so that your tongue serves Him. If your tongue does so, the rest of you will tend to follow (James 3:1-5).

The second thing to remember in employing your giftedness is to do it with the strength God supplies. Some of the greatest opportunities come our way when we feel like we have nothing to give, like Jesus when He sat down to rest at Jacob's well in Sychar (John 4). We must discover for ourselves the mystery He spoke of in the wake of that experience when He said to His disciples, "I have food to eat that you do not know about . . . my food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work." (John 4:32, 34). There is a way to be strengthened by ministry as we pour ourselves out doing it, and we must discover that "food" which the apostles eventually discovered.

There is a time for rest. Jesus modeled that as well. But He often found strength to give more in moments when He felt like He needed rest. We must carry out our giftedness in the strength that God supplies, not the strength of the flesh. Too many cross over into the flesh when they employ their giftedness.

We employ our bodies and our minds in ministry, and it takes a great deal out of us. So it is not that if we do ministry right it will be effortless. It is not that in these bodies ministry can be done endlessly. Yahweh brought about great victories in Israel, but it required the very lives of some who fought in them. There is a similarity in ministry under the New Covenant. Our giftedness is a part of the fabric of our souls. When we use it we pour out physical and emotional energy (1 Thessalonians 2:8). But part of the fabric of our being is also the Holy Spirit, and it is to be more than our strength that energizes us. It will involve all of us, but it will be more than us and will accomplish more than our own strength could possibly permit (2 Corinthians 1:8-11, Colossians 1:28-29). The result will be that we will move beyond our work and accomplish His work. As we do, others will see and acknowledge His work and He will receive glory.

The key to God receiving glory is not for us to utter some phrase. That can become nothing more than a well-intended, noble but feeble human attempt at diverting attention from us to Him. Peter's strategy for God receiving glory in our efforts is for us to speak God's words and carry out deeds that clearly require His power. When we focus on that, God is glorified in all that we have done. When people hear His words and feel His touch, that is exactly what they say they have heard and felt.

There are times we must verbally divert praise from ourselves to God (Acts 14:11-18), because of the tendency of worshipping creatures to fixate on objects and people through whom they have experienced God. But the real key in this matter is to do God's work, God's way with God's words.

Peter ends this verse with a great statement on the glory of God. We could conclude that with these words he intended to close his letter, particularly because of the "Amen," which we associate with an ending. But it is just as possible that he felt that "Amen," meaning "so be it!" was the only fitting thing to say following his statement that all glory and dominion forever and ever belong to Christ. That this would be true in our personal lives and in our churches would be the greatest of milestones to achieve. It is the grand purpose of all that God has done and the great end to which His plan is working (Psalms 46:10, Isaiah 45:4-5, 20-25, Habbakuk 2:13-14, 1 Corinthians 15:28, Ephesians 3:10).

This is the purpose for everything Yahweh has intentionally initiated and all that He has permitted and allowed. It is a testimony to His great power that even evil can be made to serve Him in the end. This is the great truth that all creation should embrace that would inspire hope in the darkest of moments. All of creation and creation's events will be made to serve Him and will in the end demonstrate His great glory. One cannot ponder that thought long without imagining the moment it is realized and longing for it. "So be it!" That is the cry of creation's heart (Romans 8:18-23).

#### **4:12—"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;"**

The exact and precise circumstances that Peter is addressing here are unknown to us. Since it was "among" them, and since "they" included a number of churches spread throughout a geographical region, we do suspect that it was one of a number of periods of persecution that arose against the early church.

History has a way of assigning names and dates to such things. But to the readers of this letter it was simply an ordeal. It is described as a "fiery ordeal." We don't know if that was because it involved actual fire or because that word describes well its intensity. Literal fire could have marked it. Perhaps property had been burned, or people had been burned. Both have been common methods of humanity in reacting to and seeking to stamp out new movements and beliefs. The word *purse* (fiery—rendered "painful" in the NIV), has a figurative usage of a difficult but refining experience. It is used literally in its only other usage in the New Testament (Revelation 18:9,18).

Peter's words in this verse remind the readers of two important ideas. First, God has a purpose in allowing such "ordeals." They are to test us. Whenever the Bible speaks of us being tested, it is not a test orchestrated by God so that He Himself can learn about what's inside us. He knows all things and He sees hearts. He does not need such a test. The word used by Peter for "ordeal," is *peirasmon*, meaning to put to the test or to prove. We know by how this word is used elsewhere of trials (James 1:2 for example), that such tests are allowed so that our faith might be documented, that is, officially certified by all who might care to examine, as genuine and authentic. Again, the object is not to certify our faith so that God knows. He is omniscient. God's purpose in allowing such trials is that our faith will be proved genuine to others and exhibited as such throughout all of eternity. We will be exhibits in God's behalf of His ability to bring about genuine faith in people who had been under evil's control, and so prove His greatness and sovereignty over all.

The second important idea that Peter's words remind us of is that such trials should not surprise us or seem strange and out of the ordinary to us. The truth never stands on equal footing to be judged by the same standard as pseudo truth in the kingdom of evil. The rule of this world is that every other lifestyle and every other philosophy must be approached with tolerance and open mindedness. Not so with Christianity, and that should not surprise us or seem strange to us. As John wrote, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Because this is true, having to witness and endure a "fiery ordeal," while painful and even agonizing, should not be surprising.

This agrees with the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 5:12-15). Peter wanted his readers to understand that while such things are abnormal in terms of God's standard of justice and should never happen, they should not lead us to conclude that God has lost control. They should in fact confirm His word which repeatedly warns that this will be our experience in this world (John 16:33).

It is likely best to understand suffering and trial as having its immediate source in Satan. He is permitted to bring it about only to the degree that such a thing brings about something that in the end serves God's purpose and can be shown to be beneficial in the eternal sense to us. Satan means it for harm. In fact, he intends it for destruction, so it is cruel and severe and dangerous. God will ultimately conform it to His purposes and work it around for our eternal benefit. He will reward us for all eternity for the thing our suffering accomplished.

There is perhaps no more accurate picture of God's immense power than His ability to bring good from His allowance of evil. The focus of the following instructions of Peter will show that this is exactly the thinking that should carry us through trial. The revelation of Jesus Christ as the ruler and judge of the world will be the event that will make all wrongs right. It will be at this time that good is brought about by God in the personal lives of all who have suffered and the testimony of all living things will be that he is good and that He has been good even though allowing evil.

**4:13—"but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation."**

The principle that God is a righteous judge is a very important one that the early church embraced in trial (see 2:23, 4:19). We must believe in both God's ability and His intention to make all wrongs right. We must believe that this is more than a concept with Him. There is an appointed day when it will happen (Isaiah 2:12-22). It is a scheduled event. All who have trusted this great fact and so waded in and taken their lumps will be rewarded. If we have courts that enforce payment for damages how much more the all-knowing all-powerful judge! This is a certainty, and we must embrace it.

Therefore, to the degree to which we suffer as Christ did, to bring about through our lives His plan, we will be filled with joy by our reward on the day appointed by God for the unveiling of Christ as the ruler of creation. A new era will be established on that day with new standards of right and wrong, justice and injustice. There will be a new order in which the meek will inherit the earth, those who have pursued righteousness will be the one's filled, and those cast aside in this world will be embraced by Christ as His leaders (Matthew 5:1-12). Therefore, when we suffer in this life, we are commanded by Peter to rejoice.

Such willingness to suffer and persist in trial is the means by which we share in all that belongs to Christ. To him who has such faith and commitment more will be given. That is a principle that relates to truth in this life and reward in the next (Matthew 13:10-17, Matthew 25:24-30, Mark 4:24-25, Luke 8:18, 19:11-26).

#### **4:14—“If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”**

Being reviled, or rejected because of our beliefs is one of the experiences that Christians hold in common. This is not to say we should not work hard at articulating our faith in a way that does not cause undue offense. But we should always remember that when God became a human and articulated the faith to perfection, He was reviled. That has been the most common reaction to the truth and it has been the reaction of the world to some of the greatest and best men and women that have lived.

Peter said that those who experience this rejection are blessed. He heard this word used by Jesus (Matthew 5:1-12). It is the word from which our word “happy” eventually evolved. So Peter says that this rejection is really something that should produce a positive emotion in us. I don't believe he means by this that we should have a happy-go-lucky attitude about people rejecting the truth. There is a proper heaviness and burden that comes over us when we see people journeying away from the truth. That burden is appropriate.

But Peter explains why we can find good news in the midst of this negative experience. The good news is the presence in us of the One who led us to live out and articulate the truth so that others rejected us. It was a certain spirit that engineered and brought about our transformation. Peter refers to this spirit as the Spirit “of glory and of God.” This is a profound choice of words that, like all of Scripture, was not accidental. The word order of this phrase in the Greek text is “the of glory and of God Spirit . . .” The syntax of this phrase combined with our theology derived from the rest of the testimony of Scripture, suggests the following rendering of this verse: “the Spirit that produces the glory that is of God, rests on you.” The word glory itself means weighty or significant. The word glory in this context (see 4:11,13), refers to the wonderfully just, orderly, beautiful, majestic and right state of things in the presence of God. The Spirit of God, the one who orchestrates this justice and orderliness and beauty that is present in God, is the one who is resting on us. We can be certain that even in the chaos, He is moving, as in Genesis 1:2. The result will be that glory will be produced once His actions are fully completed and revealed.

Part of the glory He is orchestrating is our character and our eternal reward. This will be included in the “new reality,” when the true nature of all things is unveiled and all the various masks torn off on the appointed day of Jesus Christ. That will be a day of glory for all who have trusted the truth and a day of horror for those who have rejected it. The lines are being drawn now. We can begin to taste what that day will reveal by the response of people to us. We must mature beyond needing to belong and beyond the self-consciousness and embarrassment brought about by rejection. When we are burdened for those rejecting truth and when at the same time that experience becomes a reminder of the glory of having the truth, we are processing rejection properly.

**4:15—“By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;”**

God puts no premium on suffering in itself. It is not a glory to suffer consequences of foolish and sinful actions. We must not fall into the trap of twisting our self-motivated misdeeds into Spirit-directed behavior and then comfort ourselves with the idea that we are suffering because we are being directed by the Spirit of God. Scores of people have fallen into this trap of Satan because they have not governed actions they contemplate by the standard of the written word. They are then “led” into all manner of sinful actions, some of which are noted by Peter here. They range from murder to being a trouble-maker. They are all borne out of failing to love the truth, which translates into a love of darkness.

Satan loves zeal. It is because it can easily be channeled into lawlessness. We must rule ourselves by submitting our inner leadings to the scrutiny of the sword of the Spirit, Scripture, and to the people of the Spirit, the Church’s leaders. Then we can be assured that our chosen path is of the Spirit not simply of a spirit (see 1 John 4:1 and the entire message of 1 John where walking in the light, which is truth, is the theme). Many Christians have been ruined and lost their reward because their zeal got out of hand and their own emotions gave Satan a great opportunity. This is how the Church has been led into things like the inquisitions, the crusades, and the selling of indulgences. It is how presently some Christian’s zeal for the lives of the unborn, a very legitimate concern, have led them to abusive speech and even acts of violence. We must stand for the truth, but we must be ruled by truth in our inner beings and accept the truth about what is at any moment really motivating us.

**4:16—“But if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God.”**

It is a wonderful thing to be labeled as a Christian. Christian means “of or pertaining to Christ.” There could be no greater compliment than to be associated with Him and have His name attached to you. It is proof that in some way others are seeing Christ in you. You are either intentionally aligning yourself with Him verbally or by how you behave. Either way is good though the latter is the supreme compliment.

There are places today, and there have always been those places, where nothing more is required than to be associated with Christ, and it is enough to be persecuted. Suffering has been perhaps the experience that has been most common to Christians of different cultures and eras.

But there is one thing that has comforted all those in the generations since Christ that have suffered. It has been that to be a Christian shows that God has done a great work in you. That you came to hear, understand, recognize and embrace the truth about yourself and Christ is proof of a very great work that God has carried out in you. It means that you are the objects of His special love and care. You are in covenant relationship with Him. He has embraced all that you are as His own and you in turn have free access to all that He is and has. It means you have a certain and wonderful destiny.

All this happens because you are a Christian, a believer in Christ. Each time you are reminded of that, no matter how the reminder is intended, you should glorify God for all that it means, because it is the greatest of blessings. It is security, the right kind of achievement. It is to have freedom, liberty and everything else that really matters.

**4:17—“For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”**

The death of Christ marked the beginning of judgment (John 12:27-36, 16:5-11). The judgment against the work of Satan that he had perpetuated in humankind had occurred and the sentence against it carried out in the death of Christ. That was the act that allowed all who would believe in Christ to be forgiven, to enter into relationship with God. Their sins were laid on Christ, judged by God and punished so that they can be blotted out. The result is that all who believe enter into relationship with Him. They begin a process whereby He seeks to weed out the habits that their slavery to sin had established. Their thinking patterns and behavior patterns come under God’s judgment. The Holy Spirit’s conviction gives impetus to this process.

The nation of Israel also came under judgment in the work of Christ’s death. Those who had been special objects of His love, who had been referred to throughout the Old Testament continually as His household, were now being set aside for a season of judgment. This was because they had added to their sins of rebellion their rejection of Christ as their Messiah. They would go through a period of centuries when all the curses associated with violation of the Old Covenant would be carried out against them (Deuteronomy 28). It would be a season of calamity and tragedy that Jesus had spoken of to the disciples (Luke 19:41-44, 23:28-30).

We err today in our common belief that God was concerned only with the “elect” in Israel. While it is true that only those will be saved, He viewed them all in a special way and holds them responsible for the truth they were entrusted with. So judgment had begun with the household of God. Christians today experience God’s mercy and grace, but also His displeasure with sin. His hand is extended into their lives to separate them from the evil that was a part of their past.

This is the primary activity of God that Peter is referring to here, as proven by his statement regarding those who reject the gospel. Their judgment will come later, and his words reflect a shuddering at the thought of the intensity of that judgment. Since God knows the secret sins of all and zealously addresses them in the lives of His own, who can imagine the intensity of His pursuit of the wicked when the time for their judgment arrives? Peter leaves the question unanswered. It is sobering.

**4:18—“And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the Godless man and the sinner?”**

This is a summary and re-expression of the thought recorded in Proverbs 11:31. It is similar to the thought expressed by Jesus while in route to the cross when He addressed those who mourned His fate and expressed their grief at His judgment (Luke 23:31).

Humanity’s salvation is a dilemma. It is such a great one that it can only be solved by God. Salvation is never represented as being easy in the Scripture. It is not easy for God and it is not easy for humankind. The lost are truly lost and there is absolutely no hope for them. Only by the special intervention of God can the “righteous” be saved. In other words, humanity’s righteousness is not enough. They fall short. They are “good” in the sense that they accept the truth as God has revealed it about themselves and about God. But as “good” as that is, it would not be enough to save them had Christ not died and paid the penalty for their sin. So great is the evil and “lostness” of even the so-called righteous, that it cannot be overlooked by God. The demand of justice has to be met, and humankind on their own can not meet it. It is too difficult.

God did what humankind could not possible do and so there came to be a new class of people whom God viewed as righteous, those who accept the truth about this dilemma and God's solution to it. These are saved by their faith. Their salvation is difficult in this sense.

The salvation of those who separate themselves from God and reject His truth is simply impossible. There is no basis for it, there is nothing to which they can appeal. They have rejected their only hope for salvation, the only possible course of action that could have saved them. Their fate is heart-breaking, but is their own doing. Though we do not see or understand the particulars of God's dealings with them, we know that they have not responded to the truth He has exposed them to. Whether a large or small amount, they have done nothing with it, and so have chosen to be godless and so will be separated from God for eternity.

**4:19—“Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.”**

God can be trusted in the matter of our salvation from sin. He is in fact, the only hope we have in solving that dilemma. To not trust Him is to not be saved. The same is true of our rescue from our present sufferings. Whatever God's design is in allowing our pain, His justice will be served in the end. Because His justice cannot be violated and because even in the case of the “righteous,” He overlooks nothing, we can be certain that evil done against us will not be overlooked. We can trust Him as both our defender and our judge.

Even Christ had to exercise this “faith not sight” mentality. This mentality was the persistent practice of obeying God, though it produced in humans a reaction that was personally harmful. It was trusting that God will in the end right all wrongs. And so in our imitation of Jesus we must persist in obeying God through times of suffering. That is Peter's message to his readers. God is watching and He will reward you and will judge your antagonists.

## 1 PETER 5

**5:1—“Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,”**

Peter turns now to give special instruction to the leaders of the Churches. The instructions are linked to the previous thoughts by the word “therefore.” That is appropriate because to be a leader in the movement would mark out such ones for special persecution. Having spoken of the persecution that they were experiencing and exhorting them to persist in it by faith, Peter now singles out the Elders as those who would need to lead the way.

To assume the title of elder was not in those times a means of gaining status. It was marking oneself out for persecution. Peter knew the Scripture, “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered” (Matt. 26:30-35). He had experienced the feeling of being scattered first-hand. He knew that the leaders needed to stand firm to provide an anchor for the churches. The leaders are privileged to set a pace and the people who are obedient will rise to it.

Peter’s actual instructions are preceded by his statement of his own position, establishing a kind of rapport with them so that he could influence and lead them rather than push them. This was always the style of the apostles which they learned from the Lord Himself. This statement by Peter embraces Elders as his peers and yet reminds them of his uniqueness. In choosing these words Peter models his instructions to them very well. He is a fellow elder. Now he was an apostle as well, but here he chooses to call himself an elder.

We do not know for certain what particular local church he was an Elder in. He was likely considered one in Jerusalem. In the last few verses of the letter he refers to “Babylon,” and this could be a symbolic reference to a church in Jerusalem, Rome, or one literally located in the city of Babylon. Whatever this refers to it could be the church he was currently serving as an elder in. He was of course, considered elite even among the apostles, by all the Churches. He was a “pillar in the Church” (Galatians 2:9). But he chooses here a more compelling personal approach to the leaders, approaching them as a loving peer.

He notes his uniqueness by also referring to himself as a witness of the sufferings of Christ. This adds a very transparent touch to his words, because he references a time which was certainly not one of his greatest moments as a leader or even as a follower. Yet his firsthand experience with Jesus, even though marked by blunders and failures, made him unique. Elders need to understand that. Even with their imperfections and failures, their calling makes them unique. Peter’s words are well chosen and inspire the leaders to follow his instructions.

Before giving these instructions Peter speaks of himself in one more way, as a partaker “of the glory that is to be revealed.” There had been a very pointed moment that occurred between Jesus, Peter, and the other disciples that has largely been overlooked by many who shape our theology. It is recorded by Luke (Luke 22:24-38), and involved a dispute among the eleven at the last supper over who was the greatest among them. They had to learn that titles and position were not to be pursued in this life. Faithfulness was to be pursued as well as dedicated service through trial and hardship. These were and are a means of gaining reward that actually matters, eternal reward.

The statement Jesus makes to the eleven rebukes their concern for greatness and status. He challenges them with a new model, that of serving. He then affirms their faithfulness, noting that they had stood by Him in His trials. Finally He says to them that they will be part of His kingdom and that they “will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” This is a reference to His earthly reign mentioned in Revelation 20, the messianic age that is to be experienced on earth before God’s final judgment of the earth. These men would have a trusted role in that kingdom conferred on them for a specific reason that involved more than their faith. It involved their faithfulness. It was because they had stood by Him in His trials, they had persevered in that to which they had been called. Peter had been given by Christ this precise vision of the glory that was to be revealed.

His instructions to the Elders were to be followed because they came from a man who had proved faithful and had been affirmed in this way by the appointed judge of the earth. So three things are cited by Peter about himself as he begins his instructions to the leaders. First, that he is one of them. He is experienced at the work they do and empathetic in terms of what it requires. Second, that he himself is an eyewitness of the events that are central to the faith. He is unique among men in this way and in possession of certain authority in the matters of faith that exceeds their authority as Elders. Third, that he is a partaker of a coming glory. He has proven faithful and been affirmed as such by the head of the Church. In these three things Peter shows that he had learned the lessons taught by Jesus at that last supper. He had unquestionable spiritual authority, but he was not lording it over them. He was appealing to them as a peer though he was certainly more than their peer.

**5:2—“shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness.”**

It is the charge of Elders to exercise oversight. This idea carries with it the idea of seeing the whole picture and condition of the work, and applying special effort to areas which are noticeably in need in some way. It assumes that there is a prescribed state of things that is understood by the one watching. So a prerequisite of giving oversight is that one have a clear understanding of when an individual, a ministry, and a Church is healthy. Such a person must know what is suppose to be happening so that they can know when it is not happening. Elders then know Christ and His heart in their local situation specifically enough so that they can see quickly and clearly when He is being followed.

This verse is about how elders are to carry out this work of watching, affirming, steering, warning, and rebuking. It involves the motivation and spirit that leads them to persist in and continue in this work. They are to do this work because it is the will of God for them—their calling. This is the plain and simple reason for assuming the responsibility of oversight. It is to be done voluntarily, that is in willing submission to the desire of Christ as opposed to one whose heart is in something else. It involves keeping oneself free of idols (1 John 5:21).

It shows itself in a willingness to give above and beyond, not the bare minimum. It is the imparting of one’s heart and soul not just one’s hands. It is not to be entered into as one would a hobby or other special interest. It is to be embraced eagerly, wholeheartedly, because of a desire to do what one’s mentor, Christ, is asking them to do.

It is not to be done in order to gain that which is sordid. This term relates to all motives that are fleshly, that involve self-gratification. Elders in the early church often received pay or support of some kind, but this is not to be the reason for involving oneself in spiritual leadership. But because money is not an issue one should not assume that sordid gain is not an issue. The world is full of individuals who sacrifice financial gain for certain kinds of recognition, personal comfort, or inner satisfaction. All of these can be realized in spiritual leadership, but they are not to be the motive that drives us.

If we exercise oversight for any reason other than the call of God, it will in time cause us to be unfaithful in discharging our responsibilities. In that case we will not oversee His work in a way that guides it toward His glory and purpose. It will at some point be shaped so that it serves us and at that point we have exercised headship not oversight. The process and mission are set in motion by Him and for Him. We are to watch over it to be sure that is happening.

Because an Elder's primary task is to discern between the work of the Spirit and that of the flesh, he must be able to clearly discern that in his own life and rule his own life well. A spiritual man is equipped by having successfully led himself to answer God's call to watch over a spiritual work. A fleshly man will lead the church as he does his own life.

### **5:3—"nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock."**

It is common among leaders of all things to do what this verse is warning against, to institute practices that constantly subjugate those being led to the whims of the leader or leaders. The flesh loves to be served and seeks to make us the center of attention. The responsibility of giving oversight involves making sure the things being done are of the Spirit. When those giving oversight become occupied with originating every idea, or being at the head of every movement of God, when they are threatened by what God is doing in another they are on dangerous ground. They should rather be thrilled when the rank and file are becoming greater vessels of the Holy Spirit and when some rise to do spiritual work that has greater than their own. When the leaders are not themselves being led by the Spirit, and therefore imitating Christ, you no longer have Christianity. You have a mixture of things that will not mix. In such a case you have a human organization.

Now such organizations are used by God. But this is not our objective in the purest sense. Even Satan has been allowed to exist because somehow evil will be used by God to bring about His grand purpose. So our goal is not simply to be "used of God," and when we speak of that we don't really mean it. Our goal is to be a living organism that is being controlled by Him, and is a reflection of who He is. We want to be more than tools in His hands. We want to be His hands.

Therefore the organized local church must be headed by men who have become such in their own life. They are then examples to others and provide a real life pattern of the "not my will but thine be done" lifestyle. Having fought the personal battles so as to arrive at that point personally, they are equipped to aid those battles in the lives and ministries of others. They can then oversee the work of the Spirit and help foster it in the individual and collective life of the Church. So leaders in the church don't simply push it in a direction. They have followed in the direction Christ is going and they are looking back to make sure "those allotted to their charge" are walking the same path. That describes the work of an Elder.

Now what is meant by the little phrase, “those allotted to their charge”? It is a key one in this verse. It is the NASB rendering of two words meaning “of the heritage” or “of the inheritance.” The idea is that Elders have the opportunity to impact that which is beyond them and beyond the scope of the present world. They are dealing with that which is larger than them and lives beyond them. A portion of this great inheritance that God is preparing has been allotted to them and committed to their care.

We believe that God’s family is well-ordered, known to Him and well structured by Him. He watches out for His own whether obedient or disobedient. His actions through His own are orchestrated for the spiritual welfare of His own. Ultimately then, He has a design whereby each member of His family is under the oversight of people He has called to be overseers. This does not mean they are in proper relationship to those He has provided as overseers. But He has Himself made that provision and it is always there for His family wherever they go or wherever His family springs up. So each overseer has those allotted to his charge. His responsibility is not to those under someone else’s charge. Those allotted to an overseer are not always known to Him. Some allotted to him are not responsive to him. They will bear that responsibility. Some may appear to be allotted to him but in time prove not even to be in the family of God.

An Elder need only worry about being an example of Christ. If he is this, he will be so to all who come within his sphere of influence. Whether they prove to be friend or foe he will have fulfilled God’s purpose in the relationship.

#### **5:4—“And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”**

Peter and all the apostles lived for the day Jesus appeared, and they believed it could happen at any time. We do not see in this verse the expectation that the elders in these churches would live, die, be raised and then enter into glory. That is certainly a doctrine and teaching the apostles embraced of those who had died. But they expected Christ to be “revealed” on earth (1:7), and to “appear” on earth. Whatever idea we embrace about future things (eschatology), our position must harmonize with this expectation of theirs that they would see Jesus re-appear on earth in their lifetime.

As to the “crown” they would receive, it could be that Peter is simply referencing the “glory” that all God’s children will experience when Christ judges the earth and sets things right. If that is true, then he is saying to the elders, “My command to you is to hang in there and be faithful, because our time is coming. When the boss comes He’ll fix everything.” It seems more likely that his particular instructions to elders would include a particular possibility of reward attached to their work that would motivate them. In this case Peter is saying to the elders, “My command is to hang in there and be faithful because there is a particular reward for your work that the chief elder will give to those who have been faithful in eldering.”

The “crown of glory” is most likely to be understood as “a crown characterized by glory” not as “a crown called glory.” It is a reference to a glorious reward not simply an object symbolizing achievement.

The primary work of elders is to be shepherds of God’s sheep. Here Christ is referred to as the chief shepherd. He models and directs our work. He is both our pattern and the one to whom we are responsible. When He returns to earth He will reward those who have been faithful to their charge as shepherds, even as He will reward all faithfulness.

This will happen when He sets up His earthly kingdom in Jerusalem, the next event the apostles were expecting (Acts 1:6-11). The work of eldering is one that is near and dear to Christ's heart. He will reward Elders who do it faithfully in a particular way. This is a great comfort and encouragement to those who are called to it. Their motive is not "sordid" gain, that which in some way gratifies sinful and fleshly desires. It is eternal gain, that desire to have our master say "Well done!" and so to lay hold of what really matters.

**5:5—"You younger men likewise be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for 'God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'"**

Earlier in his letter after words on Christ subjecting Himself to all that God's plan for Him entailed, particular instructions are given to particular groups within the church that require submission on their part (see 2:21-3:12). The words in this verse relate back to the last words of chapter 4 as well as to the words addressed to Elders. This is how young men can model Christ's behavior in the church. They can submit themselves to the rule of the elders.

This submission is not easy for anyone. It is learned behavior. For young men in particular it is difficult. God has wired them to conquer, to take initiative, and to make things happen. They are not yet ready to set the direction. They need experience and they need to prove themselves to be good followers. One cannot lead in spiritual matters without being first and foremost a good follower.

Spiritual leadership is different from other things in this way in that Christ is the head and is actively directing spiritual affairs. He has not delegated the headship of the Church to the Elders. They must be men who are followers of Him. A man becomes this. He is not this at the moment of conversion. So young men must submit to the Elders and in this they will become older men who can lead.

From addressing the younger men in particular, Peter turns to "all of you," and gives instructions to all church members. We are to be clothed in humility. This imagery of clothing ourselves is such that we must ponder it and allow it to sink in. It shows that humility is not natural but must be intentionally embraced on our part. Humility is embracing fully what Scripture says about yourself and your ways and publicly and privately agreeing with that. It is an intentional setting aside of impulse and a continual embrace of truth. It involves both biblical and practical understanding of who I am. It is what should be immediately recognized about us by others. They should not have to search for it. Our humility should not take special circumstances to be demonstrated. It should be the thing others notice in us very early, even by casual and passing observation.

Put your humility right out there! That is the force of Peter's words. He quotes Scripture as the reason for this. He quotes from Isaiah 57:15. This verse contrasts the response of God to the humble as opposed to His response to the proud. His special favor, grace, comes to the humble. If there is one thing we should long for it is more grace. Whenever God's grace flows it is great news for us. Humility fosters the flow of grace. Where there is repentance and dependence there is power from God.

Where there is stubbornness and independence there is opposition from God. There could be no worse thing in life than to have God opposing what we are doing. There could be no deeper feeling of frustration and being cursed than when God is continually blocking that which we set our hands to. It is not God's will that any in His family have to live like this, but we can experience it when we become willful in our dealings with Him, with each other, and with life. It is a particularly awful path to tread. We should very intentionally embrace each moment with humility to avoid it.

**5:6—"Humble yourselves therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time."**

Because receiving grace imparts the power for us to lay hold of that which is wealth indeed (Luke 16:11), we should humble ourselves. God gives grace to the humble. If we humble ourselves we receive this favor from Him. If we do not He will humble us. Either way, we will be humbled.

Now how does one humble themselves? It is an ongoing, repetitive activity. We must see ourselves as God sees us and we do this by listening to and accepting what His written revelation says is true of us and our deeds. There are times the truth commends us and there are times it condemns us. We must allow its voice to regulate our conscience and its testimony to be our view of who we are. We will find in the truth the continuous witness that we are deeply loved and also the continuous witness that we are deeply fallen.

We must recognize the might of God. It is a wonderful and comforting thing to those who do so, to the humble. It is a fearsome thing to those who do not. There is not a greater force in the universe than the power of God. Here it is pictured through this anthropomorphism of placing ourselves under the mighty hand of God. It is common in the Scripture to attribute such human characteristics as hands, arms, eyes and ears to God so that we might better understand Him. Here His hand becomes symbolic of His sovereign power, authority and protection. We find our meaning and place in life when we submit to that authority and allow Him to rule the detail of our lives. That is the ultimate fruit of humility.

We make our peace with God not just by believing in Christ, though that is certainly when we receive forgiveness. We arrive at peace with Him when we submit the detail of our lives to Him. Sometimes it takes us years to let go of a perspective we have of an event or a person in our lives and to see it from His perspective. We must come to know and accept it for what it was in His grand and complex plan (Genesis 45:5-8; 50:15-21).

It is as we do this with the various areas of our lives that His peace gradually settles in on us. In the proper time, which is always His time, we are exalted. By exalted, Peter is referring to some degree to that time when in this life we are entrusted with the thing He placed us here to do. The Amen, that is, the recognition of our worth may or may not be sounded by humans. It will be sounded in our spirits by His Spirit. But Peter is also thinking of and looking toward the day when the righteous judge affirms our actions and our worth for all to see. The true place of all things and all people in His plan will then be known.

## **5:7—“casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.”**

Grammatically, this verse is tied to the previous one and is really an expression of the command in verse 6 to humble ourselves. Taking this action is what the previous command consists of. A great obstacle to our taking our proper place of submission to God is our anxiety. We have concern over self-preservation and we have ambition, desires to achieve and attain certain things. It is difficult to sacrifice control of either of these things. On the contrary, when we feel that we might be losing control, anxiety sets in. There is, of course, no logical reason for this anxiety. It is an illusion to think such things are under our control anyway. But our thoughts take us there. We must learn to trust Him with all our concerns for “glory.”

The word rendered “cast” means just that, to throw. It implies sudden and deliberate movement. Like any action God asks of us this demands right thinking. We must understand and our faith must convince us that God cares for us. This is the theological truth that makes this action possible and wise. The previous verse speaks of God’s might. He is powerful enough to provide whatever it is we need. This verse establishes that what His might enables Him to do, His love will drive Him to do. He cares for us. That is first and foremost a marvelous thought that the Almighty One cares for us.

It is so amazing that it is difficult for us to accept that God cares for us. Our faith waivers not so much at His might, but at His love. Once we come to believe in it, this fact is of great comfort. We can be confident that His greatness will be brought to bear on matters that effect our welfare (See Psalm 62:11-12).

That He cares for us also creates a great potential. It means we are really cared for in a way that is far beyond what we could possibly do for ourselves. His knowledge far exceeds our own and enables Him to bring His power to bear on both dangers and opportunities that we know nothing about. Obedience to this verse is part of humbling ourselves. We have not “humbled ourselves under the mighty hand of God” until we have entrusted Him with the things that we feel we must control in order to survive, or be happy, or be successful or any of the other things that drive us in this life.

## **5:8—“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”**

Yet another time in his letter Peter summons the readers to what he calls soberness (see 1:13; 4:7). It is a call to behave circumspectly, considering the consequences and things at stake in the matters around us. Similarly, he summons us to alertness. He wants us to be aware and in tune with the Spirit so that we are aware of our enemy’s presence and the dangers he sends our way.

The devil is our adversary. He opposes us. His desire therefore is to harm us and orchestrate difficulty for us with regard to all that God is seeking to do in us and through us. The imagery of the lion is powerful. He is prowling, roaring, and aggressive. In that he is on the prowl, we can never think he does not notice or will overlook our movements. In that he is roaring, he is intimidating, feeling threatened and ready to attack. Some have interpreted this roaring as teaching that Satan is only capable of intimidation. But a lion who is roaring should not be viewed as somehow less dangerous. A lion roars when threatened and when cornered by that which he feels threatened by. It is true that Satan wins often by intimidating. But we must not imagine he cannot harm us.

Peter says that the devil seeks to devour. He is not in the business of just making life difficult for people. He is in the business of destroying them, taking away their lives and ministry if possible. We are vulnerable to him and create opportunity if we leave the boundaries of truth. This is illustrated well in the classic story Pilgrim's Progress. The enemy is pictured on a chain just short enough so that he cannot reach and harm those on the path. However if they leave the path they fall victim to him. It is a good picture of our needing to be alert to our own ways. In the final analysis this is all we can do. We cannot know his ways. If we walk in the pathway of truth we will be saved from his every scheme. Peter will speak next to how we can ensure our own safety.

**5:9—“But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.”**

The tactic that protects us from the devil is for us to resist (James 4:7). Much has been written over the centuries about renouncing Satan, rebuking him, binding him, and so on. We must remember that these are effective because they are a means of resisting him. Resistance was the tactic employed by Christ (Luke 4:1-13, Matthew 4:1-11). We stray from the path and become victims when our resistance creates superstition and superstitious routine about what we must do to keep ourselves and those dear to us safe. We can easily become unsettled in our faith and fall victims to Satan through such fear. Instead our routines are to be founded on truth and we are to be firm in our faith in that truth. Faith is always a matter of knowing and believing. It is knowing and believing against all the doubt that is a product of our own analysis and the analysis of evil people.

Peter cites one thing we are to know, the common experience our fellow-believers are having in this world. We are to know that trouble is simply a part of living this life as we are called to live it. What we experience in terms of trouble is common. Nothing has gone wrong and nothing has spun out of control. In fact, the expected and predictable has happened. Trouble is in its own way a confirmation of truth. We must remember this today, living in a pragmatic culture where what yields a desirable result is embraced as truth. We must embrace what revelation says is true. Truth, symbolically represented in Scripture as light, is our greatest asset in overcoming the obstacles placed in our path by the evil one.

We must avoid superstition in this matter. Among the heathen much attention is given and effort expended to cope with evil spirits. When we embrace ideas about Satan and demons that are beyond revelation we unknowingly give him greater power. Truth sets us free. Bacon wrote, “The master of superstition is the people, and in all superstition wise men follow fools.” That is a correct observation. We are mastered by what we believe to be true. We must be alert and circumspect so that we embrace as true only that which in fact is true. In this habit and practice we find protection.

**5:10—“And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who calls you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.”**

We are never told by Scripture that our protection against the evil one assures that we will not suffer harm. We are in a battle and we will be wounded. We will suffer pain. There are limits imposed on that suffering by God Himself.

Here He is called the God of all grace. He is the giver of favor as opposed to the author of trouble. When trouble comes into our lives it is governed by His grace. He only allows what He imparts grace to overcome. Our suffering is temporary, “for a little while.” Next to eternity it is nothing, though it unquestionably feels like it in the midst of it. In all trial and trouble, we must remember it is for a “little while.” That is one of the hardest things to do. Our days are limited. But we are destined for eternal glory. We have been summoned there by the king of the universe Himself. There is nothing and no one that can prevent our arrival there.

Peter speaks of four things God will do to make sure we get through the world we are in and get to that for which we are destined. He will perfect us. He will provide what is lacking in us, and help us to be all we need to be to answer the challenges of this life. He will confirm us. This means He will do what needs to be done to assure our status and privilege. He will not cast us off. He will at every turn embrace us as His own. He will strengthen us. He will impart to us what we need to rise to the challenge of each moment. We need not ever be concerned about power and adequacy. He will establish us. These things God will do. All of this implies safe arrival at a point where we are no longer threatened

To this end we embrace what is referred to in theological terms as the “perseverance of the saints” and “the security of the believer,” and “eternal security.” We view these words spoken by Peter and the testimony of other Scripture as teaching that God has called certain individuals to His family and there is not a person or force that can thwart what He has sovereignly declared to be true of His adopted sons and daughters. They are His and cannot be taken from Him either by the act of their own will or that of another. They will come to faith in Him and to the point of embracing the gospel, by the work of His grace. He and his grace will never fall short of achieving what He Himself set about to do.

### **5:11—“To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.”**

These are fitting words to follow what Peter has just stated. God’s goodness and grace are such that His rule is desired by any and all who begin to imagine the nature of things once His rule is actually established. His subjects have benefited so much already; what will be the outcome for them once opposition to Him is finally removed? Who would want such a rule to ever end: This then is a statement of the hope that Peter has continually reminded His readers of and it is a statement of worship and submission.

This is a statement that comes only from those taught by the Spirit. It is these who come to an understanding of the truth so that they desire for all time to take their places under the rule and authority of God.

The word “Amen,” meaning “so be it,” is an affirmation of this great desire. It is in us because “He is light,” the truth embodied. We have become convinced that “In Him there is no darkness,” none of the things that take the place of truth or truthfulness. We have the conviction that all that is bad, evil, painful, and sorrowful comes because of opposition to the truth. The light, truth, is what people unknowingly need, yet they love darkness. They suppress truth. Those who by God’s grace come to the light long for that light to burn brighter and to burn forever (see 1 John 1:5-7).

### **5:12—“Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!”**

The concern of every writer in the New Testament was that among human beings a prescribed way of doing things seems always to be altered and changed along the way. This usually happens in the name of “wisdom,” but all of revelation from Genesis to Revelation, repeatedly reinforces the idea that this tendency always is disastrous. The line between willfulness and submission to God’s will is so easily crossed that we must draw the line rather far back. If men like Cain, Saul, Moses, and Solomon could address us they would likely tell us to do exactly what God says and not to settle for what is similar to what He says.

Peter’s purpose was to reinforce a pattern of life. It is the life of grace, experiencing the strengthening favor of God in every moment of every day. The life of grace does not mean a lifestyle where anything goes and no boundaries exist. It is a prescribed way of living, the basics of which have been re-stated by Peter.

We know little about Silvanus, who actually put Peter’s thoughts in writing, expressing the exact message Peter wished to communicate. We believe that this is the same individual who is called Silas in the book of Acts (chapters 15-18), and was referred to by Paul as Silvanus later on (2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1). The Greek used in this letter is high literary style. Sixty two words appear in the letter that do not occur elsewhere in the New Testament. We suspect that Silvanus was an educated man therefore, but here we are told simply that he was a faithful brother. That is a greater achievement than all the letters culture can bestow, to be found faithful. Peter notes that he himself regards Silvanus in this way. This may indicate that others did not and that Silvanus, like the other leaders of the day, was being discredited by some. It could simply be Peter’s personal endorsement of the words Silvanus had written, so that no doubt could be cast on them by anyone.

Peter makes known that the letter was written by he himself through Silvanus. They were his words meant to affirm what was true and command obedience to that truth.

### **5:13—“She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark.”**

There has been considerable disagreement over how this verse is to be interpreted. Most believe that the “she” is actually a church congregation. A relative few presently believe that this refers to an individual. “She” is the rendering of the definite article in its feminine form, η. It could be rendered “the lady.” However, the Greek word for church, εκκλησια, is feminine, and so “the church” would be η εκκλησια. It would be appropriate for an abbreviated postscript in a letter such as this to be worded very concisely. To render it as meaning “the church” is an interpretation that makes sense.

The term Babylon has stirred debate as well. Some believe it is a reference to literal Babylon. There was a significant number of Jews there. It is not hard to envision Peter going there (again, seeking out and going to the Jews first), proclaiming the gospel and establishing a church. But there is strong tradition that places Peter in Rome and makes this term a symbolic term for Rome. This has been embraced by many.

There have been some who make this a symbolic term for Jerusalem. The location cannot be stated with absolute certainty, but most seem settled on Rome. Wherever they are Peter affirms their unity with those he is writing to.

All Christians have this common experience and heritage, that they were chosen together. There is no difference in their value and worth or in their experience of God's grace. Here we see that Peter had built into them an awareness of their fellow-believers in Asia Minor. We should never hold our faith in isolation from our larger family. It is bigger than us individually, and bigger than our particular local church. It is in fact bigger than the particular era we are living in.

Peter then sends greetings from "his son." In all likelihood this is the John Mark of Acts 12:12 and Acts 15:36-41. This was likely the same person who as a young man had fled naked at the arrest of Jesus (Mark 14:51-52). It was common for those who had been instrumental in the development of the faith of younger men to be viewed as their fathers. This reflects the closeness of the relationship between Mark and Peter. Just as Silvanus wrote this letter for Peter, we believe Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark from the accounting Peter gave him of the events, and so that gospel account came to have authority in the Church.

### **5:14—"Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ."**

The normal method of greeting in that culture, the kiss, was to be specially meaningful to Christians. It was to be given with genuinely. It was to be supported and followed up with acts of love. Today our handshake in America, or our embrace, should be an expression of something inside us, not just a formality. That is the nature of Christian community and all of Christian living. We must go beyond expressing our faith and allow it to be authenticated by our deeds. Peter wants their greeting to be unpretentious.

Then Peter concludes with a blessing, a prayer for their peace. They were suffering. Their experience had been described by Peter as a "fiery trial." He has assured them that unjust suffering can be part of God's plan for us just as it was for Christ. We can be at peace in the midst of it, with God and with each other and with ourselves. His prayer for their peace likely includes a desire that their unjust suffering be brought to a close. But to be in Christ is to have the potential to be at peace regardless of circumstances. Yet it is not accurate to say that to be in Christ is to be at peace, for personal peace hinges on one's practice of the faith and one's strength in the faith. So this is Peter's prayer and his desire for them. It is his hope that they would rise to this experience of faith by the power of the Holy Spirit as they followed the counsel of his letter to them.