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The General Epistles of Peter

A Gospel of Encouragement

An Exegetical and Theological Exposition

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1 Peter 1:1-12.

An Affirmation of Hope

We have all found ourselves in situations where we need encouragement. Often people of faith will turn to the biblical narrative, often finding answers to many of our questions through the documented experiences of those many people of faith that it contains. When we encounter the New Testament writings, we find a lot of encouraging instruction in the epistles, particularly those of Paul, Peter, and James. Of the New Testament writers, one of the most encouraging presentations is found in the two small epistles of Peter. Where the writings of Paul and James tend to address significant problems within the churches and provide solutions that are consistent with wise Christian ethics, Peter tends to present his material from the context of the blessings of grace and how those blessings inform the person of faith, offering joy and peace in a world that is antagonistic to the gospel. For this reason, Peter's letters can be referred to as a "Gospel of encouragement." His two epistles contain a complete presentation of the gospel message, and can be used to encourage new Christians as they present the blessings of faith and Christian ethics in a very positive light.

"Peter constructed the message of this epistle by weaving together five primary motifs: the believer's behavior, the believer's unfair treatment, the believer's deference, the believer's motivation by Christ's example, and the believer's anticipation of future glory. The apostle emphasized these themes by using a number of words that occur throughout the document. Taken together the five motifs form the underlying message Peter communicated."¹

1 Peter 1:1. *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,*

The apostle Simon Peter is clearly identified as the author, though the actual original letter was likely penned by Silvanus² his secretary or amanuensis.³ Simon Peter is also referred to in the biblical narrative by the Aramaic form of his name, Cephas.⁴ Note the title Peter used for himself, "An apostle of Jesus Christ", literally means "one sent forth" as a messenger. Though the early Roman Christian ecclesiology limited the annotation of Apostle to those who were

¹ James R. Slaughter. The Importance of Literary Argument for Understanding 1 Peter. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 152 no 605 Jan - Mar 1995, p 75.

² Silas, 1 Peter 5:12.

³ Sargent, Benjamin. Chosen through sanctification (1 Peter 1,2 and 2 Thessalonians 2:13): the theology or diction of Silvanus?, *Biblica*, 94 no 1 2013, p 117.

⁴ Allison, Dale C Jr. Peter and Cephas: one and the same. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 111 no 3 Fall 1992, p 491.

taught by Jesus during His ministry, the New Testament narrative does not make this distinction. Acts 14:4,14 uses the same title for Barnabas, and in Romans 16:7 we find Apostles by the names of Andronicus and Junias. Paul also used the title frequently,⁵ though some argue that Paul meets the ecclesiological definition of an Apostle due to his Damascus road experience.⁶ The biblical definition of an apostle is one who is set apart for the evangelical ministry. One method some authors use to provide the distinction is to capitalize “Apostle” when it is referring to those who received their call to ministry directly from Jesus, Christ.

Like the Epistle of James, this letter was written to a relatively general audience of early Christians, in this case the recipients are identified as those were driven from their Jerusalem homes due to persecution and then spread throughout a vast area of what is now modern Turkey,⁷ a distinct group who were also subject to hatred and persecution in the places they “sojourned” to.⁸ This established a persecuted “diaspora theme at the very outset,”⁹ that will continue throughout the letter. Some of these Christians could have been among the three thousand converted at the Pentecost event,¹⁰ and the two-thousand more who were converted afterwards. However, the majority of the recipients would not have been “immigrants, but resident non-Jews and formerly worshippers of the locally recognized deities.”¹¹ Also, Paul's first two missionary journeys went through Galatia and Asia, the areas that Peter addresses and many of the recipients might have been a fruit of Peter's work.

Since this letter was not focusing on a single individual or single group, it is identified with the General, or Catholic Epistles.¹² The general form and the lack of personal references, like we find in Paul's letters, would lead us to believe that Peter had not been given an opportunity to visit the communities to whom he writes. Some think the letter was written from Rome since 5:13 refers to Babylon, a common first-century Christian metaphor for Rome.¹³ However, the early

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:7-9 e.g.

⁶ Acts 9:3.

⁷ Scharlemann, Martin Henry. An Apostolic Salutation: An Exegetical Study of 1 Peter 1:1-2. *Concordia Journal*, 1 no 3 Jun 1975, p 108.

⁸ Hiebert, D. Edmond. Designation of the readers in 1 Peter 1:1-2. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 137 no 545 Jan - Mar 1980, p 66.

⁹ Tite, Philip L. The Compositional Function of the Petrine Prescript: A Look at 1 Pet 1:1-3. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 39 no 1 Mar 1996, p 49.

¹⁰ Acts 2:41.

¹¹ Edgar Krentz. Creating a past: 1 Peter and Christian identity. *Biblical Research*, 53 2008, p 41-57.

¹² Hebrews; James; 1-2 Peter; 1,2,3, John; Jude; and some hold the Revelation also to be a general epistle.

¹³ Catholic Tradition holds that Peter spent his last days in Rome, martyred by Nero, but there is no evidence of this other than in anecdotal histories by early Christian writers. However these writers are respected enough to lend credence to the theory.

Christian historians, and the biblical content and scholarship all fail to place Peter in Rome at any time in his life.

The general Roman persecution of Christians started in AD 64 under the Roman Emperor Nero after the great fire in the city, an event that Nero blamed on the Christians and Jews.

“The overwhelming majority of these people occupied an inferior economic position. They endured many restrictions, including limitations in intermarriage and commerce, succession of property and land tenure, voting, taxation, and tribute, and they were subject to severe forms of civil and criminal punishment. In addition to slanderous assaults by their neighbors (2:12, 3:9, 16), these believers endured the suppression, indignities, lack of privilege, and general malevolence of the Roman political machinery.”¹⁴

This letter appears to be written during this era. The general theme of the letter seems to be one of encouragement¹⁵ and it serves as a strong affirmation of hope at a time of persecution. It is a declaration of Christian strength, perseverance, courage, and hope in the face of a world that is actively working to diminish or destroy the Christian message. Consequently, the content of this letter is as important today as it was in the early church as the intensity of persecution of Christians is greater today than at any other time in Christian history.¹⁶

The letters of Peter, along with the accounts of Peter's experiences in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, give us a quite detailed account of Peter's personality and theology. His is one of the best examples of what happens in one's life when one truly gives their heart and life over to the LORD. Peter's life is really divided into three parts: (1) prior to meeting Jesus, (2) the period of Jesus' ministry, and (3) the period following Jesus' resurrection and ascension. During the first period he was known by his given name of Simon and along with his brother Andrew and his friends James and John, he was a hardened Jewish fisherman who worked the Sea of Galilee. His period with Jesus was a time of learning; a time where his impetuous and strong, prideful personality was quite evident. He was often the first to speak, the first to lead, and the first to let his deep sense of personal pride and confidence get in the way. His natural gift of leadership was shaped by his learning from Jesus during this second period of his life.

¹⁴ Slaughter, James R. Submission of wives (1 Peter 3:1a) in the context of 1 Peter. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 153 no 609 Jan - Mar 1996, p 65.

¹⁵ Winbery, Carlton L. Introduction to the first letter of Peter. *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 25 no 1 Fall 1982, p 3.

¹⁶ At the time of this writing, a Christian is martyred somewhere in the world at an average of every five minutes. More Christians have been killed for their faith in the last 50 years than were killed in the sum of all the previous years since the Church was first formed. *Christian Freedom International*.

The third period of his life really started when he submitted to the Holy Spirit who came and both informed and empowered his learning following the resurrection of Jesus. God used Peter's dynamic personality and skills to shape him into the premier theological leader among the Apostles, and though Peter still struggled with many issues during his ministry, he serves as an encouragement to us as we all encounter similar struggles. We find an entirely different Peter in his letters than we found in the earlier Gospel narratives. Yet, this is the same man, a man who came to fully trust in God and allow his life to be used of God for any purpose. We can learn a lot from Peter's life through the Gospels, through the Acts of the Apostles and through his letters to the Christians scattered throughout the region of Asia.

1 Peter 1:2. *who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.*

Peter described the state of those to whom he writes as chosen, elect, or destined, a reference to God's eternal knowledge and acceptance of those who have placed their trust in Him, an acceptance that was declared as far back as God's promises to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and the infant nation of Israel. Paul often used similar words to refer to God's omniscience.¹⁷ The Greek term that Peter uses, *prognoson*, does not carry the idea of supernaturally predetermined or prophesied behavior, but rather alludes to God's complete and eternal knowledge of that behavior. The word refers to God's omniscient knowledge of all things, past, present and future, and His omnipotent power as it is He who is sovereign, establishing by His own choice the means of the salvation of mankind. God does not manipulate man's behavior in order to save them, but rather gives man a free choice to reject or choose him by faith in response to the gentle prompting of the Holy Spirit's call as He chose to sanctify those who turn to Himself in faith and trust.

We find in this verse that God has a very specific purpose for His choice, that those who He chose would be sanctified: the consecration or dedication of the individual by being set apart from this wicked world for a relationship with Him, profitable for God's kingdom purpose, and resulting in a changed life and a resulting maturing pilgrimage towards the final goal of an eternity with God in heaven. Note that the Holy Spirit does the actual work of sanctification, not us. We are called to obedience, called to live a life that serves that purpose of sanctification. Peter maintains this central theme of obedience throughout the

¹⁷ C.f. Romans 8:29, Ephesians 1:4-5.

letter.¹⁸ Yet, since the Holy Spirit does that work of sanctification, we are not able to point to our own good works and claim that we have set ourselves apart and accomplished any form of righteousness on our own.

Peter clearly states that the power behind this work is the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary. The "sprinkling of blood" is a direct reference to the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy seat or on the people by the ancient High Priests of Israel,¹⁹ an act that had one purpose: to identify the forgiveness of sins that comes only through the obedient act of sacrifice.²⁰ This ancient practice was established and ordained by God as an illustration of the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ that would serve this same purpose for all people who would turn to Him in faith. The graceful gift of forgiveness comes only through the atoning death of Christ.

Some deny a Trinitarian view of God's total person because the word *Trinity* is never used in any English translation of the biblical narrative. However, this verse is one of many biblical references to the identity of three unique persons of God, a position held and written of by each of the New Testament writers, as well as taught by Jesus Christ Himself.

Peter closes this salutation with a prayer similar to that used in all of his and Paul's letters. It reflects a desire on the part of the writer that the recipient of the letter experience the fullness of the grace (*charis*) and peace (*eirene*) of God. Such fullness can only be found in a life that is given totally to God, a fullness that God promises to all those who place their trust fully in Him.²¹

It may be instructive to note that the word *charis* is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew term for *grace*, and the word *irene* is a Greek term that is usually translated as *peace*. By choosing these two words the writers have formed a bridge between the two cultures that are included in the membership of the Church of Jesus, Christ.

AN AFFIRMATION OF BLESSING

1 Peter 1:3. *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*

¹⁸ Agnew, Francis H. 1 Peter 1:2 - an alternative translation. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 45 no 1 Jan 1983, p 68-73.

¹⁹ Exodus 29:16-21, Leviticus 1:5,11; 3:2,8,13; 3:13; 4:6,17; 5:9; 7:2; 14:51; 16:14-19; 17:6; Numbers 18:17; 19:4.

²⁰ Hebrews 9:13.

²¹ John 10:10.

The introduction to this letter is strikingly similar in both structure and content to introductions in 2 Corinthians 1:3-11, and Ephesians 1:3-14,²² pointing to a shared source such as a document or the use of the same amanuensis. Peter starts with an exclamation of praise or blessing to God. Why would he be moved to do this? Peter lists five motives behind his praise as he testifies to the tremendous blessing that God has provided for those who trust in Him.

1. God's character is that of great mercy. None of us deserves God's love, nor any blessing from Him in any way. The human race has insulted God by failing to hold Him in the awe that the LORD of creation deserves, preferring our own concept of Him that serves to meet our own self-fulfilling viewpoints. The lost have rejected His offer of grace completely. Even the faithful have consistently denied His true immensity and grandeur, preferring their own minimal definition of God that allows them to retain their pride and arrogance, picking and choosing their own theology. We have all lifted ourselves up, as if we are better or more deserving than others, making little gods of ourselves. As we lower God and raise ourselves we come to treat God as our colleague in the religious enterprise, and justify all manner of sinful behavior that is characterized by our own self-serving motives. Why would God reach down to such a self-centered and arrogant people? God loves us despite our sin, and it is only because of His great mercy that He extends grace to us, seeking to establish a love relationship with us rather than seeking to grant us the eternal judgment that we truly deserve. Without God's mercy we are all doomed to an eternity separated from His love and grace. However, because of God's mercy He provided a way for us to have a saving relationship with Him.

2. We have been given new birth. Without exception, every person made their original entrance in this enterprise of life on their own terms, heading in a direction opposite of God's purpose for us.²³ An adjustment in our heading simply would not work. The Old Testament describes how we cannot follow a different heading on our own, as we simply cannot live a sinless life. God points us to the way of righteousness through His law, but try as we might we always choose our own pathway. We simply cannot keep every tenet of God's Law, and to break any tenet is to be a lawbreaker. Jesus described how we must be born first of water, the natural childbirth process, and then of the Spirit, a rebirth that comes only from placing our faith and trust in God.²⁴ Those who have made that choice to follow God have been given a new birth, a completely new start. That new birth, a birth of the Spirit, occurs when one comes to the LORD in faith, and the

²² Scharlemann, Martin Henry. An Apostolic Descant (An Exegetical Study of 1 Peter 1:3-12). *Concordia Journal*, 2 no 1 Jan 1976, p 9.

²³ Romans 3:23.

²⁴ c.f. John, Chapter 4.

Holy Spirit comes to reside in their hearts for eternity. His presence serves as the mark of faith when one comes to the LORD in the final judgment.

3. We have been given a living hope. Without God there is no hope after this life for anything other than separation from Him for eternity, a state that the scriptures describe as hell, with the most graphic and agonizing language available to describe it. There are no words to describe the horror of an existence where the Holy Spirit has been totally removed and satan reigns with utter impunity. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit gives the faithful a real and true hope for eternity that transcends simple knowledge. It is a hope that lives within us. It is a hope that has the power to carry us through tough times and tough experiences. It is a hope that carries us over the deadly chasms of false doctrine. It is a hope that leads us through the experience of death with the peace that comes from the surety of the knowledge of the blessed eternal home that awaits us.

4. We have been given forgiveness through the cross. Paul taught us, in the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans, that God has revealed His righteousness to all people, and that all people are keenly aware of their own unrighteousness. Consequently all people are responsible for their choice to rebel against God. Later in the letter Paul states that, because of this, all people have sinned and fall (not fell) short of the Glory of God. Because of our sin nature, none of us deserves a relationship with a perfect, righteous, and holy God. The only possible way for us to have a relationship with the LORD is for us to receive forgiveness from Him, something that we have no power to attain on our own, and something we will never deserve because of our continued sinfulness.

Peter uses a reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the proof that God has an eternal plan for those who place their faith and trust in Him. Jesus, through His crucifixion, performed the sprinkling of His own blood upon those who place their faith and trust in Him so that forgiveness would be found. Forgiveness only comes through the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross.²⁵

Though others profess to believe in systems of religion that seek to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, there are many who reject the true nature of God by rejecting the nature of Jesus Christ: His deity, and the power of His resurrection to bring forgiveness of sin. The distinction of Christians is found in their acceptance of God's plan, by faith: a plan that included the descent of YAHWEH, Jehovah, from heaven in the man, Jesus²⁶ who then communicated

²⁵ Hebrews 9:22.

²⁶ John 1:14.

the gospel message and performed the final sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. God's plan is simple: He has provided that forgiveness to all who will place their faith and trust in Him, and by so doing, are placing their faith and trust in Jesus as LORD (YAHWEH) Jehovah, King, Messiah, and Judge. Muslims and most Jews profess to worship God, but they reject God's offer of forgiveness through Jesus Christ, and because of that rejection, they remain unforgiven. Paul agrees with Peter when he states that if we will confess Jesus as our own LORD and place our trust in the resurrection, then we will be forever saved. It is through that profession of true faith in God that eternal forgiveness is found and not through any additional work, rite, process, or system of extra-biblical beliefs.

1 Peter 1:4. *and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade -- kept in heaven for you,*

5. We have been given an eternal inheritance. Though the word *family* is not used, the concept is implied through the use of the word "inheritance." Though we may place great interest in the subject of inheritance if we are children of wealthy parents, we are still not even close to realizing the importance that ancient Jewish culture placed in the practice of family inheritance. We think of inheritance as a one-time material windfall, and many families fight in court with one another in order to maximize their slice of the pie. The ancient Jews defined themselves by their far broader understanding of inheritance. Disbelieving in any afterlife or resurrection, they felt that their only permanence, their only future after death, came through the process of inheritance. Consequently, they lifted the state of their ancestors to a level approaching worship, not dissimilar to pagan religious practice, and looked toward being treated with this same deference after they die.

The landed Jews also defined their world by their land, a land that was provided to them by God when Joshua led Israel across the Jordan River and into Canaan, and maintained the identity of that land in their families through a formal process of inheritance. So when Peter uses this word, it really serves to draw the immediate attention of his Jewish readers. As important as their physical inheritance was, it was still subject to the vagaries of this world's intrigue. An inheritance could be stolen, bartered, or given away.²⁷ Today an inheritance can be lost the same way. Consequently, Peter's description of the inheritance we receive from God is significant in its permanence.

- **First, it cannot perish.** It is not subject to death or decay, a characteristic of all of the things of this world.

²⁷ Genesis, Chapter 25, e.g.

- **Second, it does not spoil.** Literally the word refers to a cleaning stone that is used to clean fabric. The inheritance does not weaken or become defiled by the stain of sin.
- **Third, the inheritance does not fade.** This word refers to the state of an olive branch crown won by athletes that only withers soon after it is worn.
- **Finally, it is not up to us to keep the inheritance,** a practice that was idiomatically referred to as “burying one’s father.”²⁸ The inheritance of the faithful is kept in heaven by God Himself. Our sinful nature prevents us from being able to keep the inheritance ourselves.²⁹ The word *kept* is in the perfect/aorist tense, identifying action that has already taken place in the past, still continues, and will continue to hold true in the future.

AN AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

1 Peter 1:5. who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Here Peter further assures us³⁰ of the integrity of our inheritance. It is by faith that we are saved, and it is through God’s power that our salvation is maintained to the end of the age. A Roman soldier typically did not wield his own shield. He had a shield-bearer who would be focused upon incoming threats while the soldier’s hands were free to wield his offensive weapons. Peter makes reference to the shield of faith as that weapon held up by the LORD that serves to protect us. The LORD is our shield-bearer. God uses His own power to protect our inheritance until we finally receive it. Martin Luther wrote "A Mighty Fortress," a poem that illustrates God’s defense of our faith using the metaphor of an impregnable stronghold.

1. *A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
our helper he amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
doth seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.*

2. *Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,
were not the right man on our side,
the man of God's own choosing.*

3. *And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God hath willed
his truth to triumph through us.
The Prince of Darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo, his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.*

4. *That word above all earthly powers,
no thanks to them, abideth;
the Spirit and the gifts are ours,
thru him who with us sideth.*

²⁸ c.f. Matthew 8:21, Luke 9:59.

²⁹ John 14:1-5.

³⁰ Horrell, David G. Whose Faith(fulness) Is It in 1 Peter 1:5? *The Journal of Theological Studies*, ns 48 no 1 Apr 1997, p 114.

*Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabbaoth, his name,
from age to age the same,
and he must win the battle.*

*Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also;
the body they may kill;
God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever.³¹*

God has a plan for us. Peter identifies that our salvation in him is eternally secure, and God will keep it until the end time when it will be revealed to all.

1 Peter 1:6. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

Continual Rejoicing. Peter notes that true and lasting joy is found in an understanding that our salvation is protected by the LORD Himself as He shields us against any power that could take it away. This joy is neither past, present, or future, but is a continuing process that informs and strengthens us in times of difficulty.³²

Tried by Fire. Peter's theology cannot be separated from the consequences of the discrimination and oppression that faithful Christians face at the hands of a secular, pagan, and evil culture.³³ Peter's concept of faith was not based on a "pie-in-the-sky" theology. He did not teach that one's coming to faith would bring with it a life of leisurely bliss and prosperity. His own experience shaped in him an understanding of the "here-and-now" real-life dimensions of the Christian faith. His is a realistic view. First, we do have reason for rejoicing because our inheritance is eternally secure. However, coming to faith will bring with it a life view and behavior that is in conflict with that of this wicked world, a conflict that will only increase dramatically as the world slips further and further into ungodliness. If one's faith is lived out without compromise, it will contrast sharply with the pagan and godless world in which we live, a world that detests and seeks to destroy anything that is different or outstanding. Because of this, the faithful will always suffer conflict, persecution, and tribulation as they interact with this wicked world. However, Peter understood that this experience will be short because this life on earth is short. Compared with the blessing of an eternity with the LORD, these few days we spend on earth are short enough to almost dismiss.

The word rendered *trials* in itself identifies that this conflict is not without God's ordinance. This word refers to the process of purifying metal by placing it in a

³¹ Martin Luther. The New Hymnal for American Youth. Trans. by Frederick H. Hedge

³² Martin, Troy W. The present indicative in the eschatological statements of 1 Peter 1_6,8 The *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 111/2. 1992, p 314.

³³ Kirkpatrick, William David. The theology of First Peter. *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 25 no 1 Fall 1982, p 59.

fire, burning away the dross and leaving the material cleansed. When we look at these trials in this context, we can understand better how Paul taught that these trials would serve God's purpose to make us more like Christ,³⁴ and James,³⁵ taught that these same trials can even produce joy when we submit ourselves to their true purpose, knowing that the period of trial is short, and we have the sustaining hope of a future reward.³⁶

1 Peter 1:7. *These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

Faith's nature. We may have a simplistic definition of faith, thinking that is something that we chose for ourselves, by our own power, and serves only to promote our soul to salvation. This is not faith. This is religion that carries no more power or value than the individual who holds to it. In fact, true faith itself is empowered by the Holy Spirit, and so empowered, carries with it a value and purpose beyond anything of this world. Peter describes the value of your faith in a comparison with gold, arguably considered the most valuable commodity of their day. Not only is the value of faith immeasurably beyond that of gold, it is eternal where even all the gold (in California?)³⁷ will some day perish. Furthermore, gold only to bring honor and use to those who own it. Genuine faith serves to praise and honor Jesus Christ, and in this way the true value of faith is found.

1 Peter 1:8. *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,*

Peter further describes faith in a manner similar that the description we find in Hebrews 11:1.³⁸ How do you love and believe in something or someone whom you have never met? An individual recently asked of me, "You don't really believe all of that gobbledygook in the Bible is true, do you?" I was able to give a short testimony of the nature and power of faith. Faith is a choice, and faith in God is a choice that is empowered by the Holy Spirit, a power that is only fully found when we turn control of our lives over to God.

³⁴ Romans 8:28-29.

³⁵ James 1:3 ff.

³⁶ Martin, Troy W. The present indicative in the eschatological statements of 1 Peter 1:6, 8. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 111 no 2 Sum 1992, p. 312

³⁷ Apologies to Larry Gatlin and the Gatlin Brothers Band.

³⁸ "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

How can you love Jesus without meeting Him as Peter had done? Like faith, the expression of love is also a choice, and expressing the unconditional love of the LORD is a choice that is empowered by the Holy Spirit. Knowing the resurrected Jesus is to know that He is alive, He has returned to His place in Eternity as Jehovah, that He loves us, and is preparing a place for us for when we leave this world and enter eternity to be with Him. It is easy to love one who loves us, and Jesus loves us more than we will ever fully come to understand.

A full knowledge of this love gives us a joy that knows no worldly equal. It is a joy that transcends circumstance, even the circumstance of death. Unlike faith and love that are choices, joy is a product of the blessing that comes from that faith and love, a gift that God has given to us as a small reward for our faithfulness. However, the greatest reward is yet to come.

1 Peter 1:9. *for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

The greatest reward of faithfulness is the salvation of our souls. It is interesting to note that the Greek grammar is clear and unambiguous in the verb tense that he uses. Peter did not say you have received the goal. He does not say that you will receive the goal, an argument that is used by those who profess that one can lose their salvation. Peter clearly states that the faithful are in a continual process of receiving the goal of faith: salvation. The salvation of the faithful is possible only because of the forgiveness that is given by God to all who truly place their faith and trust in Him, given through the authority of the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and that forgiveness is an on-going process. Having received forgiveness, we find that we are forgiven for the sin that we continue to commit every day. Sin has lost its power to separate us from God,³⁹ though it certainly affects our relationship with Him and our relationship with others. Death has lost its victory over the faithful; satan is ultimately defeated. The faithful are now part of the family of God, the New Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ, and no power on earth or in the earth can take that away.⁴⁰

AN AFFIRMATION OF GRACE

1 Peter 1:10. *Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care,*

³⁹ Romans 8:1.

⁴⁰ Romans 8:38-39; 2 Timothy 1:12.

Biblical prophecy in the Old Testament referred to two primary subjects: Israel and Christ. The profound majority of biblical prophecy describes in amazing detail the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as well as His purpose of providing a permanent remedy for sin. We find these prophecies throughout the Old Testament, included in the books of Psalms, Daniel, and Ezekiel among others. Even the tenets of Mosaic Law, particularly those establishing celebrations and sacrifices, were formed within the context of God's purpose in the coming Messiah, and contain a great deal of Christological prophecy.⁴¹

The prophets inquired diligently as they sought anything they could glean from sacred texts, the testimony of other prophets, and of course, the Spirit of God. How many of these prophets lived to see their prophecy fulfilled? Very few prophets experienced the vindication of their faithfulness.⁴² Consider the rejection and ridicule many endured because of their faithfulness to speak the truth to a people who wholly rejected it.

1 Peter 1:11. *trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.*

Just as many search today to find a date upon which we can expect the second coming of Christ to take place, the ancient prophets and rabbis searched the resources that they had with the intention of determining when the Messiah (Christ) would come. There was no little controversy among the rabbis of when this would take place. One of the great paradoxes of Old Testament Christological prophecy referred to a seeming impossibility: Referred to as the "messianic paradox," three different prophets declared that the Messiah would rise from three different places. He would be born in the City of David (Bethlehem),⁴³ would come out of Egypt,⁴⁴ and would be a man of Nazareth of Galilee (a Nazarene).⁴⁵ This paradox stumped the early Jewish rabbis as they tried to interpret the prophesies based upon their limited world view, a view that was not illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Upon Jesus' birth we found how these prophesies were all fulfilled when Jesus was born in Bethlehem because of the Roman Census, He came out of Egypt because of the Herodian exile, and was a

⁴¹ Note that some make passionate arguments that the prophets that are cited here are not Old Testament prophets, but rather, contemporary prophets. However, it is the position of this author that those same arguments that are used to pose the latter position may also be used to argue the former. C.f. Warden, Duane. The prophets of 1 Peter 1:10-12. *Restoration Quarterly*, 31 no 1 1989, p 1-12.

⁴² Some prophets who did experience some fruit of their prophecies include Noah (flood), Jonah (salvation of Nineveh), Jeremiah (fall of Judah), John the Baptist (coming of the Messiah).

⁴³ Micah 5:2

⁴⁴ Hosea 11:1.

⁴⁵ Matthew 2:23.

Nazarene because the village of Nazareth was his family home, chosen because of its safe distance from Jerusalem's zealots.

The purpose of biblical prophecy is to prepare us to recognize when God's purposes are fulfilled, but they do not inform us of when they will take place. Prophecy gives us the opportunity to recognize what God is doing, not to ascertain when God will do it.

We still have many would-be prophets who try to declare their secret knowledge concerning the date and time of the second coming of Jesus, Christ, and often their false prophecies lead to embarrassment at best, and sometimes mass suicides at worst. What differentiates the modern day "prophets" who make predictions and those Old Testament Prophets? Many of the Old Testament prophecies have come to pass, and those prophets who were describing the identity, nature, and purpose of the Messiah are proved 100% accurate! What does the accuracy of these prophecies imply about those prophecies which are not yet fulfilled? We can trust that what the Bible states about the end of the age is true and reliable. We can stand on that, alone, and not be swayed by those who offer an alternate viewpoint.

1 Peter 1:12. *It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.*

The prophecies were not written to instruct those who have rejected God, but rather to encourage and prepare those who have placed their faith and trust in Him. They were not written for those who are self-serving individuals who would use them to manipulate others for their own personal gain. Peter identifies that the work of the prophets were intended for his readers, quite a novel idea to the Jews who left the prophecies to the rabbis and scribes, considering the Christian cult to be entirely outside of the prevue of their religion. Likewise the entire biblical content was not written for interpretation only by the school of priests, theologians, pastors, or ministers. The contents of all Holy Scripture was written for all those who would trust in God so that all can know the purpose, nature, and assurance of their salvation. John wrote,

1 John 5:13. *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.*

Peter writes to give his readers the assurance that they also would know that their salvation is secure. When John wrote, he used a word for *know* that refers

to uncompromised certainty. We can know *for certain*, without any shadow of doubt, that the gift of eternal life is, indeed, eternal.

The grace of God that was foretold by the prophets was first experienced by the early church and continues today. The prophets could not fully understand God's grace as it would be dispensed through the blood of Jesus Christ. It was not until Jesus came and shared the gospel of Grace and then demonstrated that gospel on the cross could we fully understand God's purpose.

Like the prophets, we have been given the opportunity to learn God's plan and purpose for mankind. Peter makes an interesting comment about angels. We may recall from Jesus' interaction with demons that satan has no power when confronted by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit chases demons away just as light chases away darkness. God created man higher than the angels. Humans are not struck powerless when confronted by the Holy Spirit: they are empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is satan, a fallen angel, who is struck powerless when confronted by a person of faith who is fully submitted to the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works a radical and positive change in the lives of those who place their faith and trust in God. This is a privilege that even the angels cannot fathom.

Why did Peter add this little point? The church was being told by false prophets that they could lose the salvation that God had given them when they first professed faith and trust. Some even taught that they had already lost it. Peter wrote this passage to remind us that our salvation is securely held in the hands of God. We have been given a gift that even the angels cannot fathom, yet He has revealed Himself and His purpose to us so that we can fully understand His purpose.

God does not want his children to be covered by a spirit of fear. Christian hope is the opposite of despair. Christians are the recipients of the grandest good news that has ever been told. Let us not let any person, any group, or any teaching dissuade us from the wonderful truth that God's promise to eternally save those who trust in Him is sure and reliable. We can know for certain that we have eternal life. Let us never fail to praise God and thank Him for this wonderful gift.

1 Peter 1:13-25.

The Best Is Yet to Come

Most of us have had the opportunity to travel in an airplane to a distant location and return. When we do this, we find that air is not as solid a surface to travel on as is the interstate. The wings of the plane are shaped so that the air pressure passing under it is much greater than that passing over it, providing enough lift that it appears that the plane is being held in the air on a solid surface. However, the amount of lift is determined by the very dynamic variables of air speed, humidity, and density. When the plane encounters a sudden headwind or denser air, the additional lift causes the plane to quickly rise, giving us the impression of a bump. When the plane encounters a sudden tailwind or less dense air, the decreased lift causes the plane to quickly drop, giving us the impression of a hole. Swirling winds can make the plane jump around as though it is traveling on a bumpy road, and the ride can be quite uncomfortable, and for some, the turbulent ride can be frightening.⁴⁶

We may occasionally encounter a flight without turbulence. However, most flights will at some point become bumpy, and the pilot will request that everyone remain in their seats and buckle their seatbelts. The pilot may ask the travelers to raise their seats to its upright position, raise their tray tables, and stow any gear if the turbulence is expected to be particularly rough.

The ride that we experience here on the ground seems to have its own share of turbulence as we navigate the eventful bumps and potholes of our lives. The Apostle Peter knew first-hand the many and varied experiences of life that make for a bumpy ride. He experienced the mountaintops of miracles and the valleys of betrayal, rejection, and persecution. Just as the pilot warns us of upcoming turbulence, Peter gives us a similar warning that life is full of bumps and potholes. It is time to buckle our seat belts because there is turbulence ahead, but only for a short while.

After all, God's ultimate purpose for us is not that our life be characterized by chronic turbulence:

Jeremiah 29:11. *For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. (NASB)*

⁴⁶ For those who do not fly, simply consider a springtime drive across the roads of Pennsylvania! Apologies to the PADOT.

God's purpose for us is to ride out the turbulence with Him so that we can learn and be strengthened in Him as he gives us an ever-increasing strength with which to meet the future, a future that we can look forward to with confident hope. However, to receive the blessings that God has planned for us, we find that we must submit our hearts and minds to the LORD as we rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide us.

Certainly Peter knew the mountains and valleys of this dynamic life and experienced the dramatic power of the Holy Spirit to change his life, giving him hope for a new and enriched future, both in this life, and in eternity. Peter gives us encouraging, paraenetic, instruction on how to position ourselves to receive the blessings that God plans for us.⁴⁷

POSITION YOURSELF FOR GOD'S BLESSING

Strengthen your Mind-set.

1 Peter 1:13. *Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;*

Note the first word, "therefore/wherefore." Peter has just given a synopsis of the gospel. Consequently, these words are Peter's advice for all of us upon receiving the blessing of the gospel message into our hearts. His message is appropriate both for those whose faith is new, and for those who have been in the fellowship of believers for many years as all Christians seek the fullness of blessing that God promises to those who place their faith and trust in him. Turning to the LORD in faith does not remove all of the bumps and potholes from our journey, but faith does position us to receive strength, direction and purpose when turbulent times come.

His first advice refers to establishing a mental attitude. To gird one's loins is to take action to prepare for a coming task. The words are from an Aramaic idiom that refers to tucking the rear hem of one's robe into the front of the belt, turning the robe into a pair of short pants, allowing one to run.

To gird up the loins of your mind, immediately suggests the Passover state of being prepared to move at once and in great haste. The words are reminiscent of Exodus 12:11, "In this manner you shall eat: your loins girded, sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand . . ." At the same time,

⁴⁷ Dryden, J de Waal. Refined by fire: paraenetic literary strategies in 1 Peter. *Tyndale Bulletin*, 55 no 2 2004, p 317-320.

though, they also recall the words of the Lord to His disciples in Luke 12:35: "Stand with your loins girded and your lamps alight."⁴⁸

We often give away control when presented with an immediate crisis for which we are not prepared, like a driver giving away control in an automobile prior to a crash. We are advised to prepare for action. How do we do this?

First, Peter refers to a mindset that is sober. We are not to be T.U.I., or *thinking under the influence*. Our responses, thoughts and intentions are to be under the influence only of the wisdom that comes from sensitivity to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. We are to be proactive rather than reactive, that is, we are to be motivated out of godly purpose rather than selfish reaction.

As we find ourselves responding to the issues of life, we have a resource from the gospel that is impossible to truly attain anywhere else: hope. As we journey this road of bumps and potholes, we have the hope of knowing that God plans the best for us, so we know the best is yet to come.

As we prepare ourselves for what God has in store for us, Peter reminds us that this preparation involves more than just our mindset. It also involves a preparation that is evident in our life style.

Straighten Out Your Life-Style.

1 Peter 1:14 *As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:*

If we are bringing our mindset under the influence of the Holy Spirit, then it is necessary that we bring our behavior under that influence also. Our behavior is the primary expression of our thoughts and attitudes. If we submit our behavior to the power of the Holy Spirit, there will be a transformation as the call to Christian life summons each believer to a new freedom. The Holy Spirit sets one free from the destructive desires and lusts for this world. Those things of the world that were so important prior to submission to the LORD become simply a vague memory as those old desires are replaced by a far higher desire and calling, a calling that we were not even aware of until God touched our hearts. Paul describes this new freedom when he writes,

⁴⁸ Scharlemann, Martin Henry. Exodus Ethics: Part One--1 Peter 1:13-16. *Concordia Journal*, 2 no 4 Jul 1976, p 166.

Romans 12:2. *Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

When we contrast a life of disobedience to God with one of obedience we can easily envision the character of both. A disobedient life will be filled with strife and chaos as one steps out of God's hand of protection and brings all manner of ungodly events into an uncontrolled life. By choosing obedience, we reject the power of the lusts of the former life and choose to reside securely in God's hand of protection, as His Spirit guides us away from destructive behaviors to those that bring true peace and joy into our lives.

Be Holy.

1 Peter 1:15-16. *But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; ¹⁶for it is written: Because it is written, "Be ye holy; for I am holy."*

How do we live a life of obedience that rejects the lusts of the old life and embraces the future of blessing that God promises? Peter immediately answers that question by defining the nature of the redeemed life: holiness. Prior to your decision for faith, you were without holiness. Your attitudes and behaviors were centered around your own purposes and desires and you were united with the spirit of this world. However, upon turning to God in faith, God calls upon us to be holy. Unlike any other in God's creation, man was made in His image as a spiritual being, and has the unique capacity for holiness. "The exhortation calls for transformation. They should no longer be conformed to their previous desires; instead, they should be conformed to the holiness of God."⁴⁹ Holiness literally refers to one's choosing to be separated from this godless world, and dedicated or consecrated wholly to God's service.

What that means is that Christians must become holy, as God is holy. Not "holier than thou," in the sense of a kind of moral superiority over their benighted neighbors, still locked in their pagan darkness. But "holy" in the sense that God is holy, separated from all evil and injustice. Such holiness is to penetrate into every corner of their lives. No room here for compromise with an oppressive popular culture—every activity of the Christians' lives is to reflect that holiness, every activity is to be different from their former lives

⁴⁹ Barbarick, Clifford A. 'You shall be holy, for I am holy': theosis in 1 Peter. *Journal of Theological Interpretation*, 9 no 2 Fall 2015, p 292.

when they shared the ignorance of God characteristic of their non-Christian contemporaries.⁵⁰

Holiness is not a piety that is demonstrated by false humility or adherence to iconic religious rites. Holiness is demonstrated in a sincere submission of one's heart and mind entirely to the service of God. When one is demonstrating holiness one brings every property of this life under God's authority, including our possessions, our work, our relationships, and our very life. If any good work or godly behavior comes from a life of the faithful believer, it is a fruit of that faith, not of holiness.

Peter quotes from Leviticus 11:45, God's statement to the people of ancient Israel as God gave them instruction in obedience. This statement is not a suggestion or an idea: it is an imperative. It is a command. God has the authority and right to define holiness, and He also has the right to demand it. Why does God demand our holiness?

- We are called to be his children, and we reflect Him to others. What kind of a reflection are we when we demonstrate unholiness?
- We are called to be learners, and must submit to His will and His word in order to be teachable.
- We are called to be disciples, recognizing by the very concept of discipleship that we are to mature in Him so that we can improve the quantity and quality of service to him.

Some may argue that we, because we are originally "children of the flesh" and are all unable to fully shed our sinful attitudes and actions, will never be able to achieve a state of "holiness." However, this position simply is not true because God demands holiness. God has commanded us, as His obedient children, to dedicate ourselves completely to Him and maintain our focus on His will for our lives. He has demanded that we willfully separate ourselves from the secular, pagan, evil and base culture of this world and join Him as His children in His kingdom. God does not require us to do or accomplish anything that we cannot do when we are submitted to Him. Consequently, with a desire for obedience to the LORD that inspires holiness we may find some guidance from Peter on how we can do this.

Live in Awe.

⁵⁰ Achtemeier, Paul J. 1 Peter 1:13-21. *Interpretation*, 60 no 3 Jul 2006, p 307.

1 Peter 1:17. *And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear:*

How do we find empowerment to become holy? Peter instructs us first to call upon the Father. Note that we are to relate to God in this context as His children. God is our Father; a father who judges and has the authority to carry out his judgment. Our Father has the authority to judge us and to hold us responsible for our actions and attitudes. This One to whom we submit our heart and mind is the same One who created this universe. He is not our “buddy” nor our “co-pilot.” He is our LORD.

Peter also reminds us that we are simply sojourning here. We are on a journey that is taking us from birth, through rebirth in Him, through death, to the glory of His eternal presence. If we truly recognize God for who He is, we will travel this bumpy road with great awe of who He truly is. We understand that God receives us as we are, and that truth alone should be enough to sober us. Consequently, as we journey through this life we should understand the glory of God and approach Him with an attitude of overwhelming appreciation, humility, awe, and reverence.

RECEIVE HIS BLESSING WITH CONFIDENCE

You were redeemed by Christ.

1 Peter 1:18-19. *Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; ¹⁹But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:*

Peter urges us to remember how we got to where we are in our Christian faith. Prior to coming to the LORD in faith, we were under the authority of this world, The word “ransom/redeemed” used here comes specifically from the slave markets as the price paid to redeem a slave, making him a free man. From what have we been set free? Peter refers to our bondage to the futile ways inherited from our fathers, a bondage that immerses us all in a state of sin. The Greek word for “futile” is quite graphic. It refers to a “fumbling, groping life which makes no effective contact with reality and whose mournful verdict at the end must ever be in vanity.”⁵¹

⁵¹ Archibald M. Hunter.

Furthermore, Peter reminds us that the price paid for our redemption was far more valuable than silver or gold. Buying and selling humans for money is degrading. How much money are you worth? As much as we may think that gold and silver are of great value, you are worth more to God than the sum of all worldly possessions of this world. God paid for your redemption from slavery to sin's authority with the very death of Christ himself. It was a tradition even in the pagan religions that when one was ransomed, a sacrifice would be paid. John referred to Christ as the Lamb of God, the paschal lamb, the lamb of sacrifice that was to be without blemish or flaw.⁵²

God's Purpose is Eternal.

1 Peter 1:20. *Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.*

Does it not almost seem arrogant to think that the eternal Creator of this entire universe, who established the purpose for the universe before He created it, would reveal Himself in this way to our insignificant population on this insignificant planet?⁵³ The error of that thinking is simply a rejection of the importance that God places in His plan and purpose for His people. We are not insignificant because God considers us the "crown of His creation,"⁵⁴ and did so even before He formed the universe. Obviously Peter considered the first generation of Christians to be recipients of the best good news that people had ever received. This good news is a part of God's eternal plan, a purpose that transcends anything that this temporal world has to offer.

Your Faith and Hope are in God.

1 Peter 1:21. *Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.*

What do people who do not know God truly hope for? All that is available to those who have rejected God is that which is left when we take God out of the universe: the things of this world. Before we knew God, we had no hope beyond what this world could give us. We had no value beyond that which we could accumulate in this world. The ultimate futility and vanity⁵⁵ of a worldly hope is obvious. This is why God came and touched our lives: so that through Him we

⁵² John 1:29.

⁵³ John 1:14.

⁵⁴ Psalm 8:1.

⁵⁵ Ecclesiastes, Chapter 1.

would have a hope that is beyond the things of this world: a hope in Him for a blessed eternal life.

SHARE HIS BLESSING IN LOVE

Love is to be shared.

1 Peter 1:22 *Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:*

Having been renewed of mind, and redeemed of spirit, Peter now gives us our marching orders. We are to declare who we are by our uncompromised obedience to the truth. The word for purify, *hagnizo*, refers to making thoroughly clean something that was once soiled. Its grammatical verb tense refers to an action that has already taken place. The faithful have been purified by the blood of Christ, forgiven of their sin, and accepted before God. Objects are purified for a purpose, and once purified we strive for obedience to Him; we seek to maintain that purity. That purpose is to be holy:

- be separated from this world,
- love each other unconditionally,
- love God, and
- live an holy lifestyle without compromise.

In this process of purification we are set free from the worldly vanity and self-centeredness that burdens us, weighs us down, and holds us back.

In Him we can love each other with an “unfeigned love.” How does Peter describe that love? The word for “unfeigned” is *anhypocritos*, or “without hypocrisy.”⁵⁶ The word for love is *phileo*, that strong brotherly love that we naturally share with friends and family. Consequently, that love is to be expressed without any form of hypocrisy. Peter’s second statement about love uses the word, *agape*, the unconditional love that comes only from God. This love is to be willfully and deliberately expressed with sincerity, with fervor, and is absolutely unconditional. *Agape* is not a passive love, but one that deliberately acts upon circumstances with care and compassion even when those circumstances would tend inspire us to do otherwise.

We are not only to love one another (which is often expressed in *phileo*): we are to be “friends to the friendless and helpers to the helpless” because of the

⁵⁶ See Romans 12:9.

unconditional nature of true *agape* love. If there is any condition that causes you to fail to express sincere love for another, that love is not *agape*, but rather a worldly *phileo* love that you choose to dispense to others based upon your own preferences and prejudices. Paul referred to the priorities in the trilogy of faith, hope and love.⁵⁷ Peter reiterates the same thesis in these verses.

Love is from God's word.

1 Peter 1:23 *Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*

Here Peter refers to the description of salvation used by Jesus, quoted in John 3:3 and 3:7. This is yet another way our identity as the children of God is fully affirmed. Peter clearly believes in the initial, new-birth experience of redemption. He sees it as a life-changing experience that continues to inform and positively influence the believer's whole life as the years unfold. Note, also the metaphor used here as to the source of our inheritance. God is literally our Father, as we are from His seed. If this is true, our inheritance is literally imperishable because God is imperishable. We are each an eternal child of God, either obedient or disobedient.

Peter holds that the power of our salvation stands upon the foundation of the Word of God.

Love is Eternal

1 Peter 1:24 *For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:*

Man considers himself and his self-importance or self-authority to be significant, yet he is weak, spiritually powerless, and temporal when contrasted to that which is of God and eternal. Our greatest worldly accomplishments can at best gain little more than a footnote in a history book. In what ways is mankind's insignificance often displayed? All people, including the greatest and most respected and most powerful men (and women) all die, and are then forgotten. The quote is from Isaiah 40:6-9.

1 Peter 1:25 *But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.*

⁵⁷ See 1 Corinthians 13:13.

God's eternal word that Isaiah wrote about is the same good news of Christ. This truth purifies the souls of believers and sets them free from the condemnation for sin and from selfishness so that they truly may love one another and receive the blessings that God intends. This verse speaks to the eternity of God's word, or God's true authority. In the words of Martin Luther,

***"Let good and kindred go. This mortal life also.
The body they may kill. God's truth abideth still.
His kingdom is forever."***⁵⁸

In order to survive and carry on a redemptive ministry, Christians still need a firm mind-set. As in the first century, our time calls for deep thought and direct action in demonstrating a genuine Christian lifestyle. The true and uncompromised expression of Christian faith should help us to work through what is sometimes called an identity crises that many contemporary people experience. God has a plan for us that is well-worth considering:

Jeremiah 29:11. For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

So, the obligations grace brings with it are themselves an expression of that grace, since they indicate God's desire that Christians be involved in the new kind of world that He will bring into existence with the return of Christ, a world that God is in fact already bringing into reality with the global influence of an obedient Christian community. Christians are not to be mere bystanders, passive observers of the world around them. They are to participate actively, to be partners, active partners with their Holy God, in realizing the gracious covenant God has already established through Jesus Christ.⁵⁹

We may experience a great deal turbulence in this life as a result of our sin and the impact upon us that the sin of others can have. However, when we place our trust and our life in the hands of God, seeking His plan and purpose for our lives we find that God intends for each day to be better than the day before it as we grow closer to Him and leave further behind the ungodly attitudes and desires that have for so long vexed us. We are reminded by Peter that we have an opportunity to position ourselves for God's blessing by bringing our mind and heart under His authority as we set ourselves apart for His purposes. Only until we do this will we realize the fullest measure of His blessing that we are then to share one with another. The journey may be bumpy now, but the best is yet to

⁵⁸ Martin Luther. "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." 1528.

⁵⁹ Achtemeier, Paul J. 1 Peter 1:13-21. *Interpretation*, 60 no 3 Jul 2006, p 308.

come. This is a message that is more than worth considering. This is a message that demands our all.

1 Peter 2:1-10.

The Royal Priesthood

It is easy to take a close look at the state of the world today, and come away with a doom-and-gloom scenario. When we consider the pervasive success that is evident in the power of sin to control and manipulate our general population and its leaders, we could find its devastating impact on society to be quite depressing and discouraging. In the first chapter of his letter to the first-century Christian churches, Peter presented them with a message of encouragement, reminding them that though the consequences of sin do impact their daily lives, and may do so quite dramatically, there is no reason that they need to feel defeated under its burden. Instead of living lives of fear, hopelessness, and despair, faithful Christians have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to be lifted out of the miry clay, the muck and mire⁶⁰ of this world and live above it, standing upon God's promises as His grace and love emboldens the love of those who trust in Him. That trust brings with it a promise of an everlasting salvation and blessing beyond anything this world can even begin to comprehend.

That trust brings with it another blessing that much of the world misses: personal and direct access to the LORD of the universe; access to God; access without the need for a human mediator of any kind. All people inherently realize the holiness of God and the extent of our natural sinfulness,⁶¹ and so we as a species have spent the generations seeking ways to become good enough to be accepted by such a powerful and holy God. Religions have been formed through man's creative gifts, religions that work to make people righteous enough to enter into the presence of God's throne of grace. However, there is no religion of man that can remove the stain of sin from our lives. All people are characterized by sin,⁶² and that sin serves to condemn us to eternal separation from a Holy God.⁶³ God is not expecting people to clean up their lives so that they can be worthy to stand in His presence. Such a task is impossible for man because no man can live a sinless life. Access to God can only be provided by a work of God, not a work of man: a work of God that demonstrates His grace that "while we were sinners,"⁶⁴ God provided a way.

Peter is writing to the early church, particularly to those churches that he has not had an opportunity to visit. He writes in order to encourage them and help them to understand the blessing of the Gospel. He has declared to them the gospel of

⁶⁰ Psalm 40:2.

⁶¹ Romans 1:19-20.

⁶² Romans 3:23.

⁶³ Romans 6:23.

⁶⁴ Romans 5:8.

grace and now presents a discussion of how one is to live once grace has been received.

1 Peter 2:1. *Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,*

The word rendered, “wherefore” clearly attaches this sentence with the previous discussion. Peter is describing the difference in character of one who has accepted the LORD in faith from one who has not.

Laying aside. Peter refers to the cessation of ungodly attitudes and behaviors as though we simply take hold of that which we already possess, lay it on the ground, and walk away. The word carries the idea of taking off a heavy coat or cloak that covers us, and by laying it down, we are freed of its weight and the oppressive discomfort that it is inflicting upon us. To lay something aside also carries the idea that it will never be picked up again. When one lays the burden down, one is forever freed of its insidious and intrinsic power. Peter is clearly noting that the items to follow are to be deliberately laid down and left behind.⁶⁵

All malice. Malice is literally a desire to see harm come to others. The foundational characteristic of a life that is fully submitted to the Holy Spirit includes the uncompromised and consistent expression of unconditional *agape* love. If one is committed to this type of love, there is simply no circumstance for desiring another’s injury. An *agape*-based desire for others is identical to the *agape*-based desire that God has for those whom He loves. *Agape* love never desires that another would come to harm. Any time we would think we love others, yet could desire their harm, such love is *phileo*, not *agape*. *Phileo* is the world’s conditional love that has no need for the Holy Spirit. The faithful can be vigilant to assure that *phileo* love does not replace *agape* love in their hearts. There is simply no appropriate place for any form of malice in the life of a faithful believer.

And all guile. To practice guile, is to practice deceit, the intentional misdirection of others. Again, there is simply no place for a spirit of deceit in one who is expressing their faith through *agape* love. One who truly loves does not desire to deceive others or to propagate any form of untruth. Such a desire is unholy, and only serves self. Like malice, it seeks to hurt others rather than to edify others. There is simply no appropriate place for any form of guile in the life of a faithful believer.

⁶⁵ C.f. Philippians 3:8.

Hypocrisies. We may be reminded of Paul's admonition to "Let your love be without hypocrisy."⁶⁶ Hypocrisy is the profession of a faith or belief that one does not truly hold and is formed from the Greek word *hupokrisis* which means to "play a part" as an actor does on stage in front of an audience. Hypocrisy is evident when one claims to demonstrate *agape* love in their life without the intent or power to do so, and instead their lives are limited to *phileo*. Others can observe this form of hypocrisy instantly when one demonstrates a lack of unconditional love in any way. People can perceive when an individual claims to be godly, but lives a life that demonstrates consistent acts of ungodliness. A heart that is sincerely submitted to God recognizes the damaging testimony that hypocrisy produces and seeks to maintain a consistent witness, finding encouragement when that testimony is full of *agape*, and discouragement when it is consistent with only a conditional *phileo*. There is simply no appropriate place for any form of hypocrisy in the life of a faithful believer.

Envies. Envy is simply the discontentment that arises from a desire to possess something held by another. Envy is wholly self-seeking. An individual who experiences the pain of envy fails to fully appreciate the immeasurable blessings that the individual already has been given by God. Rather than express a spirit of thankfulness towards God, this person resents having not received from God something that God provided for someone else, and maybe did not intend for the complainer. Envy focuses on the possessions of others rather than the glories of God. Envy is not founded on unconditional love, but rather on one's desire for personal gain. *Agape* love cannot inspire envy since its expression would always be expressed in the celebration of another's blessings. There is simply no appropriate place for any form of envy in the life of a faithful believer.

Evil speakings. This may be one of the most predominant sins in the life of our Christian community, and the one that is the most difficult to control.⁶⁷ Unholy speech, speaking in an unloving and uncaring manner, is empowered by those thoughts that enter our minds and are then spoken without applying the filter of godly wisdom. If you truly love another without condition, you would never speak unkindly of the one loved, and would tend to give a defense when another speaks unkindly. This should be the character of a person of faith. You may have heard the testimony of another who says, "I never heard him/her say an unkind word about another person." Because of the *agape* love that is to characterize the life of the faithful, this should be said of every believer. There is simply no appropriate place for any form of evil speech in the life of a faithful believer.

⁶⁶ Romans 12:9.

⁶⁷ James 1:26, 3:5-8; 1 Peter 3:10.

1 Peter 2:2. *As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:*

Peter is writing to the early church, a community that includes both new and mature believers. The early church lacked many of the written resources and the large community of learned biblical scholars we now possess, having to rely predominantly on the testimony of the few more mature believers in order to understand the doctrines of the faith and how they relate to that which some of those who have an Old Testament background might understand. Note that Peter is writing to communities that are not predominantly Jewish.

Peter first refers to the freshness of the faith that comes with the original knowledge of God's personal purpose for the believer. The faith of one who comes to the LORD may be powerful and complete, but that individual still has much to learn about the details of God's purpose. A true believer will yearn to know those details, whether a babe in Christ, or a seasoned veteran of the faith. The desire in a believer shifts from a desire for the things of the world, things that Peter has just mentioned, to things of God. New believers (and old) should desire to intimately know the basics of the faith, finding these basics in God's Word and in submission to learning opportunities with more knowledgeable Christians.

When Peter uses the word, "word," he is referring to more than just the written Old Testament. His understanding of the Word, the *logos*, includes the power that the word has to produce change and to characterize the nature of the One it describes. Peter can confidently state that the Word, the *logos*, is expressed fully in Jesus, Christ.⁶⁸

Peter concludes, as he has experienced in his own life, that a steady and sincere learning of the nature and purpose of God leads to spiritual growth: a growth that is necessary and expected of every believer. Sometimes we may think that our task is done when we have brought someone to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The truth is that the necessary work has just begun. Jesus commanded us to make disciples,⁶⁹ people who are learners, by immersing them in the knowledge of God. This is an on-going task, not a singular event. God's purpose for the believer is that the individual will grow in knowledge of the Word, and grow to a continually closer relationship with Him. Growth in the faith is essential in the life of a Christian.

1 Peter 2:3. *If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*

⁶⁸ c.f. John 1:1-14.

⁶⁹ Matthew 28:18, ff.

A foundational doctrine of the Christian faith is that of the infinite and loving grace of God. The word, “tasted,” is important and is used in a similar sense in other New Testament scriptures.⁷⁰ When one is young in the faith they have come to both understand and experience the grace of God. All mankind deserves eternal separation from God because of their bent to sin. God chose to grant an undeserved gift when He provided a way of salvation, taking upon Himself at the Cross of Calvary the punishment for sin that we all deserve.

We are reminded by the writer of Hebrews that one can taste the truth, yet still reject it, and a rejection that is taken to the grave results only in eternal separation from God.⁷¹ Tasting is the beginning of experience, not the end. In the original language, the idea is that to taste something is to completely experience it, and having done so, make a judgment that results in a decision. I have tasted liver, and I have no intention of ever tasting or swallowing any form of liver again. I have no intent upon repenting of my rejection of liver. However, if you allow me to taste chocolate, I can assure you that it will be fully and joyfully consumed and I will always be in a position to experience it again. Just like we can fully consume the chocolate, we can fully embrace the grace of God, accepting it fully and completely. When we do this as a babe in Christ, our faith is empowered to grow.

Peter makes it clear to his readers that they have all tasted the graciousness of the LORD. They have fully experienced it, and are able to make a judgment on how they will respond to it. They have received God’s unmerited favor. They can all choose to grow in their faith in and knowledge of God, though some may choose to reject the offer of salvation that comes through faith in God.

1 Peter 2:4. *To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,*

The power for growing in the faith is not predicated on one’s own effort, but rather on the power of the Holy Spirit working in the center of a submissive heart. “To whom coming,” uses a continuing sense of “as you are coming.”⁷² The “stone” is a single stone that, with others, forms the wall of a building. “This idiom ... connoted permanence, security, dependability, and where God was known as rock and fortress.”⁷³ This is the beginning of Peter’s⁷⁴ use of a stone building as

⁷⁰ Matthew 27:34 - Jesus tasted the gall but would not drink.

⁷¹ Hebrews 6:4-5.

⁷² Psalm 33:6.

⁷³ Minear, Paul Sevier. The house of living stones: a study of 1 Peter 2:4-12. *The Ecumenical Review*, 34 no 3 Jul 1982, p 241.

a metaphor for God's working in the life of a faithful believer. God is the builder, and it is He who is doing a work in those who trust in Him. We should not continue without noting that this stone metaphor finds its source in the Old Testament, and Peter makes liberal use of the texts. Furthermore, Peter is referring to Jesus' reference to himself as the fulfillment of the prophet's writings that made reference to this stone motif.⁷⁵ So whether we are observing the stone metaphor in the Old Testament or the New, Jesus is ultimately its source.⁷⁶

The phrase, "living stone" is certainly a play on words, an oxymoron that pairs together two words that are seemingly opposites. Stones have no life. "This says something about Jesus that can be said no other way. In Him, the Living Stone, are vitality, life, energy, growth, and movement. Only the phrase 'living stone' can accurately describe our great Cornerstone."⁷⁷

We are accustomed to building a wall using bricks that are pre-formed and pre-shaped. The art of building ancient stone walls involved the skillful selection and shaping of the stones by the builder. It is in this way that God is shaping each person, cutting away that which is no longer edifying (building up) leaving behind that which God can use for His purpose. This implies the necessity for submission to the hammer of the builder, a hammer that can serve to cut away the malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy, and evil speech, among other ungodly behaviors that so vex the spirit of man.

When the ancient builder inspects stones, he makes a distinction among them, accepting those that will serve his purpose and rejecting those which cannot. The living stones to which Peter refers, the community of faithful believers, find that they are chosen of God, precious for the building of the edifice. The word for "precious" is literally, "well-hewn," consistent with Peter's metaphor. However, this living stone, unlike the dead stones of this world and their mythical and powerless gods, has been consistently rejected by the pagan and secular builders of this world. It should be no surprise to the faithful that they find rejection at the hands of man.

Peter clearly notes that *the* living stone was rejected by men,⁷⁸ an outcast.⁷⁹ "It is significant that Peter did not limit the rejection of the Christ, the living Stone,

⁷⁴ Peter's name is a form of the Greek word for "stone," and its assignment to him by Jesus would serve to inform his understanding of the metaphor he is using. Mark 3:16.

⁷⁵ Matthew 12:10-11.

⁷⁶ Oss, Douglas A. The interpretation of the 'stone' passages by Peter and Paul: a comparative study. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 32 no 2 Jun 1989, p 183.

⁷⁷ Draper, Jimmy. Living stones. What did Peter mean? *Biblical Illustrator*, 43 no 1 Fall 2016, p 6-9.

⁷⁸ Psalm 118:22; Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:11.

⁷⁹ Gupta, Nijay K. A spiritual house of royal priests, chosen and honored: the presence and function of cultic imagery in 1 Peter. *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 36 no 1 Spr 2009, p 71.

solely to the Jewish people. To be sure, he had stressed the fact of Israel's rejection of Christ in his sermon recorded in Acts 3:14: 'But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you.' However, in 1 Peter 2:4 the apostle stated that the ultimate responsibility for turning away from the living Stone rests with the entire human race, not just the Jewish people: He was 'rejected by men.' ⁸⁰

1 Peter 2:5. *Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*

The building that God is erecting, stone by stone, has a definite and important purpose. Each stone is selected, hewn, and placed at the appropriate point in the structure to accomplish that overall purpose: the formation of a community of the faithful, the house of the LORD. Since the concept that the church is a building "was commonly accepted in early Christianity, then it is only a short step to view the members of the community as the stones which compose it." ⁸¹

The "lively" stones, those who place their faith and trust in God, are called by Him to an holy priesthood. The ancients had a very well-defined understanding of the position of the priest. The priest was ordained by God to bring sacrifices for the people. God set the priests apart to a special ministry. In the early years of the nation of Israel one of the twelve tribes, the Levites, were to serve as priests. These served as a mediator between the nation and God. According to the Mosaic Law only members of the tribe of Levi could serve as priests and conduct priestly duties. Any time someone from outside the tribe took upon himself the work of a priest, severe judgment fell upon the transgressor. For example, Samuel prophesied Saul's fall from his position as the anointed King of Israel following his choice to take upon himself the reserved role of the priest and offering a burnt sacrifice. ⁸² Even the King of Israel was to leave the priesthood to the priests.

The age of the priesthood came to an end with the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the open access to the Holy of Holies that took place during that event. Access to the Holy of Holies ended with the final destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 A.D. The system of Temple sacrifices came to an end, and were never again requested by God. The metaphor of the presence of God within the walls of a Temple was no longer needed. Jesus served as the final sacrifice, and through the coming of the Holy Spirit, the heart of the believer became His

⁸⁰ Howe, Frederic R. Christ, the Building Stone, in Peter's Theology. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 157 no 625 Jan - Mar 2000, p 39.

⁸¹ Best, Ernest. 1 Peter 2:4-10: a reconsideration. *Novum testamentum*, 11 no 4 Oct 1969, p 280.

⁸² 1 Samuel, Chapter 13.

Temple.⁸³ Every faithful believer now has full access to God in the same manner of an ancient Aaronic or Levitical priest, and the presence of the Spirit in their hearts also gives them the same resources of an ancient prophet of the LORD.

All who truly place their faith in God have all of the *personal* “rights and privileges” of a priest. This represents a completely new order of priesthood. This new priesthood should not be confused with the ordination of church leadership into positions that we refer to as priests, pastors, etc. “The faithful are priests unto themselves and of themselves, whereas the ordained priests have other responsibilities beyond those received by all at baptism.”⁸⁴

The priesthood of the believer is intensely personal. Christians pray directly to God, and have no need for a mediator. Jesus died on the Cross of Calvary to bring complete forgiveness to all who place their faith and trust in Him, and by so doing God opened to them the door to the throne room of heaven. At Jesus’ crucifixion the veil of the Temple was torn,⁸⁵ symbolically providing this access to the most holy place to all who would enter. Prayers offered up directly to God are acceptable to Him, as is the individual who is offering the sacrifice of prayer.

Another function of the Priest was to offer up sacrifices for the nation. Even the Levitical and Aaronic priests were given the sole responsibility to offer up sacrifices for the nation, for the community where they were engaged, and for themselves. Likewise, Peter notes that the faithful are also called to offer sacrifices. However, the sacrifice that Peter refers to is not characterized by the killing of animals and the shedding of blood. “If we consider the overall impression 1 Peter makes, then it is clear that it is not particular rites that are the focus of attention, but rather the totality of Christian living which ought to glorify God”⁸⁶ Peter is in agreement with Paul as the latter Apostle states the same truth apart from the priestly metaphor:

Romans 12:1. *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

⁸³ 1 Corinthians 3:16.

⁸⁴ Chrysavgis, John. The royal priesthood (2 Peter 2:9). *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 32 no 4. Wint 1987, p 373-377.

⁸⁵ Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45.

⁸⁶ Hill, David. 'To offer spiritual sacrifices' (1 Peter 2:5): liturgical formulations and Christian paraenesis in 1 Peter. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 16 Oct 1982, p 45-63.

“In a word the type of spiritual sacrifice which Paul calls for here is obedience. There is no priestly ministry by the individual believer on behalf of anyone else. The act of obedience is that priestly ministry.”⁸⁷

The writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews presents the same truth from a slightly different perspective:

Hebrews 13:15-16. *By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. ¹⁶But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

It is clear that the spiritual sacrifices of which the New Testament writers agree is an intensely personal submission and commitment to the LORD that is evident in the spontaneous presentation of spiritual fruit: good works that come out of a love for the LORD and an unconditional love for others.

Together, the community of the faithful are a priesthood, ordained to love God, to glorify Him, to share the good news of His love with others, and to offer up a lifestyle that is characterized by continual spiritual sacrifice. The initial call of the Levites to the priesthood carried the same responsibilities, including sharing the Word of God with the lost world. Instead, the Israelites kept their knowledge of God to themselves and used it as a barrier to separate themselves from the very world they were ordained to serve.

1 Peter 2:6. *Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.*

One cannot understate the importance of the cornerstone of an ancient building. The artisan spent a good deal of time working on the cornerstone to assure its square angles and its level installation. Once installed, all other stones are laid with respect to the cornerstone, using it to sight the placement of each individual stone for both line and level.

The cornerstone that Peter mentions is a “chief cornerstone.” This does not represent one who is in charge, but rather, it does refer to the type of cornerstone that is used in the construction. We think of a cornerstone as a small marker at the corner of a building that may indicate the intended identity of the building, the date of the construction, and possibly a reference to its builders. Ancient

⁸⁷ Lea, Thomas D. The priesthood of all Christians according to the New Testament. *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 30 no 2 Spr 1988, p 15-21.

buildings were built upon a cornerstone that was hewn with as much precision as possible, laid as level as possible, and often formed a significant portion of the foundation, providing both a square surface to work from and assuring structural integrity. Archaeological digs have found foundation cornerstones as long as sixty feet or more. One such stone has been found that is over 10,000 cubic feet.⁸⁸ This type of stone serves not only as the source for dimensioning the building,⁸⁹ but also provides its solid foundation, supporting all of its walls. In a sandy and arid region, such a foundation would need to be particularly solid and sure.

The cutting and moving of such a stone was a monumental task, giving some context to Peter's description of the stone as chosen and precious, on upon which one can stand without ever being "put to shame." This latter term refers to a lack of structural integrity that would result in a latter destruction of the edifice when it is subject to stress.

Quoting Isaiah 28:16, the prophet points to the coming Messiah as He serves as this type of cornerstone as the foundation of Sion, a reference to the mount upon which the Jerusalem Temple was erected, a reference to the future Temple, the church of Jesus Christ.

"One way of describing the Church is that of a Temple composed of those who are fellow-citizens with the saints and built together into a habitation of God, a building whose corner stone is Jesus Christ."⁹⁰ Peter has given us an illustration of the part that the cornerstone plays in the formation of the building, the church. Each person who has placed their trust in the LORD are one of the stones in the edifice that is placed into position by God; placed into the walls in the place of His choosing based upon the individual's character. The placement of the individual in the church is not only laid in-line with the carefully built Cornerstone, but also the walls of the edifice stand on it. The foundation upon which the walls stand is sure and solid, never to be compromised. Peter makes it clear that the church, the collection of stones in this edifice, are comprised of those who have placed their faith and trust in the Cornerstone, Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:7-8. *Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,*

⁸⁸ Blum, Edwin A. Hebrews through Revelation. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 12.* Frank E. Gaebelein, Gen. Ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. 1981. p. 230.

⁸⁹ Hobbie, Peter H. I Peter 2:2-10. *Interpretation*, 47 no 2 Apr 1993, p 171.

⁹⁰ Marshall, John Sedberry. 'A spiritual house an holy priesthood' (1 Peter ii.5). *Anglican Theological Review*, 28 no 4 Oct 1946, p 227.

The word translated *precious*, may more accurately be translated “honor” or “with honor.” Jesus is certainly precious and holds infinite honor in the hearts of those who have turned to Him in faith. This differentiates those who believe in Jesus and those who have faith in Jesus. Those who have faith in Him stand on the foundation of the cornerstone and have been placed into His edifice by Him. However, the cornerstone also stands to separate those who have faith from those who not. Those who have rejected this cornerstone are building their own edifice on a foundationless pride. The rejected stone is a quote from the Psalms,⁹¹ where the builders reject the very stone that would be the foundational and final stone that completes the structure. The One who those have rejected has become the chief cornerstone. The stone that they rejected is that which holds everything together.

1 Peter 2:8. *And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.*

Peter employs a second illustration from Isaiah’s prophecy⁹² in which those who reject God’s offer of salvation are stumbling over a stone. This word rendered “stumbling” is far more significant than a simple miss-step. It carries the idea of a miss-step that results in dramatic and incalculable injury. Since all have sinned and fallen short of God’s demand of righteousness,⁹³ all of us have initially stumbled. All who reject the Cornerstone have rejected the Word of God and have been appointed by His plan to an eternity that is separated from Him.⁹⁴ Those who reject the cornerstone are offended by it, and by their choice have demonstrated disobedience to the One who loves them and would have them turn to Him in faith and be part of the edifice that He is building. Instead, they build their own edifice, their own religious structures that stand without the foundation of Christ, nor with the hand of His design.

These who have built their own religion apart from Jesus think of themselves as righteous, holy, and priests, but are none of these. Apart from the power of Jesus, these who have rejected the Cornerstone are within the kingdom of the prince of this world and are powerless against his evil intentions. They lack the access to God that they proclaim, and have not experienced the true forgiveness for their unrighteousness that they diligently seek.

⁹¹ Psalm 118:22.

⁹² Isaiah 8:14.

⁹³ Romans 3:23.

⁹⁴ Romans 11:8-11.

1 Peter 2:9. *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:*

The word, “but” indicates a stark contrast between that which has just been said, and that which is about to be said. Where those who have rejected the Cornerstone have set for themselves a deliberate separation from God and His purpose, those to whom he speaks are those who have turned to Jesus Christ in sincere faith and trust. Peter draws from several Old Testament descriptions of the nation of Israel, at least the Israel that God would have planned had they been obedient and faithful to Him.

A chosen generation. God chose to bring to Himself those who turn to Him in faith. Referred to as the *Doctrine of Election*, the salvation of those who trust God takes place only because of God’s work, not man’s; only by God’s design, and not by man’s; only by God’s election, not by man’s. There is nothing man can do to be chosen of God other than turn to Him and accept His graceful offer of forgiveness. Salvation comes from God’s initiative and power, not mankind’s.

A royal priesthood. These are words that would incite the Jerusalem leadership to great anger by assigning to each believer a level of priesthood that even they themselves cannot attain. Up to this point, Peter has been describing the priesthood of the believer as similar to a Levitical or Aaronic priest. However, he now elevates the character of this priesthood to its very highest possible level.

The Levitical or Aaronic priesthood intercedes for the people within the context of the community where they live. These priests are scattered throughout the world-wide Jewish community and are known by their presence in the synagogues. However, the *royal* priesthood is that special subset of priests who have direct access to the king. This level of access is known by only the Jewish high priest, and even he is aware that his access is tenuous. The high priest would enter the Temple Holy of Holies with a rope tied around himself so that if he would be killed by God for his own sinfulness, others could drag his lifeless body out of the room without entering themselves.

Christians have no need for priests to serve intercession between themselves and God. Early church dogma and tradition taught that people were not worthy to be in God’s presence and must rely on those more-righteous priests (and canonized saints) to intercede for them. This gave the church control over its membership, and denied them a relationship with God that He intended. Jesus’ resurrection not only ended the need for a sacrificial system in the Temple, it also ended the need for priests.

Peter clearly teaches that all who have placed their faith and trust in God now have all of the opportunities for relationship with God that the most faithful priest would have. As a “priesthood,” the body of believers is now the school of priests. All have access to God’s throne without any need for an intercessor. Though the faithful should be separated from the throne because of their continued acts of unrighteousness, they find access to God by way of the forgiveness that they have received, a forgiveness that was purchased on the Cross of Calvary.

“Avoiding the very real danger of clericalism, we too must understand that the ministry or apostolate is not the monopoly of the clergy but the responsibility of all. In a sense, the role of the clergy is to help all fulfil this ministry. The lay faithful are not passive members of the body of our Lord — passengers being blindly lead by the driver-clergy or, at most, some kind of “back-seat drivers.”⁹⁵

Another extremely important function of the priest cannot be overlooked. “Believers are a special sort of priesthood that, as privileged as they may be, is commissioned to minister through proclamation God's virtues to the world.”⁹⁶ Though the authority of the priesthood of the believer is a personal one between the believer and the LORD, the believer is still commissioned to serve as a missionary to this lost world, with the mission to share the gospel so that others can be saved.

An holy nation. Israel certainly had a strong nationalistic fervor, recognizing themselves as a nation that was under the authority of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It may be instructive to note that Peter was writing to a group that was a mixed population of Jews and Gentiles, and probably the great majority of these Greek Christians were Gentiles. Peter is using the Old Testament reference to the chosen nation of Israel to describe the now-chosen “nation” of the faithful, those who have turned their heart to God and received forgiveness by their submission to the Messiah, accepting forgiveness that only He has the authority to do. Like Israel, this Holy Nation is to be separate from the world, a nation that falls entirely within the domain of the kingdom of God. Peter did not think of the Church as a replacement of the nation of Israel, but rather its fulfillment.

A peculiar people. Though one can take this literal word, *peculiar*, and correctly apply it to describe the holy nation of believers, this is only a small part of the intent of this word. Those who are of the body of believers should be identifiably different from those in the rest of the world. The ancient Jews were identifiably

⁹⁵ Chryssavgis, John. The royal priesthood (2 Peter 2:9). *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 32 no 4 Wint 1987, p 373-377.

⁹⁶ Gupta, Nijay K. A spiritual house of royal priests, chosen and honored: the presence and function of cultic imagery in 1 Peter. *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 36 no 1 Spr 2009, p 76.

different, but they maintained that difference by adherence to a stringent law that defined and stipulated their appearance and behavior. The faithful are under no such set of laws that would cause them to look “peculiar” to those outside of the faith. Consequently, it is easy for a Christian to set aside their call to peculiarity and mix in with the world to the point that their distinctives as a Christian are almost unidentifiable.

However, when we apply the broader sense of this word, we find that Peter is describing a people who belong to God. If one completely and wholly belongs to God, the peculiarity that this verse describes will be a natural fruit. Christians who are fully submitted to Him will be identifiable, not so much by their physical appearance, but by the unconditional *agape* love that shapes their behavior and forms the context of their relationships.

“That you should show forth ...” God has a purpose for this holy nation that goes beyond the relationship that they have with Him; that goes beyond these distinctives that Peter has just listed. Those who have received the blessing of God’s grace should be overflowing with praise for Him to the extent that their praise is evident to those who are still unrepentant, those who have still rejected the Cornerstone. As they live lives that demonstrate unconditional love towards others, they are showing the love of God which is also unconditional and seeks to bless all who will come to Him.

1 Peter 2:10. *Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy*

A dramatic and identifiable status change takes place in the life of the believer, one that identifies the person in a couple of distinct ways. Referring to Hosea’s prophecies of God’s redemptive purpose for sinful Israel,⁹⁷ Peter implies that this prophecy is completed in the Church of Jesus Christ. Prior to coming to the LORD, Peter’s readers were lost and in darkness as were the ancient Jews, but now the fulfillment of the prophecy has come true. Those who trust in God are the people of God. They are His people, and He is their God.⁹⁸ Those who trust in God have obtained the mercy that Hosea wrote of.

Peter presents the new life in Christ as one of a close and personal relationship with God. Unlike the practitioners of pagan and errant religions that define themselves by their works, their creeds, their systems of authority and autocracy, or by the intermediaries who stand between the rank-and-file members and their

⁹⁷ Hosea 2:23.

⁹⁸ Jeremiah 24:7.

mythical gods, Peter clearly lifts the believer from a state of spiritual poverty and intrinsic valuelessness to the status of the highest order of a royal priest who has unimpeded access to the Throne of God; given fellowship with God, Himself. God desires our hearts, not our work.

With the status of a royal priesthood, Peter also reminds us that the gift of grace comes with the responsibility of conducting ourselves in priestly roles, including leading others out of darkness into God's marvelous light. Many of those in the community of ancient Israel despised God's mercy by preferring to hold on to the godless practices of the pagan world around them, keeping their limited belief in God to themselves, and failing to either draw close to God or fulfill His purpose by sharing His love with the pagan people groups that they encountered. Christians today can learn from their example, as well as by New Testament writings such as this, that salvation brings with it a change that must be evident and expressed in the life of the believer. The royal priesthood stands above the lostness and despair of this pagan world, and works to bring it to the wonderful light of God's grace that seeks to win all people to Himself.

1 Peter 2:11-25.

Citizens of Two Kingdoms

*This world is not my home, I'm just passing through.
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.
The angels beckon me from Heaven's open door
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.⁹⁹*

1. LIVE AS A CITIZEN OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In the previous passage, Peter defined the character of the Christian as a royal priest, one who has close and immediate access to God without any form or need of mediation. One who is a priest not only enjoys access to the LORD but also serves as the LORD's intermediary to those who do not know Him. This responsibility and task necessitates a change in personal character, one that is brought about in the life of a Christian through the power of the Holy Spirit as He communicates His purpose of grace and guides the believer in a lifestyle that is repentant of the sins that define and establish the previous life of darkness.

Peter continues as he describes some of the character change that takes place in the life of a believer when one submits to the LORD.

1 Peter 2:11. *Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;*

This verse starts the second part of this letter. The first part was predominantly theological in nature. The second part is predominantly ethical. Paul does this in his letter to the Romans at 12:1, and in his letter to the Ephesians at 4:1. Ethical demands grow naturally out of doctrinal or theological truth.

Peter notes that as a "royal priesthood" believers are strangers and sojourners in this world. When one travels to a foreign land one retains an identity with his/her home nation, and will usually conduct themselves largely within the cultural mores from which they come, treating any cultural differences between their home and their place of visitation with deliberate note. Though they may learn the language and culture in their newfound foreign land, and seek to appropriate parts of that culture that they can in an effort to establish relationship with the indigenous culture, the "home" of the heart almost always remains with their true citizenship. The faithful Christian believer is a citizen of the Kingdom of God and

⁹⁹ Brumley, Alfred E. (1965), "This World is Not My Home," © Alfred E. Brumley & Sons.

comes fully under the authority of the LORD, and seeks to live a life that is consistent with His Word. This is a culture of faith that is vastly different from that of this secular, pagan, and violent world. Consequently, a faithful Christian truly travels through this world like a stranger in a foreign land, with a sincere desire to remain loyal to the culture of their true home, the newly found Kingdom of God.

Reminding his readers that he loves them, Peter uses a word that is translated, “beseech” (KJV). This is a word that expresses an emphatic desire, as there would be few words that would express the importance of what Peter is about to say. In today’s language we might say, “I am down on my knees begging you.” Peter notes two characteristics that illustrate the relationship a faithful Christian should have with this pagan world.

Stranger. Though we might think of a stranger as someone “strange,” the Greek term has no such negative connotation. A stranger is simply one who is a citizen of a kingdom other than the one in which the observation is taking place. When a Christian considers his/her relationship to this world, there are many worldly authorities that hold appropriate power, including family relationships, relationships with the government and law, its courts, places of employment, etc. The Christian is subject to those authorities just as if he/she were traveling in a foreign land and is subject to those foreign authorities. However, the word also carries with it an implication that the individual retains the characteristics of his/her home nation. There is a distinctiveness in their appearance and behavior that belies their home kingdom.

The word also implies that the individual does not have an intimate knowledge of the land wherein he is traveling. An intimate knowledge comes from completely immersing one’s self in the nature of the new land. Christians are not to immerse themselves in this land of ungodly sin and violence, but are called to immerse themselves in the knowledge of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁰ It is appropriate that the Christian does not sample for themselves every nuance of sin in this world in order to understand it better. Christians are called to a lifestyle that is consistent with the Word of God and with the *agape* love of the LORD. Those ungodly characteristics should not even be of interest to the faithful Christian as they represent sin that is to be completely avoided. One can be a productive stranger in this world and still abstain from its ungodly nature.

Alien/Sojourner. A sojourner is one who is traveling through a community with no intent upon making it his/her permanent residence. Though the individual may adapt to cultural differences in the host community, there is a deliberate intent upon returning to the home of origin. When one approaches a relationship with a

¹⁰⁰ Matthew 28:18, ff.

community with this intention, they are never completely at home, always looking forward to when they will be returning to their heart home.

Peter sets the cultural boundaries around the community of faith as being similar to the boundaries around one who is visiting a foreign land. Remembering the culture from which the person comes, one would not tend to significantly break the mores of the homeland that carries a higher personal authority in their lives. When Peter illustrates the ungodly behaviors of this world, it is obvious that these behaviors are not to be found in the life of a person of faith.

Prior to reviewing Peter's imperatives it may be instructive to recall that the Bible is not a book of law to those who are faithful in the LORD. The Bible contains law that exposes, convicts and condemns sin as it illuminates the lostness of those who reject faith in God. However, once one turns to God in faith, the individual is no longer condemned by the law since Jesus' death on the cross paid the penalty for all of their sin. The relationship of the scriptures to one who is faithful changes from a condemning book of law to an illustration of godly living as the content and nature of the law has moved from written pages into the heart and mind of the believer. Consequently, when Peter (or any biblical author) writes about ethical issues he is presenting an illustration of what a godly life looks like and not setting down a set of rules or a new law.

Abstain from fleshly passions. The continuing Greek verb tense of the word translated *abstain* means "keep on abstaining." It is important to note the encouraging verb tense that implies Peter's understanding that his readers are already abstaining from sin, and this tense serves to congratulate them on their success.

When an individual is living a life under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, one will be characterized by continual abstinence from passions of the flesh that are literally waging war against our souls. Rather than being bound to the Law, the Christian is continually led of the Holy Spirit away from behaviors that are not appropriate for a person of faith, encompassing all worldly (or ungodly) behaviors including those that are not addressed in the Law. Peter uses a catch-all phrase, "fleshly passions" to refer to those behaviors that are contradictory to godly living. When a Christian engages in such sinful behaviors, an immediate conflict arises between the soul of the believer and the Holy Spirit that is contradicting the soul's base desires.

Fleshly passions are the natural fruit of a life that is not tempered and shaped by the power of the Holy Spirit. Probably the first such passions that come to mind are sexual in nature. However, fleshly passions can also include an excessive appetite of pride, egotism, narcissism, greed, or any other behavior that raises

one's desire to meet selfish needs and desires over that of meeting the needs of others.

1 Peter 2:12. *Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

Maintain sincere integrity. *Good conduct/conversation* refers to a person's total way of life (as opposed to verbal interaction). At the time of this writing, Christians were frequently being blamed for unexplained destructive natural or historical events. For example, it was the burning of the city of Rome that precipitated the brutal Roman persecution of the Christian community that so characterizes that period of history. The early Christian historian, Augustine of Hippo, reports a proverb of North Africa, "If there is no rain, tax it on the Christians."

There is still no shortage of verbal or physical minimization of the faith community by our pagan and secular culture. However, when an individual's life is characterized by uncompromised honesty and integrity in a manner that is consistent with a godly testimony, the accusations fall without substance, subject to the authority of truth. The maintenance of that spirit of bigotry against people of faith will be exposed at the end of the age and those who have held to it will recognize, only too late, the error of their position and the consequence of their choices.

The life of a faithful believer is simply a continuing sequence of good works that are motivated by sincere, unconditional, *agape* love for others rather than motivated by any rule or law. Critics may attempt to stereotype Christians, but a testimony of integrity belies those stereotypes through those works of the Spirit.

Peter sees two responses of the unbeliever to the observation of such godly integrity: (1) Pagan observers will see the true nature of God through the example of the faithful Christian, and (2) pagan observers will have a context within which to respond to God through the Christian witness. When a Christian is open to compromise and hypocrisy, failing to live a life of integrity, the lost and secular world will find no such image of Christ, and their criticism of Christianity is enabled. Such hypocrisy is a reproach of the gospel and serves only the purpose of satan as he seeks to minimize the Christian witness. However, a life of purity can influence others, and often in times of need those others may turn to the one they find they can trust, only to find the true One in which they can share their trust.

2. LIVE AS A CITIZEN IN THE KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD.

1 Peter 2:13. *Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority,*

Though Peter describes the Christian life as that of an alien or sojourner in a foreign land, he also reminds us of the need to recognize and properly respond to the authorities in the community within which we live. Peter again uses a very strong phrase that is rendered using a common Old English idiom, “*for the LORD’s sake.*” The importance of Peter’s coming imperative cannot be understated since it bears upon the testimony of the LORD Himself in and around the community of believers.

Much of the Christian faith is characterized by submission. First, if Jesus is LORD, then the Christian is fully submitted to Him, obeying Him through a sensitivity to the Word and to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The word that is rendered *submission*¹⁰¹ is to voluntarily give control of one’s self to another for the benefit of both.

Having been reminded of the necessity of submission to the LORD, Peter calls for a similar submission to the authorities that have been instituted among men. We may find this call to good nationalistic citizenship to be contradictory to citizenship in the Kingdom of God, but such a conclusion, though logical, is neither spiritual or biblical. Those who reject worldly government for the sake of the kingdom of God are rejecting God’s Word, His Sovereignty, and His Lordship. They are also rejecting God’s call to missionary service in the strange land as they choose to separate themselves from an appropriate position of influence in the world culture.

Paul also expressed this identical imperative in his letter to the Romans.¹⁰² One who stands in rebellion to man’s instituted authority severs his communicable relationship with that authority and abdicates any ability to serve that community as God’s priest. Such rebellious behavior damages the testimony of integrity that Peter has just mentioned, and is an embarrassment to God’s kingdom work as He seeks to redeem all people, including the governmental authorities.

1 Peter 2:14. *or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.*

¹⁰¹ *Hypotasso.*

¹⁰² Romans 13:1, ff.

Peter personifies that secular authority at both the top and bottom levels of government, identifying the king who technically controls the entire realm, down to the governors who execute the king's rules and laws in the local communities. Peter states that these authorities are ultimately placed into society by the LORD to provide order in our society that would be completely chaotic and corrupt without it.

How do you reconcile this concept when applied to corrupt governments that abuse their subjects? It is not surprising that a world that follows pagan and secular culture would be characterized by injustice. Neither Peter or Paul advocate supporting the injustices of secular or pagan government. "Government is a human institution and must never be given what belongs to God. Ultimate loyalty is not the government's to demand. When it goes beyond its limits, requiring of its citizens that which properly belongs to God, it must be resisted no matter what the cost."¹⁰³ Peter and Paul simply state that Christians are to submit to their authority. The alternative to government is anarchy, and Christians who resist the government would be seen as anarchists, contrary to the witness they are to present.

We also see both Paul and Peter's call to submission is based upon the God-given intent that the government would serve to punish injustice and to reward justice. God holds all people responsible for their choices, so even those in government who use their positions to promote injustice will ultimately face God's justice where they will be judged fairly, firmly, and appropriately. Much of the content of the Revelation of John contains illustrations of the execution of God's final justice upon ungodly world leadership.

Paul wrote of the same obedience to government in Romans 13. Neither Peter or Paul "clarify exactly what sort of good work was expected, but in both cases they stated that by doing good the believers could expect to gain the approval of their rulers."¹⁰⁴ Christians can certainly work within the common laws to promote godly government. In democracies, Christians can run for government positions, vote for candidates that more closely stand on godly intent, communicate justice, and expose injustice.

1 Peter 2:15 *For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.*

Be good citizens. Why should faithful Christians submit to these governments and governors? Peter first states that this is God's will. As much as we may

¹⁰³ Valentine, Foy. An historical view of Christians and citizenship. *Baptist History and Heritage*, 9 no 3 Jul 1974, p 170.

¹⁰⁴ Ray, Jr. Charles A. Rewards Among the Romans. *Biblical Illustrator*. 43 no. 1, Fall 2016, p 27.

generate logical arguments to support our opposition to governments and governors, those arguments certainly find application in our seeking to change the course of corrupt government, but cannot be used to advocate rebellion. Nobody has been placed in a position to argue with God's will. The faithful are to find God's will and submit to it, so the submission to government and governors is not up for argument.

Peter places this statement about God's will in the center of the imperative and the results. Looking back, the faithful are to be submissive to the government and governor; looking forward this serves as a positive testimony to those who need to learn of God's grace. It is also God's will that the faithful would be characterized by good works. Rebellion against the government and governors would not be an example of good works. Submission to them identifies the faithful as good citizens rather than anarchists, opening the door of communication with other citizens.

How does one, therefore, relate to the society that is submitted to worldly government? A faithful believer who applies *agape* love liberally towards all others will be rich in spiritual fruit that cannot be so easily criticized. Peter referred to the lost in that society as ignorant and foolish. We must understand that their ignorance and foolishness is within the context of the nature of their (lack of) relationship with God's Word and the LORD's purpose for their lives. They are simply ignorant of the gospel of Jesus Christ and do not know of His grace, nor the benefits of it. They are foolish in regard to their abject rejection of God's offer of grace. They are not ignorant or foolish of the things of this world and they can use our conflict with those things as fodder for criticism. Hence, our relationship with society is to serve as God's missionaries on a purpose of grace and peace rather than as incendiary anarchists who strive to bring quite the opposite to society.

Peter does not advocate that submission to the government necessarily includes agreeing with it or taking part in ungodly practices that are advocated by the authorities. Resistance to the evils of government authorities can and will bring conflict into the life of a believer, and may result in persecution.¹⁰⁵ We may note that virtually all of the early Christians experienced some persecution at the hands of a government that demanded Emperor worship, a demand that the Christians simply could not obey. However, they did not rise up in revolt against the Emperor; they simply experienced the penalties for breaking the royal laws.

1 Peter 2:16 *Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.*

¹⁰⁵ 1 Peter 3:17, e.g.

Live as Free People. Freedom in Christ and freedom from the Jewish Law was held mistakenly by some believers to mean that they were given civil and moral license to do as they pleased. This antinomian (opposed to law) approach was a popular Greek philosophy, and resulted in moral chaos and anarchy, quite the opposite of Peter's imperatives. Freedom in Christ is not freedom from civil law, nor is it any form of advocacy for spiritual anarchy. The word, "live" is a form of the word rendered "submit," implying that Christians are to submit to authority as free people. Consequently, freedom in Christ is not freedom from submission to government and governors. Freedom in Christ is freedom from the law of sin and death. Christians are freed from anxious guilt over the past and hopeless dread of the future, a dread that is motivated by the continuing struggle with sin. Under grace, Christians were freed from the petty legalism that characterized first-century Jewish piety. Likewise, Christians are freed from petty legalism as they seek obedience to God in every facet of daily life.

The word rendered *cover-up* is a verb, not a noun, and should be understood as such. Freedom is not a license to do evil, but rather a license to do good. Those who would use their freedom for evil are demonstrating that they are still under bondage to sin. Rather than bondage to sin or to the depravity of this world, Christians are bond-servants of the LORD. Since those who lead this world's governments are accountable to God, it is God who is the ultimate authority for the Christian, also. Christians are free servants, free to serve God without the shackles of guilt, legalism, and worldly influence. If the faithful allow guilt, legalism or worldly influence to shackle their freedom they do so by their own choice. This is not consistent with the blessing of peace and joy that God desire for His people.

1 Peter 2:17. *Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.*

Be Committed Citizens. Here Peter defines in four imperatives the proper relationships we should maintain as members of this world community.

First, the faithful are to **give proper respect to all people**. When one relates to others with *agape* love, the unconditional nature of that love dictates that there are no boundaries outside of that love. Consequently, proper respect is shown by the application of that love for all people without any regard to their status as secular, pagan, lost, saved, or any measure of the identification or behavior of man. As a prideful and judgmental people it is easy for us to fall into sin by failing to honor others because of our judgments concerning the sin that is evident in their lives. One may be reminded of how the writer of the gospel of John describes Jesus' honoring a woman who was caught in adultery as she was

being faced by her accusers.¹⁰⁶ Jesus did not despise her by calling her names, or even by accusing her of her sin. Jesus showed a love for her that was entirely separated from the sinful acts that characterized her lifestyle. Showing her love, He gave her the opportunity to repent.

When we free ourselves of the self-appointed position of judge, we find that we are free to love all people without regard to their sin. God is the one and only true judge and He is capable of dispensing His judgment within the context of His purpose and His grace, a grace that we will find difficult to share when we treat others with prideful judgment.

Peter also reminds the faithful to apply that **agape love within the brotherhood** of believers. The implication is that, through this love, there is a bond between believers that is different from that among non-believers. Though we hold *agape* love for all others, the lost share no such love with believers. Like two burning logs that are placed side-by-side, two believers who share *agape* love have a shared power that does not exist in the lost world. Christians need this sharing of *agape* love, finding in it a strength and encouragement that the world cannot provide, nor does it understand.

What does it mean to **fear God**? Though the government and governors are in positions of authority, the ultimate authority over all is held by God. To fear God in the biblical sense is to hold Him in awe and reverence.¹⁰⁷ Giving priority to a genuine reverence for God in one's daily living is the foundation upon which a godly life, a life that seeks obedience to the purposes of God in our lives, is built. Such a priority also becomes the foundation for all other significant knowledge. If we seriously take the intent of the first and second of the Ten Commandments, we can come away with an appropriate fear of God. The first Commandment states the uncompromised first priority that God is to have in our lives. Anything that we place as a priority higher than God becomes our idol or god, whether it be our family, our church, our possessions, ourselves, or anything else that draws our focus away from Him. When our relationship with God is truly the first priority in our lives, our desire for obedience to His Word will lead us to draw closer to Him and His purpose for our lives so that we can relate to Him and to others with the *agape* love that He intends.

The fourth exhortation is to Honor the Emperor. The same word form is used in the first exhortation: to show proper respect. Whether a prince or a pauper, each deserves the same respect or honor. Again, this can be difficult when we allow our desire to judge others overpower our calling to love others.

¹⁰⁶ John 8:3.

¹⁰⁷ Proverbs 1:7.

What do we do when the "emperor" or government behaves in a manner that is clearly outside of God's will? (1) We must first ascertain if we are in a position to judge, or in a position to even respond. Often we are powerless to anything more than simply pray for our leaders and those who are affected by their policies. (2) If we are in a position to respond, any response must be made with God's wisdom, and a sensitivity to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. However, even when disagreeing with the government, we must maintain the solid, respectful demeanor demanded of us by God. To compromise would be no more than giving into the fleshly desires to destroy that with which we disagree and lift ourselves up. A good example of submission under an ungodly government is found in the book of Daniel when the prophet refused to worship the king. Rather than stir up rebellion, he submitted to the king's punishment, allowing God to demonstrate His own authority.¹⁰⁸

1 Peter 2:18. *Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.*

Be Diligent Workers, Even Under Stress. Next, Peter directed his citizenship concern to the area of what would now apply as employee-employer relationships. People became slaves by being kidnapped, captured in wars, by being born into a slave household, or by deliberately placing one's self into another's employment to receive something, such as to pay a debt.¹⁰⁹ One should not use the American slavery of the 16th-19th centuries in order to understand the Greco-Roman institution. The two cultures have very little similarity. Ancient slaves were often educated better than their masters and often received great respect. American slavery was largely biased by racial and cultural bigotry, where no such bias would typically exist in the Greco-Roman world.

Slavery was such an integral part of ancient near-eastern culture that there is no criticism or condemnation of the institution by any of the New Testament writers, though there is no form of commendation for it either. Slavery is simply approached as an existing secular civilian institution that is to be interacted with in a godly manner. Even when Paul wrote to Philemon to take back the slave Onesimus as a Christian brother, he does not appeal for his freedom.¹¹⁰ The New Testament writers opposed rebellion against existing institutions, since such

¹⁰⁸ Daniel, Chapter 6.

¹⁰⁹ Schreiner, Thomas R. (2003) 1,2 Peter, Jude. *The New American Commentary, Vol. 37.* Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers. p. 137.

¹¹⁰ Philemon 17.

rebellion is contrary to the testimony of love and grace. What would have happened if the budding Christian movement rose up against the practice of slavery? Such an act would be futile, and distract the Christian community from the tasks and responsibilities of their royal priesthood.¹¹¹ Furthermore, rebellion against the government would only bring upon themselves far greater persecution and violence. Christian influence over political agendas over the years is not particularly positive. Though there was a lot of pressure from the Christian community to end American slavery, much pain and suffering has also been promulgated by the church and church-driven governments over the years. Many of the leaders of 18th, 19th, and 20th southern American churches were leaders in the advocacy of slave trade, and in white-supremacy groups following the civil war. Christians are to serve as “salt and light,” an influence in our culture for positive change, but an influence that does not compromise God’s purpose of grace.

Some estimates are that there were 60 million slaves in the ancient near east. Usually, slaves were initially assigned menial tasks of hard manual labor. However, after time they worked as doctors, teachers, musicians, actors, secretaries, stewards, etc. The former slaves were *douloi*, the latter *oiketai*. Neither of these slavery groups enjoyed any civil rights; they could not marry or vote. In verse 16 Peter uses the term *douloi*. In verse 18 he uses the word *oiketai*.

Just as Christians are called upon to be submissive to the existing governmental authorities, Christian slaves are to be submissive to their owners.¹¹² This form of submission, a rendering of *hypotassomenoi*, is the same form used to describe submission between husband and wife, a voluntary, respectful, and purposeful submission among equals for the benefit of both.¹¹³ One is expected to work for the master, even if that master is evil. That, however, is not a command to do evil work.

1 Peter 2:19. *For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.*

Under what situation is suffering honorable to God?

- (1) When that suffering is unjust, and
- (2) when the sufferer is enduring the pain because of obedience to God.

¹¹¹ 2 Peter 2:9, ff.

¹¹² Ephesians 6:5-9, Colossians 3:22-25, 1 Timothy 6:1-2, Titus 2:9-10, e.g.

¹¹³ Ephesians 5:20, ff.

The Greek word rendered “commendable” is *charis*, often rendered “grace.” When one endures undeserved pain for the benefit of someone else we may be reminded of what Christ did for us. When we exhibit grace for one another we are demonstrating a Christian maturity that comes only from the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the model shown for the responsibility of slaves towards their masters is appropriate for all similar relationships such as employer – employee, or any other that involves one individual holding civil authority over another. This is also consistent with Peter’s previous admonition to show appropriate respect for the government authorities.

1 Peter 2:20. *But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.*

Peter implies that there is a reward given when grace is demonstrated towards the persecutor. However, this grace is merited only when the one so persecuted has done no wrong. If one is treated brutally for wrongdoing, *amartanontes*, purposely missing the mark, that treatment, though it is possibly harsh, is consistent with the model of civil authority. Both Peter and Paul teach that government is responsible before God to reward those who do good and punish those who do evil.

However, when one endures suffering at the hands of the authorities for doing that which is a right and proper expression of faith, *agathopotountes*, and maintains uncompromised obedience to God, one will experience God’s blessing of grace.

3. Follow the Example of Christ.

1 Peter 2:21. *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*

Peter advocated dealing with conflict through passive non-resistance, finding the supreme example of this in the life of Christ during His week of passion. “Jesus suffered in the flesh as a man just as the Gospels portray him (4:1; 3:18). He died sinless though he lived on the earth as a man (1:19; 2:22). In his suffering he remained passive and threatened no harm to anyone even though he was innocent (2:22, 23). Instead he trusted himself to God and his care (2:23).”¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Hall, Randy. For to this you have been called: the cross and suffering in 1 Peter. *Restoration Quarterly*, 19 no 3 1976, p 141.

Christians are called by the LORD to walk through the experiences of this world as Jesus walked, imitating His life and responses. Just as Jesus was appointed to maintain obedience as He suffered at the hands of evil men, those who place their faith and trust in Him are expected to do the same. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that "when God calls a man, he bids him come and die."¹¹⁵ Christians today face the same evil world that Jesus and the first-century church were immersed in, and are subject to similar circumstances of suffering when they stand for truth in a world that despises it. Peter literally states that the faithful have been "called to suffering." The point is that Jesus "suffered, passionately, for us and we are called upon to suffer, passionately, for others."¹¹⁶ When Peter is referring to suffering he is speaking of that "suffering which Christians undergo precisely because they are Christians. It speaks of the suffering of the members of the church, the people of God, the household of God. Its focus is on the special trials which Christians must encounter in a hostile situation."¹¹⁷

Jesus serves as an example of how to relate, one to another, and to do so within the context of civil law. Included in this context is Jesus' persecution and suffering at the hands of those in civil authority, whether the Jewish religious leaders, or the Romans. Though Jesus was treated with overwhelming injustice, his treatment was in accordance with then-current civil law. Jesus was characterized by passive non-resistance and forgiveness rather than civil disobedience and violence. A slave may naturally desire to rise up against his owner, particularly if that owner is brutal or the slave is subject to injustice. Jesus saw both injustice and brutality, yet He maintained the character of His identity as YAHWEH in the flesh.

The word for *example*, in this case is the Greek, *hupogrammon*, a written document that a teacher will assign a student to copy as an exercise in learning how to read and write. The word denotes "a model to be copied by the novice. The term, literally an "underwriting," could refer to a writing or drawing which was placed under another sheet to be retraced on the upper sheet by the pupil. More probably the reference is to the "copy-head" which the teacher placed at the top of the page, to be reproduced by the student."¹¹⁸ The idea is that the student will copy exactly what he/she sees, imitating the original a suitable number of times so that the student will learn to write clearly without it.

¹¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. by Fuller, R.H. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961, p. 73.

¹¹⁶ Burtress, James H. Sharing the suffering of God in the life of the world: from text to sermon on 1 Peter 2:21. *Interpretation*, 23 no 3 Jul 1969, p 283.

¹¹⁷ Filson, Floyd Vivian. Partakers with Christ: suffering in First Peter. *Interpretation*, 9 no 4 Oct 1955, p 400-412.

¹¹⁸ Hiebert, D. Edmond. Selected studies from 1 Peter: pt 1, Following Christ's example: an exposition of 1 Peter 2:21-25. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 139 no 553 Jan - Mar 1982, p 35.

The Greek word for *steps* could also be translated footprints, bringing to mind one placing footprints in the snow and another following behind by stepping into those same prints to avoid getting cold, wet feet, (a common practice in the snowy northern winters.) Peter clearly indicates that the faithful are to pattern themselves after Christ, to follow in His steps. Many testimonies have been stated, and many books written to help the faithful understand what it means when one asks, "What would Jesus do?" with an intent on following the model of Jesus. Some notable examples include Charles M. Sheldon's *"In His Steps,"* and Thomas a' Kempis' *"The Imitation of Christ."*

1 Peter 2:22 *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."*

The imperative to endure injustice while committing no sin can be a tall order. In the next four verses Peter makes use of five quotes from Isaiah, Chapter 53 that both describe the Messiah and provide an example of the character of Christ that the faithful are to follow: a fundamental character of personal integrity that precludes any form of rebellion.¹¹⁹ The word for sin, *hamartia*, refers to missing the mark. A good illustration can be found in the game of darts. When it is one's intent to throw the dart into the center of the target, the "bull's-eye," chances are good that the dart will not land on its intended target. There will be a distribution of error that is determined by the thrower's skill, by distractions, or any other impeding events. Increasing skill and focus can serve to narrow that distribution of error, but the bull's eye always remains an allusive target. To miss the mark in life is to sin, and the further our behavior is from the intended target, the greater is our sin. Christian maturity and focus on the lead of the Holy Spirit can serve to narrow the distribution of our error. Christ never missed the mark. His love for his persecutors overwhelmed His personal need for justice.

We may never learn to respond to the stressors of this world with perfect accuracy, but we certainly can narrow the distribution of error as the personal importance of the circumstance becomes overwhelmed with the love of Jesus.

No guile (2:1) or deceit was ever spoken by him. When subject to external stress, it may be very easy for us to work our way out of it using a form of deception that could extricate us from the situation by either rationalizing away the significance of the event or our part in it. It is often possible to avoid conflict using an out-and-out lie that will deceive the persecutor. One can often avoid taking responsibility for a personal transgression this way. There are many different situations where a lie can serve to deflect undesired circumstances.

¹¹⁹ Green, Gene L. The use of the Old Testament for Christian ethics in 1 Peter. *Tyndale Bulletin*, 41 no 2 Nov 1990, p 283.

How many lies did Jesus use? The scripture simply states, "none." How many "little white lies" did Jesus use? The scripture simply states, "none." Christians are great at rationalizing "little white lies," rather than exercising a dependence upon the Holy Spirit for His wisdom in dealing with stressful circumstances. The example of Jesus simple: He never uttered untruth in any form. This is the example Christians are to follow without compromise.

1 Peter 2:23 *When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*

Furthermore, Jesus gave an example of patient courage and endurance under heavy stress. How do we typically respond to heavy stress? It is probably an axiom that we tend to respond with anger, bitterness, guilt, blame, and to seek some form of retaliation. One way to handle these stresses, therefore, is to ask yourself, "How would Christ handle this situation"? When we realize we do not have the strength or wisdom to handle problems in such a manner, we can lean on Him, turning the situation over to Him. In doing so we can look beyond the local situation and place things in the proper perspective and priority. The first step is trusting in God.

1 Peter 2:24. *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

Christ's Wounds Heal You. Peter does not elaborate on a fully developed doctrine of the atonement. However, any atonement doctrine must include this fact: Christ went to the cross, not because of His sins, but because of our sins, doing so to pay the ultimate penalty of death for those who place their faith and trust in God. Some would take the word "healed" out of context to argue that Jesus died on the cross so that the faithful would receive physical healing, rejecting its true purpose. All healing is a gift and ordination of God, whether from the smallest scratch to the most grievous of illnesses and diseases, and for that healing we are thankful. However, to use this scripture as a defense to guarantee physical healing is to take it wholly out of its context. There is no reference to physical healing in this passage, though the entire passage refers to atonement for our sins. "By Christ's stripes the wounds that sin had inflicted on their souls "were headed" (ἰάθητε), not merely "will be healed." The forgiveness of their sins in regeneration brought about their experience of imparted spiritual wholeness."¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Hiebert, D. Edmond. Selected studies from 1 Peter: pt 1, Following Christ's example: an exposition of 1 Peter 2:21-25. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 139 no 553 Jan - Mar 1982, p 42.

The word “bore” refers to the carrying of a sacrifice to the altar, and the form of the verb implies that it is done once. Jesus brought his own body to be sacrificed. To “die to sins” means to be separated from them, and consequently freed from their bondage. Only this way can we live a life of righteousness.

What is righteousness? Certainly we all miss the mark, and without Jesus’ act of grace on the Cross of Calvary we would be without hope. Note Peter refers to a call to “live for righteousness,” not righteousness itself. Our righteousness only comes through Jesus, and for our lives to be characterized as righteous we must be truly seeking to do the will of God as we following our understanding of that will to the best of our ability. There is simply no excuse for unrighteous living. There is no excuse for treating others in any other manner than in the love and grace that Jesus showed. The life of a Christian is to be characterized by love and grace for others, just as Jesus’ life is so characterized.

The word “wounds” refers to the damage done to the skin by a lash. Here Peter graphically reminds us of the severity of Jesus’ beating, and relates the quote from Isaiah, “By his stripes we are healed.” Jesus, the Messiah, the LORD, YAHWEH in the flesh submitted Himself to evil men who had no true power over Him at all, and suffered real and severe wounds, suffering even unto death so that we might be forgiven, and that we would be empowered through the Holy Spirit to live lives of grace.

1 Peter 2:25 *For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

Christ is your Shepherd. Two titles for Christ are given here, Shepherd and Guardian. Biblical references to Jesus as The Shepherd are frequent.¹²¹ The work for Guardian or Overseer is *episkopon*, referring to an elder who has a leadership role in a community. This is the only verse in the New Testament that uses this word. It is comforting to know that as we go through this life we have one who serves as our Shepherd and as our Elder who has the power and wisdom to make a true difference in our lives.

Verses 21-25 are very similar to Isaiah's description of the suffering servant, consistent with the Septuagint, a Greek paraphrase of the Old Testament from which Peter drew his Old Testament quotes.¹²² Jesus identified with the servant concept of the Messiah.¹²³ As we are to become the image of Christ, we are also to live lives of servanthood: Christians are to serve others rather than seek to be

¹²¹ Psalms, Chapter 23, John 10:11-16, 27-30, e.g.

¹²² Isaiah, Chapter 53.

¹²³ Luke 4:16-27.

served by others. The Shepherd ministers to the needs of the flock, and likewise, as servants, Christians are called to minister to each other's needs in the same manner: in love and in grace, without any mixture of condemnation, judgment, or criticism. This can be a tough order to follow when we are so easily distracted by our pride and the self-centered demands we place on one another. However, as we grow and mature in Christian maturity our lives should be more and more characterized by grace, and less characterized by self-will. Jesus is the model, and He is the model that we strive for.

1 Peter 3:1-12.

A Life of Faith Begins at Home

It is probably fair to say that the structure and integrity of the nuclear family is under tremendous attack in today's society. The mid-20th century "Father Knows Best" image of the family seems to be archaic and even laughable by today's cultural standards. The nuclear family, one with a father and mother, who together raise their children through adulthood, is becoming increasingly rare. Single-parent homes are so common that it is becoming the norm in many communities, in itself redefining the concept of the nuclear family. Currently over 40% of births take place without the advantage of a married mother.¹²⁴ Recently the acceptance of legalized marriages of single-gender partners has become a badge of tolerance by an increasingly hedonistic and epicurean culture, and its acceptance is becoming common in modern Christian church polity. It almost seems as though the family unit is becoming obsolete and even culturally disdained, and if not in this generation, it may fully become so later in the 21st century. What is causing the escalating degeneration of the family structure in our society?

There are at least three major New Testament passages that provide specific guidance on maintaining a godly family.¹²⁵ Biblical narratives that discuss the relationship between slaves and masters are also household guidelines since slaves were fully integrated members of the ancient household.

PETER'S COUNSEL TO WIVES.

1 Peter 3:1. *Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives;*

Consider the vast cultural differences of the ancients and what we experience today concerning the state of women. Most ancient cultures held that women were considered a possession of the man, similar to his possession of personal items, physical property, slaves, and animals. Note that the LORD, Peter, Paul, the Apostles and the first-century church held women with an equal respect with men in all ways. This was a radical teaching of the early church that, though consistent with ancient Israelite culture was in direct conflict with ancient middle-eastern pagan culture.

¹²⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Health Statistics, Summer, 2016.

¹²⁵ Ephesians 5:21-6:4; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Peter 3:1-12.

Redemptive Behavior.

When referring to the relationship between husband and wife, Peter uses the same word that is rendered "submissive" as in the relationship between servants to masters¹²⁶ and citizens relating to the state.¹²⁷ Submission is not characterized by spineless groveling, nor is it the assignment of authority to the one which one is submitted. Rather, it is a voluntary selflessness which sets aside pride for a desire to serve. It is not a submission of fear, but a deliberate submission based upon love. This word, *hypotasso* refers to one's choosing to submit to another for the benefit of both.

Lest we become one-sided when it comes to submission in the marriage union, we might take a look at Ephesians 5:21, Paul's statement that immediately precedes his instructions on wives' submission to husbands, and vice-versa.

Ephesians 5:21. *Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*

There is no biblical instruction that gives one member of the marriage a pass on submitting to the other. The submission of one spouse to the other is fully mutual for the benefit of the marriage. Both Peter and Paul give instructions on ways that the wife submits to the husband, and the ways that the husband submits to the wife.

Ephesians 5:25. *Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;*

Note that Paul's instructions to the men is that their love for their wives would be similar to Jesus' love for the church, one that was uncompromised, unconditional, and selfless. This concept the husband "giving himself" to the wife, modelled in Jesus' character is an excellent example of *hypotasso* submission. The submission is mutual.

Note also that Peter uses the Greek term *idosis*, ἰδιωσις, which refers to the submission of a wife to her own husband only.¹²⁸ This is a clear identification of the unique role of the husband that is not shared with other husbands or men in general. This mutual submission is an important property of the "one flesh" of

¹²⁶ 1 Peter 2:18.

¹²⁷ 1 Peter 2:13.

¹²⁸ Slaughter, James R. Submission of wives (1 Peter 3:1a) in the context of 1 Peter. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 153 no 609 Jan - Mar 1996, p 71.

marriage.¹²⁹ Peter also addressed the advantages of submission by wives who are in marriages to unsaved husbands.

Note the method that is to be employed by the wife in appropriately witnessing to an unsaved spouse. Her obedience to the Word of God can serve as a model to her husband, and can serve to bring him to faith. Only then will the mutual submission of their marriage be complete. Note that nagging is not recommended!

1 Peter 3:2. *While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.*

The word that is rendered conversation/behavior is the same as used in 2:12 to represent a lifestyle of uncompromised godly conduct. Peter identifies this form of conduct as both reverent and chaste. Peter appealed for behavior among Christian wives that show reverence to God, not for conduct that was based upon fear of their husbands.

To be chaste is to be pure, without any mixture of taintedness. It was a word that referred to an attribute of an immutable and perfect deity. It came to refer to moral uprightness and uncompromised integrity. Her character is made pure by being one that sincerely loves the LORD, is obedient to the Word of God, and demonstrates the fruit of faith and obedience continually in her behavior, showing appropriate respect for her husband as she makes the Word of God the foundation of that relationship. It is by this spiritual integrity that she will be known.

1 Peter 3:3. *Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel;*

First-century Roman ladies typically wore no hats. Fashion was defined by elaborate adornment of the hair and clothing. The Greek word that is rendered outward adornment is based upon another similar Greek word, *cosmos*, which in ancient Greece, depending upon the context, referred to the whole of the then known physical universe, the world, or that which is worldly.¹³⁰ It is the same word form from which we get the words *cosmetics* and *cosmetology*, as well as *cosmology*. It is not the purpose of this passage to present any legalistic argument that would serve to defending abolishing braided hair, jewelry and fine clothes. It is not Peter's intent to abolish physical adornment, and to use this text

¹²⁹ Matthew 19:5-6; Mark 10:8; Ephesians 5:31.

¹³⁰ Ancient Greek philosophy had historically held largely to a dualistic "theology" that taught that all things physical were separated from all things spiritual. The parallel position was that which is physical is evil, and that which is spiritual is good. Consequently, the word *cosmos* lacks a connotation to that which is good, or that which is eternal.

as a law on the subject is to miss the purpose of Peter's letter. This verse identifies that true beauty simply does not come from physical adornment but rather from the integrity of the internal spirit of the individual. Outward adornment can serve as a sham and cover-up that can never take the place of a humble, joyful, and gentle godly spirit.

Also, there was a wide range of various near-eastern cultures present in the early church that included people from both the lower and upper economic levels as well as those from far-ranging countries. Making such a statement, Peter indicates that he knew that the church had some wealthy members.¹³¹ It was, and still is, common for those at the higher levels to flaunt their wealth by wearing precious jewelry. Such a display is inconsistent with the humility that the Holy Spirit would lead the faithful to demonstrate in their lives.

Peter is not setting down a legalistic rule against the use of cosmetics. The Apostle Peter (as did the Apostle Paul) dedicated his Christian life and work to the abolition of ritual legalism. Peter simply states that outward adornment should not be established as the basis for one's beauty. However, lavish adornment can overpower the appearance of the actual individual, making a statement that is not consistent with the spirit of the wearer. How should a Christian woman approach the wearing of cosmetics, jewelry and fine clothes? The wearing of cosmetics is much like most things in life: it is to be done in wisdom, moderation and in good taste.

1 Peter 3:4. *But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.*

"The Holy Spirit led Peter to remind women of the temporary happiness found in outward ornaments. Rather, lasting joy comes from choosing love, compassion, and humility."¹³² Peter's appeal calls, not for Sterling silver, but sterling character. The inner-self refers to the true person that may be kept hidden under the hypocrisy of false disguises. Compare the beauty of a well-adorned frown or scowl with an unadorned, impulsive, beaming, ear-to-ear smile. What does the latter example show that the former does not? There is a beauty in a sincere smile that cannot be obtained with any amount of cosmetics simply because a smile communicates the joy in the heart of the individual.

Cosmetics are both false and fleeting. They do not last. Peter urged Christian wives to adorn themselves with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit.

¹³¹ Ray, Jr. Charles A. Rewards Among the Romans. *Biblical Illustrator*. 43 no. 1, Fall 2016, p 30.

¹³² Jones, Roberta. Jewelry: What the Bible Says. *Biblical Illustrator*, 41 no. 1 Fall, 2016, p. 60.

For Peter, Christian beauty was a matter of modesty, not makeup. Peter wrote that the ornamentation of a meek and quite spirit were precious in God's sight, whereas all of the face cream and mascara has no value to the LORD at all. The term translated *precious* was an old Greek word that carried the idea of something of great intrinsic value. It is used only two other times in the New Testament.¹³³

A Godly Example.

1 Peter 3:5-6. *For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: ⁶Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.*

Peter's example of a Godly woman was Sarah, and pointedly describes her godly and submissive behavior towards her husband, Abraham, as her form of adornment. "Although Peter mentioned Sarah specifically in verse 6, the plural 'women' refers generally to godly women in the Old Testament."¹³⁴ "The women in Peter's audience were holy in that they were set apart by God and belonged to Him. They were chosen by God (2:4) and possessed an eternal inheritance and salvation through Christ (1:4-5, 9). The word "holy," when used in 3:5 of women of ages past, seems connected to this thought previously expressed."¹³⁵ Peter gave the example of Sarah as one who was holy, and was obedient and respectful of her husband through the many years of her adult life when she was marginalized and despised by those around her simply because she had born Abraham no children.¹³⁶

Note that women are not to fear their husbands, yet hold them in respect due to the responsibilities that the LORD demands from them. The word rendered, *lord*, does not refer to an attitude of spineless cowering, but simply rather a title of respect for one who has been granted great responsibility. It is not to be confused with the word for LORD that is used in place of Jesus or YAHWEH. A search of the Old Testament for Sarah's reference to Abraham as lord is relatively complex, as Peter was using a multiple of circumstances to point out the respect and submission that Sarah demonstrated toward Abraham. "There is no place where the Genesis stories state explicitly that Sarah obeyed her husband, and the only

¹³³ (*Poluteles*) Mark 14:3, 1 Timothy 2:9.

¹³⁴ Grudem, Wayne. 1 Peter, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988, p 141.

¹³⁵ Slaughter, James R. Sarah as a model for Christian wives (1 Peter 3:5-6.) *Bibliotheca sacra*, 153 no 611 Jul - Sep 1996, p 358..

¹³⁶ Genesis 18:12

recorded instance of her calling him lord" is in derision."¹³⁷ "The occurrence of the term "lord" does indeed come from Genesis 18, but that it is used by 1 Peter to typify what he sees as the commendable attitude of a wife as seen in Genesis 12 and 20."¹³⁸ In these latter situations, Abraham's treatment of Sarah was less than honorable, yet she maintained her choice to honor her husband. From this example Peter urged Christian women to hold fast to their faith and show honor and respect for their husbands even when experiencing forms of provocation from their husbands.¹³⁹

PETER'S COUNSEL TO HUSBANDS

1 Peter 3:7. *Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.*

Hellenistic culture treated women as slaves. "Peter's ethical instructions to Hellenized Jewish Christians are grounded in the actions of their ancestors, and challenge husbands within a strongly patriarchal Greco-Roman culture to honor and value their wives as equal partners in God's work on historical grounds."¹⁴⁰ Consequently, Peter's first implication (and final in this verse) alludes to the equality of responsibility of both partners. The "likewise" refers to the command of submission by wives in verse 1. Peter agrees with Paul that submission in the marriage union is mutual. Second, the phrase "dwell with them" is in the Greek aorist imperative, and carries the idea of continual domestic association. It could be rendered, "as you will keep on sharing your life with your wives." This is an instruction to encourage the permanence of marriage.

Weaker vessel: this word "vessel" could be rendered "partner", or "utensil", referring to something which specifically is to be used of God. In ancient near-eastern culture, the woman was profoundly handicapped in her ability to influence society for Christ. The Greek word rendered "weaker" literally means "with lesser strength", "fewer resources," or "lesser ability to accomplish the task." Because of this, some hold that this English rendering fails to denote that the text refers to

¹³⁷ Sly, Dorothy I. 1 Peter 3:6b in the light of Philo and Josephus. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 110 no 1 Spr 1991, p 127.

¹³⁸ Kiley, Mark Christopher. Like Sara: the tale of terror behind 1 Peter 3:6. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 106 no 4 Dec 1987, p 691.

¹³⁹ c.f. Proverbs 3:25.

¹⁴⁰ Bott, Nicholas T. Sarah as the 'weaker vessel': Genesis 18 and 20 in 1 Peter's instructions to husbands in 1 Pet 3:7. *Trinity Journal*, ns 36 no 2 Fall 2015, p 244.

non-Christian wives who lack the understanding of the faith.¹⁴¹ However, the beginning of the passage is clearly speaking to Christian women who are marginalized in the culture within which they live. The “weakness” to which Pater refers has nothing to do with physical or spiritual weakness, nor is it setting up any form of pecking-order in the marriage, but rather Peter is noting that the wife is attempting to serve the LORD and administer the fruit of grace from a weaker position, subject to significant cultural limitations the male did not then experience.

“Two things should be remembered when comparing ancient and modern political attitudes. First, Christian slaves and wives, the two groups addressed at length in I Peter, were not voting citizens in the Roman world, unlike contemporary Christians who live as full citizens in egalitarian democracies. Women never attained voting rights in Rome.”¹⁴²

This cultural bias gave the husband an additional responsibility to respect her, encourage her, and support her in a way their culture, nor his own peers, would not, and as noted earlier, this is a responsibility that is given to no other man. He is to be considerate of her, and allow her room to serve God, since they are equal partners in the ministry, joint heirs of salvation. He is to be her strong defender in a world that works to marginalize her.

Note that Peter implies that if this respect, consideration, and marital partnership is not supported by the husband, his fellowship with God is adversely affected. When the relationship in the home is not in order, it is difficult to maintain a proper relationship with God. On the other hand, when the husband's relationship with God is in order, he will also respect, consider, and work beside his wife in the ministry.

PETER’S COUNSEL TO BOTH SPOUSES AND ALL OTHER CHRISTIANS

Basic Christian Virtues.

1 Peter 3:8. *Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:*

This verse is probably intended for all in the Christian community rather than just the husband and wife in the Christian home, though its message is certainly applicable to the home life as well. The summary of Christian virtues applied not

¹⁴¹¹⁴¹ Gross, Carl D. Are the wives of 1 Peter 3:7 Christians. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 35 Feb 1989, p 89-96.

¹⁴² Balch, David L. Early Christian criticism of patriarchal authority: 1 Peter 2:11-3:12. *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 39 no 3 1984, p 167.

only to interpersonal relationships within marriage but also to interpersonal contact throughout the church and community.

Peter enumerated five imperatives concerning the Christian response to one another.

LIVE IN HARMONY. Live a life that is deliberately characterized by a unity of spirit, proactively putting away friction, hostility, and division in the home or church family which are destructive tools of satan; literally "like-mindedness." Like-mindedness requires deliberate compromise that comes from the application of *hypotasso* submission that stands on a foundation of true agape love. When you have true agape love for another, there is no need to force the other person to agree with you, as you love them enough to both allow them their own likes and dislikes, and support them in those opinions.

The next four traits contribute to this form of unity and harmony. Each is only a single Greek word.

BE SYMPATHETIC, The literal Greek translation would be "with suffering," or suffering with or feeling with those whom he or she loves. One who is sympathetic hurts with those who hurt and seeks to understand their pain, and they demonstrate a caring spirit that is responsive to other's needs. Sharing pain is also rewarded with shared joy. Shared our experiences with one another in this manner serves to divide our sorrows and multiply our joys.

LOVE AS BROTHERS (φιλαδελφοι), *philadelphoi*, a non-gender brotherly love. The relationship among Christians is not based upon their acceptance of one another: it is based upon their acceptance by Christ. Christians are to choose to love one another simply because (1) God loves us without condition, and (2) Christians have been called, and even commanded, to love each other in this same way by God, Himself. Treat one another as dear brothers and sisters, making friends from strangers, sharing uncompromised love with all.

BE COMPASSIONATE, tenderhearted; the opposite of hard-hearted, moved by the needs of others. Compassion can be thought of as "sympathy in action." Where sympathy is exercised in attitude and feelings, compassion is exercised in action. When Jesus is described as having "compassion" on someone, some form of ministry to the object of that compassion immediately followed. Be quick to address the needs of others when so led by the Spirit of God.

BE HUMBLE, Not driven by pride, humility is an awareness of one's true lowliness before God, looking upon no one else as inferior in value to themselves. Humility is expressed in meekness: strength under control.

1 Peter 3:9. *Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.*

Response to Evil.

Peter spells out a sixth characteristic of the Christian response, and in more detail: returning good for evil. "*To return evil for good is animal-like, to return evil for evil is human-like, to return good for evil is God-like.*"¹⁴³ Such a pattern of returning good for evil was inconsistent with ancient near-eastern culture, as it still tends to be today. Even the Jews defended their right to repay evil with equal evil.¹⁴⁴ Today's Judaism tends to work to repay evil with amplified evil, creating never-ending cycles of retaliation against their enemies. If the early Christians were to follow the teachings of Jesus, Paul, and Peter concerning the very unusual characteristic of rendering good for evil, they would stand out in their society. Peter shows that he believes that when Christians act in this graceful manner they will BE a blessing to others, and RECEIVE a blessing themselves as a result.

Achieving the Good Life.

1 Peter 3:10. *For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile:*

Peter concluded this passage with a quote from the Psalms.¹⁴⁵ It is a poem, and has a positive thrust. What defines the "Good Life"? It is an attitude of spirit, not an attitude of geography, of personality; not of possessions; but of love not power.

First, Peter writes that we are to keep our verbal conversation clean. Two negatives are described here: "evil speech" and "deceitful speech." Evil speech is that which is not brought under the control of the Holy Spirit. It is speech that is coarse and demeaning. It is speech that uses vulgarity and cursing. It is speech that serves to elevate one's self over others, seeks to injure, hurt, or destroy such as an evil repayment for a perceived injustice. Evil speech serves to hurt others.

Deceitful speech has a similar purpose but is more subtle and conniving. Deceitful speech is deliberately calculated to be misleading and misdirecting,

¹⁴³ Sommers, Ray

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Matthew 5:38.

¹⁴⁵ Psalm 33:13-17.

producing the same results as evil speech but making use of misdirection in order to avoid taking the personal responsibility for the message.

What are the opposites of these forms of speech? 1) Speech that is good, edifying, and constructive blesses others when it is based upon *agape* love. 2) Godly speech is always honest and yet tactful; its predominant characteristics are wisdom and integrity. When considering your words, it might be instructive and constructive to ask the question, “would the LORD use these words?” If the answer is “no,” a godly alternative, or silence is likely in order.

1 Peter 3:11. *Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.*

Second, Christians should shun all manner of evil, whether it be produced of ourselves, or others. Christians are continually bombarded with the evils of this world, both in our home and outside of it. What are some of the evils which we can shun? We can avoid bringing the sinful culture of this world into our homes through the avenue of audio and video media. We can tactfully refuse to engage with others when their attitudes and actions are ungodly.

The statement to do good is an imperative. It implies action, not just attitude. The Apostle Paul speaks to this imperative in a key passage in his letter to the Romans:

Romans 12:9. *Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.*

The love that people of faith share is to be consistent, and without any mixture of hypocrisy. The choice to do so informs virtually every decision in life. When our life is consistent, we are empowered to express that consistency in the manner in which we respond to the many and varying influences in this life. Paul’s statement concerning the Christian’s response to good and evil is similar to Peter’s, but expressed in a dynamic manner.

If you placed your hand on an extremely hot stove, you would, upon realizing what you have done, remove your hand as fast as your reflexes will allow. There is no time invested to make the decision whether or not to remove your hand. This is the idea behind the word that is rendered, “abhor.” It is though, as we recognize evil in our grasp, to immediately throw it as far away as possible as though it were a live grenade.

The opposite is to cleave – it is to cling firmly to something. Imagine you are standing on a very small platform with a high vertical pole in the center, and the

platform is 1,000 feet above the ground, the pole being the only thing to hold on to. You are almost cleaving to the pole. Suddenly the platform drops away. Now, you are cleaving. Our grasp on that which is good and godly is to be a very firm and deliberate one.

Third, Peter notes that people of faith are to seek peace, and be peacemakers. The Church is immersed in a wicked, violent, and fallen world that is drawing its people away from the LORD into all manner of turmoil, fear, and even terror. A peacemaker is one who works to bring peace to turmoil, calm to conflict. People of faith are not to produce or contribute to turmoil. In an Old Testament list of seven things that God hates, the seventh is stated as an abomination: “*he that soweth discord among the brethren.*”¹⁴⁶ A person of faith should never work to bring disharmony and discord to the fellowship, as by doing so they are setting themselves in a position that God literally hates. Virtually all church conflict comes from this form of behavior, making the understanding of this passage of utmost importance.

People of faith have been ordained to a ministry of reconciliation,¹⁴⁷ bringing people out of chaos into peace, and from an hopeless future to the peace and the true and abiding hope that comes from faith in God.

1 Peter 3:12. *For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.*

To use the concept of the Lord's face was to refer to His divine presence. Peter and the psalmist understood God to be relating to his people either with mercy or with judgment, depending on their dominant lifestyle as it relates to their faith in Him.

For Christians, beauty is a matter of character, not cosmetics. A basic foundation for Christian marriage must include the following attitudes: equality, mutual submission, reciprocal responsibility, honesty, forgiveness, mutual respect and love. The good life is not measured by money, possessions, status or power but by the true quality of one's redeemed character.

¹⁴⁶ Proverbs 6:16.

¹⁴⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:18.

1 Peter 3:13-22.

Standing for What is Right

We face choices every day, choices that expose our true nature, and choices that have consequences that impact our lives and the lives of others. As Peter writes to the early church, he is writing to a fellowship of believers that found their faithful world view to be in sharp, and sometimes violent contrast with that of their lost culture, a godless and hedonistic society that considered the piety and self-control of the faithful to be ignorant, foolish, and unenlightened. Though many Christians of our earlier contemporary generations may find this contrast a little strange to clearly grasp, the 21st century has brought a return to ancient Greek thought in modern western culture. The fulfillment of personal base desires has overwhelmed the piety of self-control and sacrifice, with all manner of ungodly lifestyle choices becoming the accepted societal norm. With this has come a return of the derision and ridicule of the faithful. This derision takes form anywhere from direct and deadly persecution in some predominantly Muslim nations to ridicule and disrespect in western societies.

The pressure on the faithful to allow compromise is tremendous. It is easier to hide one's faith than it is to maintain a bold witness in the face of such ridicule and injustice. It is easier to remain quiet when witnessing injustice than it is to take a stand to defend those who are without defense. As Peter writes into a similar circumstance, he does so to encourage the faithful as they face the same choices. encouraging them to maintain a bold and ever-strengthening faith and to take a clear and uncompromised stand for the gospel so that through their testimony the world can see a testimony to the truth.

1 Peter 3:13. *Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?*

The Beatitude of Persecution

Though this verse starts a new direction in the letter, it is tied to Peter's last statement that the LORD rewards those who do good, and withholds much reward from those who do evil. The contrast continues as Peter observes the interaction between the two. It may seem odd that Peter would ask the question, "who is going to harm you," when it is obvious that great harm was being experienced by the early Christians as is still the case today. The Greek word that is rendered *harm* refers to ultimate injury or destruction rather than the harm of persecution or suffering. Peter's statement is more eschatological in nature than may first appear. There is no ultimate harm that can be done to a faithful believer since God's reward for faithfulness is sure and eternal. They may take your possessions, but they cannot take your possession of eternal life. They may

take your freedom, but they cannot take your freedom from sin's condemnation. They may take your life, but they cannot take your reward. God has also "set his face against" those who do evil, so the faithful find a defender against such injustice in God Himself.

The word *eager* is also translated *zealous*, or full of zeal and energy. In the first century a zealot was an intense patriot. One would never expect a zealot to compromise their beliefs in order to avoid personal harm. The testimony of the Christian should be an intense, uncompromised, patriotism towards the kingdom of God, a patriotism that is characterized by a bold testimony and an active engagement in doing those things that are good. The goodness to which Peter refers is an uncompromised righteousness.¹⁴⁸ Peter's words are a positive appeal for Christians to take a bold stand for what is right.¹⁴⁹

1 Peter 3:14 *But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."*

The word translated *but* can also be translated *indeed*,¹⁵⁰ making this statement a complement to the previous statement rather than a replacement. Peter's statement is similar to Jesus' eighth beatitude:

Matthew 5:10. *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

What are some of the sources of suffering in this life? We suffer from illness. We suffer from the consequences of our sin and the sin of others. Note that those who are blessed for their suffering are suffering for righteousness sake only. Suffering for other reasons does not guarantee any form of blessing. Some individuals bring suffering upon themselves for suffering's sake only in order to demonstrate their piety, pay some debt of penance, or to seek a blessing. These motives are in error. Suffering for righteousness' sake occurs spontaneously in response to the conflict that arises when one demonstrates true faithfulness in an unfaithful world. Those who experience suffering for their faith will find a real and tangible blessing that comes from the LORD who defends them in times of persecution.

Literally, "fear not their fear" or "fear not their intimidation" is an alliteration implying that Christians should not fear the threats of the unfaithful. Peter did not

¹⁴⁸ c.f. Ephesians, Chapter 6.

¹⁴⁹ Isaiah 50:9.

¹⁵⁰ Schreiner, Thomas R. 1,2 Peter, Jude. *The New American Commentary*, Vol. 37. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2003 p 170.

want his Christian friends to be troubled or disturbed by the taunts, jeers, and acts of reprisal that they were facing. There is no need for Christians to fear what non-believers can do to them. Likewise, today's faithful should not be frightened by this evil world culture in any way. The faithful can draw upon the wisdom of God and find a spirit of confidence and security that is found only in Him. Being frightened is an indication of a lack of confidence in God and His promises. One resource to draw from is indicated in the next verse.

1 Peter 3:15. *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,*

The first part of verse 15 is a response to verse 14. Our confidence and strength can come from God when He is the supreme authority in our lives and His Lordship over us is the only power and defense we have in the conflict. Peter points to the necessity of our holding the position of Lordship for Christ in our hearts without compromise. If we represent Him to the world, the capacity of the world to intimidate and overpower us is significantly diminished, if not defeated altogether. The faithful find no such defense when their own lifestyle is seen as compromised and worldly.

Furthermore, Peter is literally telling the community of the faithful to be prepared to give an apologetic for their faith. Here, the word apologetic means to give a reasoned, accurate, positive, and convincing response to the criticism that Christians receive. It does not mean to apologize for being wrong, it means to accurately and in reason defend what one knows as the truth.

Note that the faithful should be able to provide an answer for anyone who asks. The implication here is that one's faithfulness is open and evident all of the time to all who one encounters. Furthermore, their faithfulness is open and evident enough to encourage questions from others. The person of faith can be confident that when someone asks a question, the Holy Spirit will lead them with the answers, first through their knowledge and understanding of the gospel, and second through the promised work of the Spirit in the heart and mind of the believer.

The Christian life is one that should be characterized by a true and abiding peace, hope, and joy. All three of these are sought by, but never found by those who do evil. Peace, hope, and joy in the life of the faithful is a most powerful testimony to this wicked world. How do we express these? One expresses peace in a genuine serenity in times of conflict, a serenity that comes from a confidence in God. Hope is expressed when we are not overcome by

circumstances, but rather by maintaining a confidence in God's purpose in our future. Joy is expressed by a deep happiness and confidence in God that transcends circumstances.

However, note that Peter's imperative does not give the faithful a testimony of silence. Christians are to look for opportunities to give a reason for that peace, joy, and hope. That testimony is to be one that is consistent with the faithful nature, one that is bathed in love and respect for those to whom a testimony is shared.

The work of the kingdom of God can be grievously damaged by a zealous response that lacks gentleness, or does not show sincere love and respect for the one hearing the testimony. This is one criticism for the way many media evangelists (or stump shouters) often present the gospel. We sometimes may refer to theirs as a "hell and brimstone" presentation. Their presentation is often condemning and harsh, or elitist and soapy. Rarely does a media evangelist seem to present the gospel in a gentle manner, showing care and respect for the audience. Jesus and the Apostles always presented the gospel in a gentle and respectful manner, allowing the recipient to make the decision upon hearing the truth.

Our Best Defense: Genuine Christian Conduct.

1 Peter 3:16. *keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*

As a third qualifying condition, Peter urged the faithful to back up the verbal defense of their faith with an exemplary Christian lifestyle that is beyond reproach. What happens when your verbal witness and your non-verbal witness are inconsistent? This inconsistency is the very definition of hypocrisy, a charge that is appropriately leveled against Christians by the lost world on a regular basis. Because of our own bent to sin, the maintenance of a godly lifestyle requires deliberate and continual decision, a vigilance towards the negative impact that compromise has on our lives, the lives of those who we care for, and for our testimony. Peter describes the result of a godly lifestyle is one of clear conscience.

A clear conscience is found in one of two ways. First, one can use any manner of rationalizations and defenses to cover those sins that one foolishly considers "secret." This choice to cover sins in itself is a choice to allow sin, a sin that is fully known by the LORD and may well be evident to others in all other areas of life. A clear conscience in the life of one with un-repent sin is a delusion.

A true clear conscience is found in a retrospective analysis of one's life that reveals a sincere and uncompromised desire for godliness that is evident in spiritual fruit in many areas of life. It is found in a repentance from those secret sins that one thinks nobody knows about, and certainly a repentance of those that are not so secret. A clear conscience is found in a confidence in God's promise of forgiveness.

If one has built a good Christian reputation, how long does it take to destroy that reputation? The confidence that people have in you and your Christian testimony can be destroyed in a single act. If you do not have a good Christian reputation, how long does it take to gain one? People are generally slow to forgive, remembering acts of hypocrisy, making it difficult to regain other's trust and confidence. The most compelling defense of your faith is a true and uncompromisingly Christian lifestyle that is characterized by integrity in all areas.

How can you maintain a Christian lifestyle on a continual basis? Peter states that you cannot be rightfully attacked when your lifestyle is unblemished by an ungodly character. Peter's imperative is in agreement with both the Prophet Isaiah and the Apostle Paul who held that a lifestyle of uncompromised integrity serves as a "breastplate of righteousness" that serves to deflect the attacks of the evil one.¹⁵¹ However, if there are blemishes in our lifestyle, these are chinks or cracks in the armor that God has made available to us, and we are susceptible to attacks from which we have no reasonable defense, and the suffering we experience is our own doing, a suffering that is not blessed by God.

1 Peter 3:17. *It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.*

Peter then gives a fourth reason for bearing unjust wrong: "Such an experience may lie in the will of God for His child. In proof thereof, the writer has referred to the Cross where God's beloved Son died. What follows in the remainder of the chapter, after verse 18, is not understood easily. Ten orderly steps, however, may be traced through verses 19 to 22.

- (1) The Spirit of Christ offered some the gift of salvation ("By which also he went and preached") ;
- (2) It was proffered to spirits now in prison ("unto the spirits in prison") ;
- (3) But they refused the effort of common grace ("Which sometime were disobedient") ;

¹⁵¹ Isaiah 59:17; Ephesians 6:12.

- (4) They despised the riches of divine goodness and forbearance and longsuffering ("when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah") ;
- (5) But in contrast to their unbelief was the faith of Noah as he prepared for the threatened destruction ("while the ark was a preparing") ;
- (6) Only eight souls chose to enter the ark and escape the predicted judgment ("wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water") ;
- (7) Baptism is the antitype of Noah's deliverance, consequently baptism has nothing to do with human reformation ("The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh)") ;
- (8) Salvation depends today upon the work of a good conscience, i.e. faith ("but the answer of a good conscience toward God") ;
- (9) Saving faith is directed toward Jesus Christ and Him raised from the dead ("by the resurrection of Jesus Christ") ;
- (10) Faith will embrace both the resurrection and glorification of Christ."¹⁵²

If we understand verse 16, the ethics represented in this verse are simply common sense. It is better to suffer for doing right, then it is to suffer for doing wrong? Peter already repeated Jesus' beatitude that those who suffer for righteousness' sake are blessed. Those who suffer from the consequences of their unrighteousness receive no such blessing, but only experiencing the curse of the consequences of their acts.

Is it God's will that we suffer? We might argue that, since God ultimately wants what is good and best for us, that suffering should not be a part of our lives. However, the first chapter of James reminds us that the conflict of suffering is a necessary part of our growth and is therefore permitted by God so that it can do its perfect (complete) work in our lives.¹⁵³

We might find a metaphor in the example of parenting. Does a parent want their children to experience hurt and suffering? Of course not, but when children disobey or demonstrate behavior that is worthy of discipline some measure must be properly taken, a measure that a child might interpret as a form of suffering. When children step outside the boundaries of reasonable conduct, they must be corrected and brought back. The same is true for Children of God. When a child must be corrected that form of correction comes only from a willful transgression and the child is ultimately responsible for the price they must pay.

¹⁵² Bennetch, John Henry. Exegetical studies in 1 Peter. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 101 no 402 Apr - Jun 1944, p 193..

¹⁵³ James 1:14,17.

Consequently, there is a clear difference between the suffering that is blessed by God and the suffering that is not. The blessing is found when one suffers at the hands of others in response for doing that which is in obedience to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Peter reminds us that the faithful should not be discouraged from doing good because of the threats or intimidation of the evil one, but rather to remember the ultimate blessing that obedience to God brings.

Christ is our example of suffering.

1 Peter 3:18. *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,*

The supreme example of one who suffered and did no wrong is Christ. "Peter assures the readers that suffering for righteousness brings them into close identity with the experience of their Savior and Lord."¹⁵⁴

The word used in this verse and rendered as "died" in many of the older manuscripts is the identical word that is also rendered "suffered unto death." There is only one letter difference between "died" and "suffered" in the Greek lexicon. The quote clearly identifies that the death of Christ was a death that came with great suffering.¹⁵⁵ The New Testament writers declared that Jesus' suffering was the one final sacrifice that provides the full atonement for the sins of all those who truly place their faith and trust in God. Jesus did not die for His own sins, but for the sins of all others who would place their faith and trust in Him. "The suffering Christian must always remember that he has a suffering Christ. Christ's attitudes and actions during His unjust persecution reveal the proper response to suffering that His followers are to maintain during stressful situations."¹⁵⁶

Christ's death on the cross is not an event to be repeated:¹⁵⁷ the work of grace is done.¹⁵⁸ Christ's death on the cross was once for all time. His sacrifice also was once for all sin and once for all people, giving all the opportunity to find forgiveness by trusting in God. We may be reminded of the contents of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews where the writer states, "By faith Abraham, " and goes on to list many others who placed their faith and trust in God prior to the coming of Jesus, Christ, clearly denoting the voracity of their salvation through

¹⁵⁴ Hiebert, D. Edmond. Selected studies from 1 Peter: pt 2, The suffering and triumphant Christ: an exposition of 1 Peter 3:18-22. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 139 no 554 Apr - Jun 1982, p 147.

¹⁵⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:3, Galatians 1:3-4, 1 John 2:2, Hebrews 5:1-3, 7-10.

¹⁵⁶ Kirk, Gordon E. Endurance in suffering in 1 Peter. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 138 no 549 Jan - Mar 1981, p 55.

¹⁵⁷ Hebrews 9:26-27.

¹⁵⁸ John 19:30.

the work of the Cross. Jesus died to provide forgiveness of sin for all who place their faith and trust in God. All means everyone, without regard to how they came to faith in God, but that they came to faith in God.

The next phrase literally means, "the just for the unjust" This refers to the vicarious nature of Christ's death on the cross. He took our place, suffering on our behalf, though He did nothing to deserve that suffering. We should never forget that we all have an unjust nature, and all of us deserve God's wrath for our continued sin.

The word rendered "bring you to" refers to bringing someone to the throne of one in great authority.¹⁵⁹ Only Aaron and his sons were allowed to come to the door of the tent; only "righteous" Jewish men were allowed to enter the inner court of the Temple. Only Jews could go past the Temple court of the Gentiles to the inner court. Each of these rules serve as a metaphor of one's worthiness to access the throne of God. Jewish traditions stratified access to God. Jesus' death did away with all of that stratification, even though many world religions and faiths have sought to recreate it.

Jesus died. He did not go into a coma or faint, but was alive in the spirit immediately upon his physical death.

Christ's Preaching to Imprisoned Spirits.

1 Peter 3:19 *through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison*

This is probably the most difficult passage in the letter, and it is numbered among the most controversial passages in the entire New Testament. "The meaning of every word or phrase in 1 Peter 3:19 has been and is disputed. No one interpretation has gained dominance. So it is unlikely that "another" interpretation will succeed in commanding the field."¹⁶⁰ Martin Luther admitted that he did not understand what Peter meant in these verses. These verses have been used to defend the Catholic tradition of purgatory. Here is a summary of the primary modern viewpoints:

- Jesus went to the realm of the wicked dead, Sheol or Hades, between his death and resurrection. This was part of His suffering for the sins of his people.

¹⁵⁹ Exodus 29:4.

¹⁶⁰ Bandstra, Andrew J. 'Making proclamation to the spirits in prison': another look at 1 Peter 3:19. *Calvin Theological Journal*, 38 no 1 Apr 2003, p 120.

- Jesus demonstrated, through His death, the truth of the gospel to all those who are under the bondage of sin, including those who had already died.
- Jesus made this journey to proclaim his Lordship over the dead. His goal was to obtain release for the righteous people who had died prior to the cross. "This "harrowing of hell," as it is sometimes referred to, is described at some length by the spurious *Gospel of Nicodemus*. It includes a description of the descent itself, a deception of Satan, a bursting of the gates, a preaching to the spirits, their release, and the resurrection of the saints."¹⁶¹
- Jesus went to the realm of the dead to validate what God had been saying throughout history: God's redemptive work now had been accomplished in Christ's death on the cross. The damnation of those who had refused to respond to the truth was confirmed.
- Jesus went to preach repentance and salvation, providing all the dead with another chance to be saved.
- Jesus became eternally present at the actual time of His death. It was that eternal spirit that called people to repentance.
- These verses refer to the apocryphal book of Enoch, which is not part of Christian doctrine.

Our separation from the meaning of the original text by several layers of language translation and 2000 years of cultural changes can sometimes serve to make the exact determination of an author's intent difficult to ascertain. However, the specific meaning of these verses may elude us, but the basic message is still very clear:

1 Peter 3:20. *who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,*

Jesus' death was not myth or make-believe. If we ascribe to Jesus' descending into the realm of the dead, this scripture clearly states that He descended into Hades. Jewish tradition held that the realm of the dead was divided into two sections: Hades was a waiting place for the righteous, often referred to as "Abraham's Bosom." The second section was Gehenna, or hell, which was reserved for the wicked. Its name was based on the name of the Valley of Hinnom, just outside the walls of Jerusalem where the city's refuse was burned.

The New Testament does not specifically state that Jesus descended into Hell. However, the implication here is strong that Jesus entered into eternity, where He

¹⁶¹ Scharlemann, Martin Henry. 'He descended into hell': an interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18-20. *Concordia Journal*, 15 no 3 Jul 1989, p 312.

would have met Abraham, Moses, Elijah, etc. We may recall the Mount of Transfiguration,¹⁶² where Jesus met with the patriarchs, clearly demonstrating their state as a living being. The Jews would have held that the patriarchs ascended from Hades for this event, whereas many now hold that they stepped back into created, physical time from their home in eternity as the Messiah, the Christ had done.

The Gospel of Matthew, gives witness to the dead rising during the period between Jesus' death and His resurrection, lending credence to the timeless efficacy of His saving grace.¹⁶³ Whether these who were raised ascended from Hades or descended from Heaven's eternity, Christ's triumph over all times and places is universal. God's message of grace in Christ reaches out to touch all mankind so that no person is excluded from the scope of God's love and concern.

In Noah's time, the ark was the instrument of salvation for the righteous. The water lifted the boat and held it safe during the destruction of the wicked. In the same manner, Jesus lifts up all those of genuine faith, saving them from ultimate destruction. "The author of 1 Peter aims to foster Christian endurance by helping his readers to connect their sense of being heirs of an ancient great escape to their reception of God's redemptive activity in Jesus."¹⁶⁴ Peter is laying the groundwork for his statement concerning Christian baptism.

Christian Baptism: Symbol of the Resurrection.

1 Peter 3:21. *and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,*

The Greek word, ἀντιτυπον, *antitupon*, rendered as the word *symbolizes*, is also used in Hebrews 9:24, and refers to that which is represented by the type of another, and is grammatically linked to the word translated, "saved." This verse does not mean, as it may literally appear, that salvation is obtained through water baptism, but rather, that water baptism is a symbol or archetype of that salvation.

The grammatical constructs in the original Greek language are complex and open to various interpretations based upon where one places the punctuation and how verbs are organized to pair with subjects.¹⁶⁵ How does "baptism save," when we

¹⁶² Matthew 17:1-9.

¹⁶³ Matthew 27:52.

¹⁶⁴ Collins, C John. Noah, Deucalion, and the New Testament. *Biblica*, 93 no 3 2012, p 403-425.

¹⁶⁵ Hiebert, D. Edmond. Selected studies from 1 Peter: pt 2, The suffering and triumphant Christ: an exposition of 1 Peter 3:18-22. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 139 no 554 Apr - Jun 1982, p 154.

know that salvation is by faith and faith alone? "It spares one from the unfavorable circumstance of judgment. It does so because it is the declaration of the individual's appropriate conscious awareness in reference to God. He can have this appropriate awareness because of the resurrection of Christ. Baptism saves in that it is the moment when the individual testifies to the fact that he shares something in common with God. He makes known that he has the right attitude and relationship toward God. He willingly responds with his declaration to anyone who interrogates him. He has become a 'co-knower' with God and other Christians that in the resurrection of Christ there is salvation. The one who is baptized is saved because he recognizes the authenticity and divine origin of the message that in Christ God has offered man the ultimate revelation of His grace."¹⁶⁶

Those who hold to the literal interpretation that water baptism is necessary for salvation can find through the actual Greek grammar a context that is in agreement with the basic doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. Peter uses Noah's deliverance by the floodwaters as an archetype of the Christian believer's deliverance which is symbolized in water baptism. "The flood that destroyed all mankind was, in a certain sense, responsible for Noah's being spared judgment. It floated his ark instead of overwhelming the craft. Similarly the water of baptism, although it speaks symbolically of death in union with Christ, will at the same time witness to co-resurrection with the Savior."¹⁶⁷

Furthermore, the verse continues to state that salvation is by the "pledge of good conscience." This is far more consistent with our understanding that God looks to our heart, and not to our outward actions. However, a misunderstanding of this verse can lead one to believe that baptism alone saves. Infant baptism was a tradition started in the third century, A.D. as a response to a misunderstanding about baptism and a subsequent thought that since it is the act of baptism that saves, then one should be baptized upon birth to assure one's security against an early death. This mistaken interpretation has become a stalwart tradition that has greatly contributed to the persecution of the church. Many Anabaptists ("re-baptizers" were tortured and killed during the next twelve centuries in the name of doctrinal correction by the Catholic and Anglican churches. There is no religious ritual or rite that can provide a means of salvation. There is no single work, or set of works, which can make one righteous. This verse states that the power of salvation is found only through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, His work, and His authority.

¹⁶⁶ Brooks, Oscar S. 1 Peter 3:21: the clue to the literary structure of the epistle. *Novum testamentum*, 16 no 4 Oct 1974, p 290-305.

¹⁶⁷ Bennetch, John Henry. Exegetical studies in 1 Peter. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 101 no 403 Jul - Sep 1944, p 305.

1 Peter 3:22. *who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand--with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.*

Peter has identified that baptism is not a bath that cleanses one of dirt, but a symbolic act that is an archetype of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. In being baptized, the new Christian is making an open pledge, or vow, of consecration to God, declaring repentance from sin, and allegiance to the LORD, Jesus. This public proclamation indicates that the believer has heard the truth, and has turned to God for salvation through Christ's resurrection. Being buried in the water symbolizes Christ's being buried in the tomb. Rising out of the water symbolizes that new life that one now, upon their previous profession of faith, will experience.

In baptism we identify ourselves publicly with Christ in the same manner that Jesus' baptism by John (the Baptist) served as a public profession of His own submission to and approval of John's message. Through baptism faithful believers state unashamedly that they have died to the old life and arise to a new life in Christ. Second and third century Christians illustrated this quite graphically. They removed their old clothes prior to baptism, were baptized, and then they put on new clothes. Since baptism is a testimony of repentance, it is not appropriate that one intentionally carry an un-repentant sin through the waters of baptism. Likewise it is not appropriate that one baptize another when there is evidence of deliberate and rebellious un-repentant sin in their lives.

Verse 22 also affirms the ascension of Christ and his eternal status as the reigning Lord. Christ holds the position of ultimate authority over all creation. If angels, authorities and powers are in submission to Him, our very first step in understanding what Jesus is doing, is to accept his complete authority over us. Jesus is not a symbol or icon to be worshiped, He is the Lord to be loved and obeyed. Only when we accept the position of Jesus as our personal LORD, can we experience the salvation He died to give us. It is from that perspective we then seek to obey Him, and show evidence of His Lordship in our lives.

1 Peter 4:1-6.

Living Under Lordship

My paternal grandfather passed away in the autumn of 1972, shortly before my wife, AnnMarie and I were married. I can still vividly remember my grandfather and the time he spent with me as a young boy when we visited his home in Conklin, New York, a small town that is situated on the Susquehanna River valley very close to the Pennsylvania border. I was adopted by my family at the age of four, and an important part of that adoption was the change of my name from Jack Howard Buchanan to John William Carter. This name change represented something quite significant. When my name was changed I was brought into a new and fundamental relationship with a new family and with a new father. From the day of that adoption I would be under both the care and the authority of a new father. I went from the vagabond life of an unwanted orphan to the stable life as a member of a caring and loving family.

It was always apparent that my paternal Grandfather was very pleased to have a grandson, and we were very close. He would take me on walks across the neighboring fields, up and down the railroad tracks near his home and through his gardens as he would talk to me about any number of things that were on his mind. The one thing I remember most from those, rather one-sided conversations, was related to his concern that I was his only remaining male heir in my generation. I have no brothers and all female first cousins. One day he said to me something like, "Always remember that you are a Carter: you will be representing this family everywhere you go." He gave me the impression that the character that people would see in me was a direct reflection on him and upon our family.

Several years later our country was engaged in the war in Vietnam and I found myself in boot camp as a new volunteer recruit. Those in authority replaced our civilian clothing with military uniforms and did their best to replace our civilian world view with military bearing. It was made clear that the uniform that we wore represented the people of the United States of America and our behavior was expected to be consistent with the codes of the U.S. Military. Now I was not only representing the character of my family, but also the character of the people of the United States of America.

Our personal character is a reflection of that set of influences in our lives to which we choose to submit. Inappropriate behavior as a young person would have brought embarrassment to my family. Inappropriate behavior as a soldier would have been an embarrassment to the military and to the uniform. When we take that life-saving step of turning to God in faith, we place ourselves under another

authority that is superior to family, superior to the military, and superior to any authority on earth. Character is established by living a life of obedience. As a child, I was obedient to the set of behaviors that were expected by the family culture so that my parents would never regret their adoption decision. As a soldier, I was obedient to the set of behaviors that were expected by the military code of conduct.¹⁶⁸ As a Christian, we find that our character is also established by our obedience to God. We find obedience to God by placing ourselves under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and it is this submission that is the true evidence of sincere, saving faith. Without such submission, there is no true faith.¹⁶⁹

The apostle Peter understood this concept, and he also experienced a name change that defined the character of his new set of personal relationships. His name was originally *Simeon* in the Hebrew, or *Simon* in the Greek. Jesus gave Simon the surname *Peter* (or literally *Petros* in the Greek) that means “rock” or “small stone.” Peter was also then called *Cephas*, a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic word for “small stone.” Peter understood that the name change from Simon to Peter was directly associated with a change in his character that was found in his faith in Christ. Sometimes people misunderstand the basic teaching of Jesus’ purpose in using Peter’s name:

Matthew 16:18. *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

The early Christian orthodoxy made reference to this verse without considering the surrounding context, coming up with an understanding that the church was built upon Peter, the Rock. In truth, the church is built upon the confession of faith in Jesus Christ, demonstrated by Peter in the previous verses. The Greek grammar clearly denotes that it is Peter’s faith that Jesus refers to as “this rock.” The foundation of the church is faith in the One true God, against which the gates of hell cannot prevail.¹⁷⁰ Paul writes to the Romans,

Romans 10:9. *That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*

A key word in Paul’s imperative is “LORD.” This is the same word that is rendered, “YAHWEH” in the Old Testament. It is the covenant name for God. It

¹⁶⁸ Uniform Code of Military Conduct, U.C.M.J.

¹⁶⁹ Romans 10:9-10.

¹⁷⁰ Note that gates are used to keep a domain secure. The idea here is not that the church is protected from being overrun by the Gates of Hell... the writer states that the gates of hell cannot hold back the power of an obedient church. Evil is overrun and overwhelmed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

is the name that recognizes and acknowledges God's rightful authority over us and our willingness to be placed under that authority.

Peter spent most of his ministry in a pastoral and apostolic context within and around the city of Jerusalem. And though he did not seem to engage in a significant ministry outside of the city, it is clear that his heart was deeply concerned about the condition of believers throughout the region. It was to this audience that Peter wrote these letters that are included in the New Testament, letters that are full of encouraging instruction as Peter draws from his own life's experience to help Christians understand how to live a life that is consistent with their profession of faith, a life that is representative of that new name, "Christian." In the first of these letters he writes,

Arm Yourselves with the Mind of Christ.

1 Peter 4:1. *Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin*

We might expect that if we are going to follow closely one who suffered, we will also experience suffering. One does not suffer unless there is some conflict entering one's life, and when one turns to God in faith, one enters into that same conflict that Jesus came to address: the conflict of sin and its consequences in this pagan and secular world. The godless character of this world stands firmly against godly character, so when one comes to God in faith one also comes into that same conflict that Jesus encountered. Those to whom Peter is writing are experiencing that conflict in the form of marginalization and persecution from those who stand against God's presence and purpose. When I was a child I stayed faithful to my new name because of the benefits that I received from being a member of a family. When I was in the military I stayed faithful to my new status both because of my love for my country and my respect for the uniform code of military justice. I was also aware of the benefits and rewards given to obedient soldiers. How do we stay faithful to the authority of God in our lives? We do so by submitting wholly to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Peter provides us with some resources to help us in that effort.

The words "arm yourselves" is a literal military term that means to take on a full array of armaments. This clearly implies that Christians are engaged in an active battle. As a child I had no desire to return to my orphan days, nor to the domestic abuse I suffered that resulted in my removal from the home. These were days that I quickly and completely forgot. I have absolutely no memory of any event prior to the moment I met my adopted parents. However, as Christians, we find

those old days much harder to forget, and we find the old ways much harder to change. So, the battle lines are drawn.

What are we to arm ourselves with? Peter states that we are to arm ourselves with the same mind, or literally, the attitude of Christ. The word, *attitude* has two meanings, both of which may be relevant. Placing ourselves in the proper attitude involves both a mental and physical state. Attitude can refer to our physical state: we can place ourselves where Christ wants us to be both in our geographical location and in our position within the complex web of relationships that define us. Attitude also refers to our mental state: the foundational set of choices and opinions that define our world view. Our world view as a Christian will be a transformation of the world view we had prior to our profession of faith as our new perspective comes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ as informed by our submission to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Taking on the mind of Christ is the first and most important step in overcoming the conflict with this sinful world.

The last phrase has been misinterpreted to allow a teaching that suffering atones for sin. Those who hold to this position claim that we must experience suffering in order to receive forgiveness. However, Jesus suffered on the cross so that sin would lose the power to condemn those who place their faith and trust in God, so no further suffering is necessary for salvation.¹⁷¹ However when we are engaged in the conflict that godly living will encounter in a godless culture, we are going to experience some level of persecution, some level of suffering. Peter states that the level of Christian commitment that brings one to the point of being willing to suffer for his or her faith also tends to make a person able to resist temptation and sin. Faith in Christ takes away the desire, or the “want” to sin that so characterized our prior lives.

Live by God's will, not your own.

1 Peter 4:2. *That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.*

The word used here for “live”¹⁷² is a durative verb that which can mean “to spend an entire life.” Peter is referring to a change in lifestyle that characterizes the life of a Christian from the day of salvation until the day that the LORD brings us home. We can see a clear call for Christians to mature in the LORD as the desire for the world of men is gradually and completely replaced by a desire for the kingdom of God.

¹⁷¹ Romans 5:8.

¹⁷² Used only here in the New Testament.

How do we actually accomplish this transition from one world to another while we are still immersed in the old one? The answer is found in our choice of authority: that of the world, or that of God. These authorities are mutually exclusive. Christians are not to allow their lives to be dominated by worldly human passions, but rather to let God's will be the determining influence of their lives. This is another example of the biblical doctrine of the Lordship of Christ, and the instruction that the scripture provides concerning the call for obedience to God's authority.

1 Peter 4:3. *For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries:*

Before we knew the mind of Christ, we lived under the will of the world, what Peter herein refers to as the “will of the Gentiles.” When a Christian takes on the mind of Christ, the old life becomes a gray, dark memory. It is not appropriate that a Christian fall back into that life. Peter is writing about arming ourselves for the conflict, and to go back to the old life is similar to a complete surrender, a decision to abandon the faith. When we live under the Lordship of Christ, we have no desire to return to the powerless authority of this pagan world. Peter refers to that experience as the “time past of our life.” It is behind us now.

The manner of that old, secular life is incompatible with faith in Christ, but is very compatible with the world. You will be less criticized by the world for openly portraying a godless lifestyle than you will be for openly portraying your Christian faith. This godless lifestyle is advertised by the world in its politically liberal publication and entertainment industries, both reporting and shaping its culture as it demands conformance by all who would express a different viewpoint. Peter, Paul and other New Testament writers express that a person will never reach any degree of Christian morality or maturity by copying the world culture and doing what comes naturally. Christians are to live by God's will, following the example of Christ, and not give in to the influences of this world. The natural person is unredeemed. Peter listed six specific sins that characterize the will of the world:

Licentiousness or lasciviousness. This is the giving in to base desires that result in ungodly behavior. As one matures in their faith it becomes easier to deny such desires. However, maturity also changes the character of the enemy. A more mature Christian may not be as given to licentious or immoral behavior, but may still give in to other unholy desires such as behaviors that demonstrate prejudice, arrogance, a lack of self-control, or any other attitudes and actions that

nullify the demonstration of *agape* love that is the foundation of the mind of Christ.

Lusts. This is the giving in to distractions that turn our focus to ungodly thoughts or attitudes. Unlike licentiousness that characterizes ungodly actions, lusts characterize ungodly thoughts and attitudes. Since lusts are not as visible as lascivious behavior, Christians may have more difficulty overcoming this enemy to the faith. Obedience to the Lordship of Christ requires a deliberate decision to turn away from those distractions that would promote ungodly thoughts and attitudes.

Excess of wine. This is the giving in to the influence of alcohol, drugs, or any other behavior-altering chemicals. In order to have the mind of Christ, our mind needs to be clear and sober. When we give ourselves over to the influence of mind-altering drugs, we give them control over us, a control that compromises our ability to maintain our focus on the Holy Spirit and our testimony of submission to Him. Again, the more mature Christian may have completely overcome any desire for alcohol or drugs, but may still deal with other excesses that compromise the health and testimony of the mind and body such as smoking or over-eating.

Reveling. This is the giving in to the influence of pagan and secular celebrations. This world is certainly not short on party spirit. In the first century these celebrations were inclined to be held to promote the celebration of their understanding of the nature of their pagan gods, and their reveling included behaviors that were designed to get the attention of those gods, behaviors that were extremely inappropriate for a Christian. At its worst, Christians today could be caught up in parties and celebrations that promote ungodly acts. Christians today are probably more likely to engage in parties that surround family, college or professional spectator sports, and one should always be aware of their behaviors in this arena.

Banquetings. This is the giving in to personal pleasure, a specific form of gluttony. This might be understood as the opposite of fasting. The purpose of fasting is to allow the one who fasts to maintain their focus on prayer and Bible study, and avoid the time and distraction that preparation and consummation of meals requires. Gluttony might be described as a fast on prayer and Bible study so that one can spend all of their time and energy on the pursuit of personal pleasure. When the clock rolls around to 12:00 PM on a Sunday morning, is your heart's desire to continue to immerse yourself in God's Word, or are you in a hurry to get away from the church so that you can find personal pleasure in your other afternoon activities? Christians are not impervious to the distraction of gluttony.

Idolatry. This is the giving of authority to created things of this world or its imaginings. In the first century context we might think of idolatry as the worship of pagan gods, yet in today's culture those same gods still exist. They have simply changed their names. We give authority to worldly things when we allow them to make decisions for us. At its simplest we offer sacrifices of praise and hard-earned dollars to support our favorite sports teams or entertainment celebrities. However, our penchant for idolatry is actually far more subtle. For example, our desire for a big house, big car, big boat, etc., can result in a network of debt that is so large that we can no longer demonstrate proper stewardship in our lives. We have become slaves to our mortgages as they then decide where we are going to invest the material wealth that the LORD has blessed us with.

An obsession with our careers or the money we make can turn us away from our true calling to serve the LORD and to serve others, including our own families. When we engage in any activity or attitude that causes us to make decisions that turn us away from God's will in our lives, those activities or attitudes become our idols, and we are demonstrating the sin of idolatry. Of all of the worldly behaviors in this list, idolatry is probably the most vexing enemy of the Christian spirit. One cannot maintain the mind of Christ when our mind is focused on the secondary authorities that we have given to things of this world.

Christians no longer run with the old crowd.

1 Peter 4:4. *Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you:*

When one comes under the Lordship of Christ, one will "run with a different crowd," an idiom that refers to the group of people who you draw closest to yourself. The godless debauchery of the world is no longer an attraction to the person of faith. The early church found themselves ostracized by the community because they no longer took part in what they considered of great importance in their social activities. "Among the things they would no longer do is participate in the festivals that were a part of the culture of the whole Roman Empire. While practices that often accompanied those festivals bordered on the profligate,¹⁷³ a normal part of the festival included fealty to the local gods and to the Roman emperor as the embodiment of the advantages conferred by Roman culture. Such activity could only appear as idolatry to the Christians, and as a result, they would not participate in many of these public festivities."¹⁷⁴ This same refusal to participate in the godless revelings of this secular and pagan culture is true today.

¹⁷³ Recklessly extravagant.

¹⁷⁴ Achtemeier, Paul J. 1 Peter 4:1-8. *Interpretation*, 65 no 1 Jan 2011, p 76.

The seeming alienation from this world by people of faith is with good reason: the faithful no longer look to the world to find their social relationships. Though God will certainly use a Christian to minister to a segment of society that needs the gospel, Christians will find true *koinonia*, Holy Spirit-led, fellowship only in relationship with other Christians. It is within the Christian fellowship that one receives the full benefits of the unconditional character of *agape* love.

Peter states that those who are a part of the secular culture from which we come will not understand why Christians are no longer in as close a relationship with them, and have chosen to literally run with a different crowd. The illustration here is similar to that of a footrace where one is running in sync with a crowd of runners toward a defined goal. Christians no longer run with the old crowd, for now the direction of their paths is different.

Those you left behind do not understand why you no longer find happiness in their revelings. This makes you different, and different things are invariably criticized and unaccepted by the world. Left to its own, the powers of this world always seek to destroy anything that is different or is opposed to its beliefs in any way. At this point, the marginalization or persecution that the Christian might experience is probably more personal than political. It is fueled by the viciousness of broken friendships and lack of understanding or trust.

Those who persecute Christians will be judged by God.

1 Peter 4:5. *Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.*

Here and in other verses,¹⁷⁵ Peter stated that those who take part in persecuting Christians for their godly choices will be judged by the LORD. He is writing to Christians who are doing their best to maintain a lifestyle that is under the Lordship of Christ, and they are experiencing real persecution by their godless culture as a result of their faithfulness. Peter encourages persecuted Christians by reminding them that those who are doing the persecuting will be judged for their behavior. Those who persecute Christians will be judged by God. This frees Christians:

- of the task of judging and condemning the lost.
- to love people who are lost and work to bring them the good news of the gospel.

¹⁷⁵ 1 Peter 1:13, 17.

Conflict is inevitable when a person seriously seeks to live a Christian lifestyle, a lifestyle that is brought under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Authentic Christian living requires that believers declare a firm, resolute NO to certain kinds of behavior as we move our lives from the authority of this world to the authority of the LORD. How do we do this? In this short passage Peter gave us five specific instructions:

- Christians are to arm themselves with the mind of Christ, seeking to be consistent in obedience to Him.
- This means that Christians are to live by God's will, not their own.
- Christians are not to turn their eyes off of Christ by giving in to the distractions of this pagan world.
- Christians no longer run with the old crowd, and may experience persecution because of that choice.
- Christians are not to judge those who persecute them, but to love them so that they can also hear the good news of the gospel and be saved.

1 Peter 4:6 *For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.*

In context, Peter was talking of people who were physically separated from them by death, those who have passed away after hearing and responding positively to the Gospel. "Commentators who see in the verse a preaching of the gospel to the souls of the dead generally base their argument to a great extent on the interpretation they offer along similar lines for 3,19. In [this verse] the preaching is clearly to men and equally clearly a preaching of salvation."¹⁷⁶ By this time, many of those who had died during the lifetimes of the readers did have a chance to respond to the Gospel. Here he is stating that the reason for the preaching of the gospel has not changed. Why? That, though we are judged in the manner of all men, Christians are no longer condemned to eternal separation from God by their sin. Christians are called to live according to God's will by His spirit.

Living in the Hope of Jesus' Return

The first six verses of Chapter 4 of Peter's letter focuses on the task of Christians to live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ while living in a world that rejects the gospel. The conflict that arises between these two opposing world views will always bring stress into a believer's relationship with the world, a stress that

¹⁷⁶ Dalton, William Joseph. The interpretation of 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6: light from 2 Peter. *Biblica*, 60 no 4 1979, p 553.

comes from the world if the believer is faithful, or from the church if the believer is apostate. Some might prefer to sit on the fence, hoping to avoid the conflict only to find out that such a position finds stress in relationships both within the body of faith and without.

Peter has been encouraging Christians to live under the Lordship of Christ without compromise, taking on the heart-view of faith, the “mind of Christ,” accepting the inherent conflict with the world while loving all people and serving Christ by serving those who would show only persecution in return.

As first-century Christians were dealing with this conflict another question was continually in the debate as it still is today: how long will we wait for Christ to return and this conflict will end? The context and language of the New Testament writers implies that they believed that Jesus would come back in their own lifetimes. There are people today who make similar arguments as they would set dates and watch them pass without event. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians¹⁷⁷ concerning those among them who were preaching of an imminent return of Christ, or even that Christ has already returned. Paul reminded the Thessalonian fellowships that two events had not yet taken place that are prophesied: the world will be in a state of utter apostasy, and the antichrist will be known to all the faithful. Though these two events have not yet taken place, they could happen in a very short period of time, less than a day. If the antichrist were to declare his deity tomorrow morning, the media would have the message spread throughout the world before lunch. Consequently, though we have been waiting for two millennia, we must be ready because the return of Christ could, indeed, happen very quickly.

1 Peter 4:7. *But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.*

“The hope of Christ's return is an essential part of the believer's equipment for fruitful Christian living.”¹⁷⁸ Peter clearly teaches that the faithful are to live in the expectation of Jesus' return. That expectation is to be so real that we organize our lives and activities in preparation for the *Perousia*, the second coming of Christ. It would be easy to argue that, since Jesus has not returned in two centuries there is little reason to expect that His coming is imminent. However, That argument does not diminish the probability that Jesus' return is imminent indeed.

¹⁷⁷ 2 Thessalonians, Chapter 2.

¹⁷⁸ Hiebert, D. Edmond. Selected studies from 1 Peter: pt 3, Living in the light of Christ's return: an exposition of 1 Peter 4:7-11. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 139 no 555 Jul - Sep 1982, p 243.

Consider what would you do if you knew for a fact that a dangerous thief was going to enter your home, brutalize your family, and steal your possessions. Furthermore, consider that your knowledge of his coming is certain, but you have no idea of when this would happen. What would you do? You would be prepared. You might install a security system in your home and keep defensive weapons close at hand. Jesus gave this identical counsel when He told His disciples to be ready as they would for a “thief in the night.”¹⁷⁹ Peter gives some advice on how to be ready.

1. Be sober. The word that Peter uses describes one who is in an attitude of self-control, a sound mind, not swayed by the influence of others. “The first verb, “be of sound judgment” (σωφρονήσατε), was used of a person who was in his right mind as contrasted to one who was under the power of a demon.”^{180,181} When we consider insobriety the first thing that often comes to mind is one who is drunk from too much alcohol. Drunkenness dulls the senses and robs the individual of the alertness and self-control that is necessary to do even the simplest of tasks. Any influence that can serve that purpose steals away our sobriety. Though one may not be intoxicated by drugs, one can be intoxicated by ideas and false teaching including eschatological alarm. One can be intoxicated by their own pride and arrogance that blinds them to the truth. There are many subtle intoxicants that can cause our view of the truth to be distorted. Consequently, Peter calls upon the faithful to be vigilant and clear-minded in preparation for Jesus’ return.

2. Watch unto prayer. The Greek word for watch is a military term that refers to one who is guarding a position, deliberately and intensely searching for a possible intruder. Another relevant metaphor might be the wife who watches the ocean for the return of her ship-captain husband. It is a form of watching that implies a continual and uncompromised expectation. The Greek grammar ties the words sober and watch together in a manner that requires sobriety for effective prayer to take place.

If one were waiting for the thief in the night and was armed with a weapon of defense, one would not lock that weapon away in a safe. The weapon would be loaded and kept close at hand. One would be listening and watching, ready to respond to the danger. Likewise, as Jesus is surely returning, the faithful are called upon to be on the watch. The “weapon” that we keep close to us is prayer, the continual communication with God through the words and attitudes of the

¹⁷⁹ Matthew 24:43, Luke 12:39, 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 2 Peter 3:10, Revelation 3:3, Revelation 16:15.

¹⁸⁰ Mark 5:15; Luke 8:35.

¹⁸¹ Hiebert, D. Edmond. Selected studies from 1 Peter: pt 3, Living in the light of Christ's return: an exposition of 1 Peter 4:7-11. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 139 no 555 Jul - Sep 1982, p 246.

heart. As one is alert and unimpeded by insobriety, one must continue in prayer as one awaits Jesus' return.

1 Peter 4:8. *And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.*

3. Love one another. As we prepare for the coming of the LORD, we are to love one another deeply. The love that Peter refers to is the unconditional *agape* love that God gives us that we can choose to give to one another.¹⁸² *Agape* love is not the natural or reflexive response of an individual towards another. Our own pride and prejudices will always lead us to choose whom we would love and reject those whom we consider undeserving of that love. The gift of *agape* love is a deliberate choice to love without any condition or mixture of compromise. The faithful are called to express *agape* love by the LORD Himself, and the power to overcome our prejudices and to love others unconditionally comes from the Holy Spirit.

4. Forgive one another. Some misunderstand the second half of this phrase and use it to argue that sincere *agape* love in some way atones for sins since several English translations use the word, "cover," a word we often use to refer to atonement. This is a false teaching that is the result of an incomplete exegesis of the text. There is only one source of atonement for sin, and that is the work of Jesus Christ as He paid the price for sin when He died on the Cross of Calvary. He experienced death so that those who place their faith in God would not have to. However, if we take God's act of atonement a step further we recognize that Jesus died on the cross because of His love for us.

Jesus prayed, "Father forgive them..." because of that love. When we truly love one another, we are very quick to forgive, and forgiveness does indeed "cover" a multitude of sins. Forgiveness destroys the power of sin to separate. It is the unconditional forgiveness of sin that seals the relationship between the LORD and the faithful for eternity. Likewise, unconditional forgiveness between individuals serves to maintain their relationships that would otherwise be broken.

1 Peter 4:9. *Use hospitality one to another without grudging.*

5. Practice hospitality. Hospitality was an integral and extremely important trait of ancient near-eastern culture. Lacking the restaurants and hotels of modern society, it was necessary that travelers find food and lodging along the way in the homes of the people who lived there. The opening of one's home to strangers is

¹⁸² Downs, David J. 'Love covers a multitude of sins': redemptive almsgiving in I Peter 4:8 and its early Christian reception. *The Journal of Theological Studies*, ns 65 no 2 Oct 2014, p 489-514.

simply a lost art in our society today. It is considered rude in many modern societies today to knock on the door of another's home without previous permission. The practice is illegal in many local communities where cold-door visitation or solicitation is allowed only by permit, and the visitor must carry some form of visible identification.

Hospitality towards strangers has become increasingly rare. The act of hospitality is directly related to the expression of *agape* love. Again, the expression of *agape* love is a choice, and to love a stranger and to extend hospitality to that stranger requires the deliberate choice to do so. Often the expression of hospitality necessitates some form of sacrifice whether it be the giving of time, resources, food, or other things that meet the needs of the stranger. Furthermore, there is a sacrifice of faith as one accepts the risks associated with a close relationship with one who has not had the opportunity to engender trust.

It is easy for many of us to share hospitality with those whom we already love and trust. However, the same LORD came to share the good news of salvation with all people, both those who we trust, those who we do not trust, and those who we do not know. *Agape* love, hence hospitality, is to be extended to all of these without dissention. Such dissent is simply the voice of our sinful nature that stands against the expression of *agape* love.

1 Peter 4:10. *As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

6. Minister one to another. Somewhere in the historical development of the modern church it has become common practice to believe that one person in a church fellowship has the responsibility to serve as its minister. We typically call out individual ministers, conduct some form of formal ordinance rite, and then sit back and expect them to minister to us and to others. Even the title of "minister" implies that the named individual has the unique and special task to minister. This practice and philosophy is simply not biblical. Ministry is the task of every believer.

Peter teaches, as does Paul, that all believers are gifted. Any community of people, large or small, will include those with a wide variety of gifts. Gifts are manifestations of God's grace¹⁸³ and can be given at birth or attained during maturation. Gifts include that set of skills, talents, and interests that make every individual unique. We express our gifts in many ways, most often to bring personal gain. However, the biblical model is that these gifts have been received

¹⁸³ Note that the Greek word for gift, *charisma*, is derived from the Greek word for grace, *charis*.

from God, and that they have been received for a purpose. We were created to glorify God, and the gifts we have been given were received by us for the purpose of glorifying Him. Keeping gifts for ourselves, or using them entirely for personal gain is inappropriate for a person of faith. Just as Christians are stewards of those things of this world that have been entrusted to them, they are also stewards of those gifts. Peter goes on to state that proper stewardship of those gifts is expressed in ministry to one another.¹⁸⁴ He then give a few examples.

1 Peter 4:11. *If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

7. Speak godly words of love and grace. Peter describes two forms of gifts: speaking and serving, and some have used this verse to organize the gifts under these categories.¹⁸⁵ When the expressed gift is a speaking gift, one is to teach, to edify, to encourage, and minister to others by speaking the very “oracles” of God. The content of one’s speech is to be consistent with the mind of Christ that Peter previously described. A Christian’s words should stand on the foundation of God’s Word, expressed in *agape* love, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

James wrote of the difficulties associated with ministering through words in a significant portion of his letter to the church.¹⁸⁶ How does one come to speak the “oracles of God?” First, the believer must have a sincere faith in the LORD, and be cognizant of the context and purpose of salvation so that the truths of the gospel can be shared with others. Then, that sharing can include the correctly applied words of scripture as occasion allows. The more one is familiar with the scriptures, the more one can draw from them in their speech. Furthermore, the context of the oracles is the application of God’s love and grace. We speak the oracles of God when we speak in God’s love towards others rather than through our own selfish motives. Since the oracles present God’s grace, our words can also demonstrate grace towards each other rather than criticism and condemnation.

8. Serve one another. The second category of gifts that Peter refers to are the active ministry gifts. These might be considered the expression of the entire body of spiritual gifts that are not speaking gifts. For example, administration is a gift. We often forget that the word is simply the perfect tense of the word, minister. To minister to another is to actively work to meet their needs. To minister in the

¹⁸⁴ c.f. 1 Corinthians 12:7,25-26; 14:1-19, 26; et. al.

¹⁸⁵ Schreiner, Thomas R. 1,2 Peter, Jude. *The New American Commentary*, Vol. 37. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers. 2003, p. 214. e.g.

¹⁸⁶ James 3:5-6.

context of the biblical call is to minister to the range of another's needs from a motivation of unconditional *agape* love. Again, all believers are given gifts that are to be used to minister one to another.

Finally, Peter notes the reason for this list. God has given to every believer a sacred task as we watch and wait in prayer for Jesus' return: that God would be glorified in and through everything we do. God deserves our obedience because of what He has done for us, and the predominant context of that obedience is found in our love for Him as we praise Him continually. When we declare of Jesus an eternal dominion, we are declaring His eternal Lordship over us. Consequently, the list of tasks that Peter has described are not suggestions for better living, but rather commands from God that are to be obeyed until Jesus' return. This is how we fully prepare for the second coming of Christ.

1 Peter 4:12-19. Enduring Hardship

There is little question that many people experience hardship in this life. In general we witness a world where poverty and pestilence are common, yet it is a world where enough food can and is produced to meet the needs of everyone. We see wars and military actions that destroy the infrastructure of nations and acts of terrorism that attack the foundations of society's security. We witness virtually an entire nation's population of civilians fleeing war-torn areas where government and infrastructure has entirely collapsed. We witness the dramatic and destructive consequence of man's sin towards others on a continual basis as it shows its ugly face in the form of hatred, bigotry, and violence. We also witness hardship that comes from the result of natural disasters as they can interfere with the patterns of our daily lives.

As Christians live out their faith, they will also experience hardship because their world view and their stand for the truth of the gospel is in stark opposition to that of this secular and pagan world. For some Christians that hardship may be found in no more than an occasional critical word. For others, that hardship may become real as they face choices that bring consequences in important areas of life such as family relationships and employment security. There are many places in this world where a profession of Christian faith can bring great personal and physical risk where governing structures are actively persecuting the church. Those areas of the world under the control of Wahhabism,¹⁸⁷ the fundamental and violent branch of Sunni Islam, are consistently persecuting Christians with torture and death.

The first-century church was experiencing hardship from all of these sources. Much like the experience of Christian Jews and Arabs today, a profession of faith usually brings rejection by the family. The early church found it difficult to take part in the regular market of the day since the Jews declared their Christian family members to be dead, the Romans considered them to be disloyal to the Caesar, and the Greeks considered Christians to be unenlightened. It was difficult for a Christian to find meaningful or stable employment, and land ownership was almost beyond question.

1 Peter 4:12. *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:*

¹⁸⁷ Whabbism is the fundamentalist Muslim sect that has spawned violent extremist groups such as Al Qaeda, Boko Haram, and ISIS.

It is natural to respond to hardship with alarm, The word translated “strange” could also be translated “inappropriate.” When we experience hardship we invariably consider that something is wrong, out of place, and needs correction. We might state questions like, “why is this happening to me?” or “where is God when I need Him?” or “Why is God allowing this to happen”? However, Peter reminds us that when we experience hardship at the hands of this pagan and anti-faith world that persecution is directly brought on by this evil world’s conflict with the gospel, and we should not be surprised at all. In fact, if we are not in conflict with this world, and if we are not experiencing some kind of persecution or hardship, it may be possible that we are simply not taking a stand for the gospel. There is a battle for the souls of mankind taking place in this world, and if one is not experiencing its consequence, they are probably not in the battle.

Though some have held to a literal position, holding that the “fiery trial” of this verse refers to Christians being burned at the stake, or that some had lost their possessions and homes to acts of arson,¹⁸⁸ this literal interpretation of the word is not the most likely one. Neither internal nor external evidence suggests that opposition to the Christian faith took these forms in Asia Minor during the period that this epistle was written.¹⁸⁹ This “far more likely is a metaphorical use of the term drawn from the use of intense heat in the smelting of precious metals to refine and ‘prove’ the metal's genuineness.”¹⁹⁰

1 Peter 4:13. *But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.*

We may be reminded of the introduction of James' letter when he admonishes the faithful to count it all joy when they encounter the trials of righteous persecution.¹⁹¹ James spends a good deal of his writing describing that God has a very positive and specific purpose for allowing His people to experience suffering: that through the experience they will become stronger and more patient, and better prepared to share the grace of God with a lost world. Peter adds a reward that is omitted by James: All people will witness the second coming of Christ, either while alive, or risen from the grave, and when His glory is so revealed one can look back and remember the times of faithfulness and be

¹⁸⁸ Selwyn, E.G. “The First Epistle of St. Peter.” New York: Macmillan, 1969, p 221.

¹⁸⁹ Beare, Francis Wright. “The First Epistle of Peter: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes,” 3d ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1970, p 190; Arichea, D.C. and Nida, E.A., “A Translator's Handbook on the First Letter from Peter.” New York: United Bible Societies, 1980, p 145-146.

¹⁹⁰ Johnson, Dennis E. Fire in God's house: imagery from Malachi 3 in Peter's theology of suffering (1 Pet 4:12-19). *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 29 no 3 Sep 1986, p 287-288.

¹⁹¹ James 1:3, ff.

glad. The Revelation of John also implies that there are greater rewards for those who suffered for the gospel.¹⁹²

Any time we think that we are unjustly suffering for the name of grace, we can simply remember Jesus Christ's suffering. Each of the gospel writers reminds Christians that they are partakers of Jesus' suffering, a pattern of abuse that is exacted at the hands of a wicked and sin-filled world that simply does not know or understand the context or eternal impact that their behavior engenders. Jesus' demonstrated unconditional forgiveness towards those who treated Him with such injustice,¹⁹³ and the Holy Spirit that resides in the hearts of the faithful will lead them to imitate Jesus. The world responds to persecution with anger and retribution. The faithful are instructed to respond to persecution with joy and forgiveness. This is a tough standard to live by when our pride gets in the way, but an easy standard to attain when we truly are submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 4:14. *If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.*

One of the most frequent reasons Christians cite for failing to live out the gospel boldly is their fear of reproach. It is far easier to compromise in public and refrain from overtly demonstrating your faith and love for others than it is to "expose yourself" by showing your faith in Christ. This becomes more and more of an issue when we live in cultures that denigrate the expression of faith. Because of this many (or most?) Christians are virtually indistinguishable from this secular and pagan world as they live what look to others like secular and pagan lives, reserving their piety for those moments when they are surrounded by other Christians, or "safely" sheltered within the walls of a church facility.

We are not alone when it comes to the fear of reproach. A most significant recorded discussion that took place between Paul and Peter involved an event when Peter shied away from his Christian fellowship when he was in the presence of Jews,¹⁹⁴ historically significant to Peter since among the persecutors are the Jewish elite.¹⁹⁵ We often find ourselves positively impressed by those who "wear their faith on their shirtsleeve" and are quick to show their faith in public, finding ourselves embarrassed by our fears. Certainly, it is not the Holy Spirit that

¹⁹² Revelation 6:9-11, e.g.

¹⁹³ Luke 23:34.

¹⁹⁴ c.f. Galatians 2:11 ff.

¹⁹⁵ Rodgers, Peter R. The longer reading of 1 Peter 4:14. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 43 no 1 Jan 1981, p 93-95.

is invoking this spirit of fear,¹⁹⁶ and the work of the kingdom is not promoted when we succumb to this fear. We also miss out on the blessing of being a part of what God is doing around us when we turn our backs on Him.

How do we overcome this fear? If we trust in the word of God we find in this passage that the very thing we fear as a negative experience is actually something that is meant to be a positive one, something that can promote both joy and happiness. Peter is quite experienced with the circumstances of reproach, probably far more than most who are reading these words have ever, or could ever know. Peter states that we can be over-the-top happy when we experience reproach because the Holy Spirit and all of the glory of God come to rest upon us at those times. Paul knew that, when he was receiving the blows of persecution that the LORD was there with him, strengthening him, and giving him hope.

The reward for overcoming our fear is great. When we take a stand for the grace of God, God looks upon the act with great favor. As the ultimate judge, God is quite capable of judging those who would bring reproach upon His name and upon those who carry it. Those who bring reproach against the gospel are responsible for their actions, and the LORD will deal with them in His way and in His time. God has relieved us of that responsibility.

1 Peter 4:15. *But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.*

Peter does make it clear that the suffering or reproach that he refers to is that which results from the works of the Spirit of God, not from the works of the flesh. When one suffers the consequences of their sin they will not receive the blessings that He refers to in the previous verse. Though Peter states four specific acts of sin, he is referring to acts of sin in general. He does present a spectrum from murder, considered one of the most grievous sins, to the work of a busybody, probably considered a small sin compared with the others. However, this fourth sin should not be taken too lightly, as the adjective has a more significant meaning in early Greco-Roman thought. The word translated “busybody” could also be translated “meddling” or “mischief maker.” The idea is that one is involved in “inappropriate movement outside of one's assigned role in society,”¹⁹⁷ and was met with firm resolve, much like any other crime against society. Regardless of the charges made against the faithful, Peter “has particularly in mind the fact, not that Christians are sometimes guilty of these crimes (although of course that possibility is not excluded), but that they are often

¹⁹⁶ 2 Timothy 1:7.

¹⁹⁷ Brown, Jeannine K. Just a busybody?: A look at the Greco-Roman topos of meddling for defining ἀλλοτριεπισκόπος in 1 Peter 4:15. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 125 no 3 Aut 2006, p 549.

placed in the false position of being punished for them? The writer, if this should be his meaning, wants the fact to be made clear and unmistakable in every instance where Christians are brought to trial that the only valid charge against them is that they are Christians.”¹⁹⁸

It may be useful to illustrate the need for the application of wisdom as we separate works of the Spirit from works of the flesh. The government of China does allow its citizens to practice Christianity, but it does not allow public preaching or evangelism. If, on a recent trip to China, I were to stand at a street corner with a Bible and start preaching to the passersby, there is a good possibility that I would have been arrested, and at best be sent home and at worst, spend a few months in a brutal prison environment. I might be tempted to think my suffering was for the LORD, but wisdom reveals that my suffering was brought on by my own choice, a choice to rebel against the government of China.¹⁹⁹

We can see that simply labeling an act as godly does not necessarily make it a work of the Spirit. A true work of the Spirit will always be one that is led of the Holy Spirit and by being so led, is completely in agreement with God’s Word, His will and His purpose. A work of the Spirit will always be consistent with God’s unconditional *agape* love. A work of the Spirit will always serve to bring Glory to God and/or contribute to the work of the Spirit among others. Sincere prayer and the application of God’s wisdom will help us to ascertain when it is appropriate to act in a way that may bring reproach, when it is truly the LORD who is being rejected rather than ourselves.

As Peter admonishes the faithful to be free of such fruitless suffering and reproach the implication is simple: do not be involved in works of the flesh, but rather be busy about works of the Spirit.

1 Peter 4:16. *Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.*

Though the world may work to shame the faithful, God sees no such shame. Peter notes that a Christian²⁰⁰ can take that incident of shame and glorify God through it. This may also be applied as we witness the work of others who may experience suffering as a consequence of their faithfulness. If the church is living

¹⁹⁸ Knox, John. Pliny and 1 Peter: a note on 1 Pet 4:14-16 and 3:15. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 72 no 3 Sep 1953, p 187-189.

¹⁹⁹ There are ways to effectively and legally share God’s message of grace in China without breaking National law.

²⁰⁰ This is one of only four New Testament instances where the word, “Christian” is used. It was a term of derision that became a proud label. Horrell, David G. The label Χριστιανός: 1 Peter 4:16 and the formation of Christian identity. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 126 no 2 Sum 2007, p 363.

a life that is indistinguishable from the world, it will also join with the world in criticizing and condemning Christians for their faithfulness. Consequently, it is not unusual for church members to be critical and judgmental of other Christians who openly demonstrate their faith either in worship of the LORD or in their service to others.

When the church ridicules and derides Christians for their faithful stand, it is buying into the world's viewpoint rather than that of the Spirit of God. The church is to be a place of support and encouragement for its members, a place where forgiveness and peace is found. It is far easier to overcome the discouragement that the world would throw at the faithful when the faithful pray for and support one another without judgment or criticism.

Peter notes that there is no need for shame for those who are shamed by this world for their obedient behavior. Rather than feel shame, the very conflict with this world that promotes such shame is reason to celebrate the glory of God. This is in complete agreement with James' advice to find joy in persecution.²⁰¹

1 Peter 4:17. *For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?*

Peter understands the incarnation of the Messiah as a seminal event in the experience of mankind, one that certainly changed his life as he came to meet Jesus and accept his ordained task of apostleship. Peter understands that the redeeming work of God offered to the lost people of this world is built upon the context of the church. Consequently, it is through the church, and by its example, that the judgment of this world culture begins. If the church remains like the world and is indistinguishable from it, the gospel will not be seen, it will not be shared, and people will remain lost in their sin. Consequently the responsibility that God has given to the faithful is great. A fear of reproach that diminishes the sharing of God's grace diminishes Kingdom work and opens people of faith to judgment. *Peter points out that the judgment upon an apathetic church comes before the judgment of the ignorant lost.*

Peter provides both a positive and a negative motivation for the faithful to overcome their fear of reproach and suffering for works of the Spirit.

1 Peter 4:18. *And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?*

²⁰¹ James 1:3.

The real difference between the lost and saved people of this world is found through the work of God's grace on behalf of those who have placed their faith in Him. Outside of that work of faith, we are all subject to the eternal destruction that is the consequence of sin. Both the saved and the sinner are engaged in sinful behavior. Peter's statement is much like the modern idiom, "but for the grace of God, go I." We all deserve an eternal, condemning judgment from God, and those who fail to serve God and exercise that rebellion to the detriment of the faithful will find that judgment at the end of days.

The faithful may never see vindication this side of the grave, but can be encouraged to know that vindication is sure. Yet, the faithful should not be unloving or unforgiving towards the persecutor since salvation itself is an undeserved gift of God.

1 Peter 4:19. *Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.*

As long as the church and its members take a stand for God's love, and for the truth of God's word, it will always be in conflict with this secular and pagan world. When that stand is firm and requires a response from this world, the response will be one of derision, scorn, and persecution. Understanding that obedience is God's will, those who suffer for their obedience can be encouraged to know that God is "keeping their souls" as He blesses and approves of those who take a stand for Him against the evil of this world. Those who know God know of His faithfulness, a steadfastness that is uncompromising and never-ending. God shows His faithfulness as He blesses those who place their trust in Him, and as He judges unto eternal separation those who do not.

"Because of grace we already have a foretaste of heaven; because we live in a fallen world, we experience a fraction of what hell must be like. So, while we are down here slugging it out, we should remember that we have not yet experienced the fullness of the glories of our salvation; and persecution should not take us by surprise."²⁰²

Peter encourages the faithful to "keep on keeping on." Though they do find conflict with this world, the faithful are not to become discouraged or give up. Continue in faithfulness, exercising godly wisdom.

²⁰² Jackson, Paul N. The House of God: A New Testament Understanding. *Biblical Illustrator*, 41 no. 1. Fall, 2016, p. 97.

Peter has been writing to those who suffer reproach for their stand for the LORD in an ungodly world. It is this fear of reproach that many Christians cite as their reason for compromising the expression of their faith and for their failure to submit themselves fully to the task of sharing God's love with this lost world. Peter reminds us that we should expect that reproach, but rather than fear it, the faithful can embrace that reproach as evidence of their obedience to God, celebrating His approval of our sacrifice, and knowing that He will not only reward the faithful for their obedience, but He will also vindicate them through His perfect and complete work of judgment upon all who would blaspheme His name and bring reproach, scorn, and persecution upon His church.

1 Peter 5:1-5.

The Task of the Shepherd

Peter has been writing to a geographically wide-spread and culturally diverse church community that, in its early years, was struggling to define itself within a world that gave it very little acceptance. One could probably argue that the 21st-century church may be finding itself facing challenges that are quite similar as those faced by the ancient church as this increasingly faithless world seems to becoming more and more openly opposed to Christianity. Unlike many Christian denominations today, the early church had no hierarchy of authority, leaving local congregations to establish and follow their own mission as best as they could with their limited understanding of Christian faith, practice, and doctrine. Consequently, the leadership that Peter, Paul, and others provided was invaluable to the nurturing of the early church.

Individual churches were small and quite diverse in their demographics, as well as in their doctrine and practice. They tended to be small house churches where a few would gather together regularly, subject to the hospitality of a host who was usually the leader of the group. Being such a group leader carried with it a great responsibility, and in a time of persecution, also carried some modicum of additional risk, as they may frequently serve to deflect the bulk of the persecution as well as counsel and minister to those in the group who also so suffer. As Peter brings this letter to a close, he writes specifically to the leadership of the churches and to the relationship the leader has to his purpose and to his group. He also writes about the responsibility that the church fellowship has to those who minister on their behalf.

Shepherding the Flock

2 Peter 5:1. *The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:*

Peter refers to the leaders as “elders,” a group among whom he considered himself. Peter never considered himself as an authority figure over the elders, but rather as a co-worker (fellow-elder, *sympresbyteros*) as they share their witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also as partakers in the glory that shall be revealed.

Some churches assign great significance into the differences between the Greek words used for “elder,” “overseer,” or “bishop,” but the biblical epistles tend to

interchange and overlap their usage. The word, *elder*, is a Greek transliteration of the similar Hebrew term that is used frequently in the Old Testament. The elders in today's church would be those who are responsible for the doctrinal integrity and spiritual nurture of the flock, the ones we would refer to as "shepherds of the flock." This is quite disparate from the group of words that are translated as "deacon," those who serve the physical needs of the needy in the fellowship, including widows and children.

We may recall that Paul instructed Titus²⁰³ to appoint leaders that he referred to interchangeably as "elders" and "overseers."²⁰⁴ Our first assumption of this process that Paul recommended is similar to that implied by the modern church fellowship with its pastoral staff and deacon/elder/presbytery. However, we may be reminded that Titus' church, as well as the others that we read of in the New Testament, were not singular, large congregations, but rather a collection of scattered individual house churches, with each having the need of a shepherd, the elder.

As for a "witness of the sufferings of Christ, Peter probably had more experience than most of these peers."²⁰⁵ As he counseled those in the church concerning the difficulties of living their faith in an extremely wicked and perverse world, he certainly did so with memories flooding his mind of the sufferings that he had personally known.

Often when we think of elders we think of those with life experience as well as grey or thinned hair. We might also stereotype our view of the elder as a male. Probably the closest person in today's church is the small house-church pastor who initially heard the gospel and started a gathering in his own home in response to that experience. Though this is not the predominant model in our modern denominational organizations, it is a prevalent model in other countries, and is emerging anew in western cultures as small non-denominational groups are becoming common. These pastor-elders tend to be less formally trained and more dependent upon communication with their peers for counsel and guidance, much like those in the early church. In more organized denominational work this person is usually the pastor or part of a pastoral staff. Consequently, Peter is not setting up some form of church organization or hierarchy, but rather is describing responsibilities among equals.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Titus 1:5.

²⁰⁴ Titus 1:7.

²⁰⁵ With the obvious exception of Paul and the Apostles.

²⁰⁶ Elliott, John Hall. Elders as leaders in 1 Peter and the early church. *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 28 no 6 Dec 2001, p 555.

The Greek passage starts with the word, “*oun*” that can be translated “therefore,” and is omitted in most translations, tying this passage with the previous passage that focuses on persecution. As a reminder that their work is not in vain, Peter refers to the elders as co-partakers in the “glory that shall be revealed,” an inference to the vindication that will be completed when God’s final judgment is at hand, when those who have persecuted the faithful will be held fully accountable for their rebellion against God.

1 Peter 5:2. *Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;*

One can only imagine the wide variety of elders that made up the leadership of the early church that reached from Egypt to Asia, and from the Mediterranean to the Fertile Crescent, a disparate brotherhood of varying culture, language, world-view, training, spiritual acumen, etc. Today we have the Holy Scriptures that serve as a common doctrinal foundation, and serve to bring such varying cultures together. No such resource was as readily available to the early church, so Peter provided some clear instruction to these elders as they seek to shepherd their flock.

Feed the flock. Drawing from the pastoral imagery of a shepherd and his sheep, Peter notes as a first priority to feed the people. Peter first notes that the flock belongs to God, not to the shepherd. This instruction by Peter might remind us of the identical instruction that he heard from Jesus when he was restored after the passion and resurrection of Christ.²⁰⁷

The agricultural early church fully understood the nature of this responsibility. Sheep do not tend to find food on their own; they must be led by the shepherd to the location of the grasses upon which to feed, and to the water sources for drinking. Consequently, the shepherd provides the food and leads the flock to it. The concept of feeding the flock refers to meeting all of the needs of the sheep. Caring for the Christian flock involves a wide spectrum of responsibilities, not the least of which is preaching and teaching God’s word. The shepherd of the faithful flock has the responsibility of immersing himself in God’s word so that he can effectively and accurately share it with the flock. Caring for the flock also involves meeting all other spiritual needs of the flock as the Holy Spirit gives opportunity, including the tasks of protection, leading, nurturing, etc. The shepherd gives his life for the sheep as he serves them.²⁰⁸ It would not be appropriate for the sheep

²⁰⁷ John 21:16.

²⁰⁸ John 10:11,17.

to serve the shepherd. Nor would it be appropriate for the sheep to demand for themselves any form of spiritual authority over the shepherd.

Take the Oversight. Many fellowships today are governed by skilled and proud leadership that has no hesitation when charged with taking responsibility for the group. However, the true humility often found in the sincere believers of the early church necessitated this imperative. It is a difficult task for a truly sincere and humble Christian to accept a position among Christian brothers and sisters to serve as their shepherd. True humility reveals that such an imperative is asking one of the sheep in the LORD's flock to serve as a shepherd, something that is doctrinally a very significant concept, one that is even contradictory to colloquial understanding of humility. Consequently, Peter admonishes the elder to take upon himself the responsibility that comes with serving as a shepherd, the responsibility to care for and feed the flock. For a sheep to serve as the shepherd of the other sheep, Peter recognizes that this is a task that is beyond himself, necessitating an appropriation of God's power and wisdom in order to exercise the task effectively. For a sheep to try to lead the other sheep with no more than a sheep's ability would lead only to frustration, failure, and burnout. Dependence upon the LORD is not an option for the shepherd.

Not by constraint. One does not accept the task of a shepherd as a result of the prompting or coercion of others, but rather as a deliberate and disciplined submission to the clear and unambiguous call of the Holy Spirit. The position of the elder is not an elected position, though we do find precedent for choosing *deacons* by election. Again, note the difference in the mission of these two offices. Paul characterized the work of elder as a "noble task,"²⁰⁹ one that is given by the LORD to those who will be held accountable for their work.²¹⁰

Not for personal gain. It is evident that the pastors of the early church did receive some form of financial support from the flock, and that the pastors were handling congregational finances.²¹¹ Consequently, there is always the potential of a pastor serving for the wrong motives. The proper motive is the "ready mind," the eagerness to be obedient to God's call, an eagerness that is evident in the zeal that the pastor expresses for the ministry. The elders (and the church members) may be reminded that the financial support that they receive from the flock is a gift that is given to the LORD's work, and not an earned salary. The pastoral ministry is not a work for gain, but a work of love. Other scriptures teach clearly that the flock has the responsibility to care for the pastor by providing

²⁰⁹ 1 Timothy 3:1.

²¹⁰ Hebrews 13:17, James 3:1.

²¹¹ 1 Corinthians 9:7-11, 1 Timothy 5:17.

appropriate and tangible support,²¹² so the mechanism for establishing the material support is the responsibility of the flock, not the pastor.

1 Peter 5:3. *Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.*

Not as a lord, but as an example. The position of shepherd is not a position of lordship over the flock. The office of the pastor, which is simply a Latin form of the word, "shepherd," is not an office of authority, but an office of service. There is only one LORD, and He is God. Peter reminds the elders that they, like himself, are simply sheep, and they are not in a position to oppress those whom they serve. The term "lord over" (*katakyrieuo*) was used by Jesus as He taught the disciples not to model the Gentiles who seek to appropriate authority that they might rule over others and seek their own interests. Such behavior is a form of idolatry as they seek for themselves the lordship (*kyrio*) that belongs only to the LORD.

Just as there would be a prideful tendency for the shepherd to rule over the flock, there is always the prideful and natural tendency for members of the flock to also rule over one another, establishing a pecking-order much like a pack of animals. This model of social authority is inconsistent with the expression of unconditional *agape* love that seeks the benefit of others rather than self.²¹³ Peter calls upon the elders to serve proactively as an example to the flock of the appropriate expression of *agape* love as they serve without seeking or obtaining any inappropriate authority over them. This is an example that is contradictory to the leadership model of the Gentiles, contradictory to the model of authority used in businesses today, a model that the church would easily embrace if the shepherd fails to set the example.

1 Peter 5:4. *And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*

It is only natural and worldly to seek power and glory in this world, and it is that drive that produces much of its conflict. It is unnatural to live a life that is truly humble, submissive to the Holy Spirit, and submissive to the needs of others. The natural man desires immediate and profitable reward for his work, yet regardless of the value or nature of that reward, in every circumstance that worldly reward is always temporal and short-lived, for none of that reward will be carried from this world to the next.

²¹² Luke 10:7; 1 Corinthians 9:9, e.g.

²¹³ 1 Corinthians, Chapter 13.

Peter reminds the elders that the reward that is received for sincere, humble, and caring ministry is one that is of far greater value, and it is one that is not temporal but eternal. The reward is described as a “crown of glory.” In apocalyptic literature the crown is used to represent authority. The reward of “authority” that the elder receives is that blessing that comes from God’s pleasure when one is obedient, when one is faithfully a part of His kingdom work. The knowledge of a final, eternal, and appropriate reward can help to encourage the faithful to persevere in an environment that seems to provide no intrinsic reward other than ridicule and scorn.

Mutual Submission

Peter understands the office of the elder/pastor to be one of grave importance. He understands that individual to be synonymous with the role of a shepherd who cares for all of the needs of the flock, not from a position of authority, but from a position of service. He also understands that the shepherd is called out of the flock, simply one of the sheep who has accepted this calling. It is a responsibility that is not to be taken lightly, one that is to be accepted with humility, yet one that requires positive and decisive action.

Peter finds very little reward in this life for the elder. His experience and his testimony makes it clear that this is a life that is filled with reproach as well as blessing, and the reward for faithful service is not one that will be obtained in this world, but will be found in heaven when those who scorned God will be judged, and those who were faithful will be lifted up. Among those lifted will be the faithful elders who endured. It is certainly a worthy calling.

1 Peter 5:5. *Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*

Peter summarized the discussion of the responsibility and ministry of the elders by shifting to their relationship with the “younger.” It should be understood that the word for “younger”, *neōteroi*, is not a reference to youthful age, but refers to one who is newer to the faith experience, or a person of faith who is new to ministry responsibilities. This presumes that the elder/shepherd who serves the flock, unlike the “younger” is not new to the faith, but one who is both mature and experienced.

The word for submit, common to Pauline writings as well as that of Peter is again the term *hupotasso*, referring to a voluntary submission among equals for the benefit of both. The term clearly indicates an equal value or esteem on the part

of both, and in virtually every biblical use of the word, this form of submission is mutual, “subject one to another.”²¹⁴ This is not a license for the elder to lord it over the flock. It is an instruction to those in the flock to graciously allow the elder to conduct his ministry without undue interference, allowing Him to serve the LORD as the shepherd, remembering that even the shepherd of the local congregation is one of the sheep who has been called out for this specific purpose by the One Shepherd, Jesus Christ.²¹⁵ We tend to look at this word “submit” and allow it to inform and exercise our selfish pride as we set up a pecking order, when the intent of the scriptural application is quite the opposite. Consequently, when both Peter and Paul speak of *hypotasso*, not only do they emphasize its mutual submission, they also, without fail, emphasize the need for humility.

As the churches to whom Peter write are so varied in their demographics, background, and leadership, he provides some sound advice on the task of the elder/shepherd/pastor and the relationship that he has with the flock.

Peter emphasizes that the task of the elder is not one that is led by or motivated by pride, but rather by a sincere response to an unambiguous sense of the LORD’s calling as one who is equal to the sheep in the eyes of the LORD, but has a responsibility for the care of the flock. In order to care for the flock effectively, the flock also recognizes the task of the elder and allows him to serve them through the *agape*-based form of *hypotasso* submission. When we do this we will experience a church at peace and one that is better able to fulfill its gospel mission as it reaches out to those who are lost and serves to nurture those who have entered its fellowship.

²¹⁴ Ephesians 5:21.

²¹⁵ In criticism of the cleavage between the clergy and laity of his day and a monopolization by the former of the means of grace, the great Reformer [Martin Luther] insisted on the equality before God of all the baptized. Through baptism, he asserted, all believers are consecrated as priests (WA 6.407.22-25; cf. also 6.564.6-7), pointing to 1 Pet 2:9 (and Rev 5:10) as the biblical basis for this thought. This priesthood of all believers complements the priesthood of the officially ordained, he maintained, and both general and specific priesthoods participate, each in its own fashion, in the priesthood of Christ. Elliott, John Hall. Elders as leaders in 1 Peter and the early church. *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 28 no 6 Dec 2001, p 551.

1 Peter 5:6-14.

Coping in Difficult Times

As Peter brings his letter to a close, he offers some summary imperatives to assist the churches in overcoming the consequences of the stresses that they are experiencing as they are working to maintain their witness and ministry in a wicked and perverse world. When we understand the early church in this way, we find that there has been very little change in the relationship between the church and this world in all of these years. There has always been tremendous pressure placed upon the church by this secular and pagan world to compromise its holiness and accept the mores of this godless culture, increasing its acceptance by those outside of the community of faith, and diminishing its effectiveness in propagating the gospel message, as well as dramatically diminishing the presence of “holiness” in our culture. We tend to operate our churches like secular clubs that simply maintain a Christian theme, and in doing so we tend to be doing things in a manner that is quite the opposite of what the Holy Spirit would will. Consequently, Peter’s summary imperatives are quite important and applicable to the church today.

Sustaining Godly Character.

1 Peter 5:6. *Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:*

Pride is a powerful and damaging fruit of our natural spirit. Pride is one of the primary motivators among those who strive for success in this pagan and secular world. However, the LORD has made it quite evident through literally hundreds of scripture passages²¹⁶ that pride is not a fruit of the Holy Spirit, and it serves to damage Kingdom work as it turns glory and authority away from the LORD of creation to those of that creation. Because of our propensity to prideful behavior, we are continually taught to replace that pride with true and uncompromised humility as one recognizes the true glory of God and His amazing grace.

Our sin nature that is so evident in our propensity to prideful behavior convicts all people of their need for God’s grace, and subject to that grace, there is no place for feeling that any one individual is any better or more valuable than another. God has declared that all people are of infinite value to Himself, hence He is not a “respector of persons,”²¹⁷ in that all people are equal and of great value. All have sinned and come short of God’s glory. All people deserve eternal separation

²¹⁶ There are no less than 110 biblical references to pride and its negative impact on God’s purpose.

²¹⁷ Acts 10:34.

from God. It is only by God's choice of grace that people are lifted up by Him and His work, and not by any work of their own. It is only by God's mighty hand that we are exalted and blessed far above that which we truly deserve. Peter reminds the church of that exaltation of the faithful that will be realized at the end of the age. There is no need for the church to fight for position in this society, nor is there any need for individuals to fight for position within the church. Humility teaches us to submit ourselves to one another in love so that each can thrive within the context of their calling by the LORD as they exercise the unique gifts that God has given each. The exultation that we seek, even when filtered by our bent to natural pride, will be rewarded at the end of the age when those who have humbled themselves before the LORD and before all men will hear the words, "well done."²¹⁸

1 Peter 5:7. *Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.*

In perhaps one of the best known and encouraging passages of this epistle, Peter reminds us that we can give to God all of the baggage that comes with the stressors of life and ministry because He loves us and seeks to replace that stress with His joy and peace. The grammar of the first word ties it with the previous passage that refers to remaining humble and submissive in a world that despises the meek and humble.

Peter uses a play on words that is evident in the English translation as the word "care" is used in two ways. The first usage refers to those issues that burden us, contextually identified as those that are the result of persecution, rejection, or reproach that Christians may receive as a consequence of uncompromised faithfulness that is demonstrated as holiness in an unholy world. However, it may also be appropriate to understand this verse in a broader context since God's love transcends time or circumstance to include all of the worries that we carry. God's love for us supersedes our need to carry the burdens of worry or guilt. Peter's imperative is simple: give them to the LORD. Period.

The second use of the word, care, is a reminder of how the LORD demonstrates His great love for us in his caring concern for all of the issues of our lives as he seeks to bring to Himself those whom He loves, and to bless those who have turned to Him in faith. Consistent with his unimaginable power and glory, the depth of His care for us is likewise beyond understanding. We can be encouraged by the knowledge of the LORD's care for us as we experience the many issues of life.

²¹⁸ Matthew 25:21,23.

1 Peter 5:8-9. *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: ⁹Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.*

As we live lives that are characterized by holiness, godly humility, and freed of the burden of care, we might do so thinking that “all will be well,” with little or no more effort on our own. However, the battle that is waged between the faithful and this world is the same battle that is waged between the Holy Spirit and the adversary: the prince of this world, the devil himself. Peter makes use of significant imagery as he describes the nature of the prince of darkness through the description of a roaring lion. “The lion image itself, though concisely depicted, is characterized by strong and vivid embellishment. First, the lion is roaring, conjuring up an auditory as well as a visual image of aggression and hostility. Second, the lion ‘is prowling around,’ a depiction that adds motion as well as threat and thus intensifies the visuality of the text. Finally, the lion is ‘seeking someone to devour,’ another vivid image that explains why the animal is prowling around and intensifies the sense of threat: those who succumb will be eaten up, swallowed, gulped down.”²¹⁹ The thoughts of the early Christians would immediately be drawn to the violent and bloody executions by the Romans when they threw their victims to hungry lions.²²⁰ How does one stand up to such a formidable enemy?

Peter provides two imperatives that instruct us on how to deal effectively with the attacks that come from the adversary, those same attacks that we refer to as persecution, rejection, and reproach.

Be sober. This call to sobriety is repeated frequently in the biblical narrative both by Peter and by Paul, as well as by the LORD. Today’s culture tends to limit the application of sobriety to a separation from the intoxication that comes from the ingestion of alcohol or drugs. However, though the term certainly includes these intoxicants, the term actually refers to a deliberate separation from any event or action that would tend to cloud our judgment or distract us from the truth. The list of those things that can introduce wrong thinking into our minds is a long one, one that reaches far beyond drugs to include things like personal world-view based presuppositions, the exercise of pride or prejudice, the acceptance of false doctrine, mob logic, secularist human logic, or any other influence on us that can guide our choices other than the One true source of holy choices: the Holy Spirit of God. It is only when our mind is freed of the burden of error and we put on the “mind of Christ” are we truly sober.

²¹⁹ Horrell, David G.; Arnold, Bradley; Williams, Travis B. Visuality, vivid description, and the message of 1 Peter: the significance of the roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8). *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 132 no 3 2013, p 703.

²²⁰ Paschke, Boris A. The Roman ad bestias execution as a possible historical background for 1 Peter 5.8. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 28 no 4 Jun 2006, p 490.

Be vigilant. This term is one used to describe the state of a military guard who is intently scanning the area around himself for any indication of a threat from any direction. Though we are not to carry the baggage of worry, that does not imply a life of indifference or ignorance. Some would leave the battle lines with a testimony that “God will take care of me.” Though God does care and provide for us, we are still subject to the ravages of our own sins and the sins of those with whom we have a relationship. It is through these that the adversary can attempt to defeat us. Peter calls upon the faithful to keep up their guard against the wiles of the devil, much like Paul does when he recommends the faithful to put on the armor of God.²²¹

Peter reminds us that the enemy of the faithful is not people, but rather is the adversary himself. The adversary wins when he can get people, and particularly those in the body of the church, to quarrel and fight among themselves, doing so in ignorance of the true enemy who seeks to devour them. Standing against the work of satan requires a constant watch as he works in this pagan and secular world, as well as within the body of the faithful, to build up his own dominion.

This battle is a subtle one. Though the Holy Spirit draws the faithful to Himself, He still does so within the context of drawing them out of this perverse world. It is a difficult task to leave this world fully behind, and when we are not perfected in that task we find ourselves burdened by the same issues that are experienced by this pagan and secular society. Today’s statistics reveal that the frequency of divorce, suicide, abortion, infidelity and many other unholy choices among Christians is roughly the same as that among non-Christians in their same community. Though Peter describes a Christian life characterized by humility and peace, he also provides an honest assessment of the battle that all Christians are embraced in. Therefore:

God’s Sustaining Grace

1 Peter 5:10. *But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.*

We are reminded that we all are in need of God’s grace. We have done nothing to deserve God’s favor. There is no work of man that can win God’s favor. There is no power that we can appropriate on our own to defeat the adversary who seeks to destroy us. Our only hope is in God’s grace, His favor that is given out of His own love for those whom He has called: those who place their faith and

²²¹ Ephesians, 6:11-12.

trust in Him, those who have found forgiveness through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The call to godly living in this world, a call that is also one that will bring persecution, rejection, and reproach, is one that is only for a short while when we compare the length of this life with the promise of eternity that awaits the faithful.

Meanwhile, God provides several resources to empower and enable us to withstand the attacks of the adversary.

Make you perfect. In this application the word translated “perfect” does not refer to flawlessness as much as it refers to completion. God is at work in the lives of the faithful, working through the circumstances of their lives to make them more like Christ, and more capable of dealing with the issues of the battle, a process that is often referred to as “sanctification.”²²² Personal perfection, as we understand it in modern terminology, will never be attained in this world. However, God’s work to bring us to completion is a continuing process that would bring us closer to the target of perfection as we grow and mature in our relationship with God and in our obedience to the gospel mission.

Establish. As God works in the lives of the faithful, He builds a firm foundation upon which they can stand without falling. The foundation for the Christian is the Truth, the Word of God. It is the rock upon which the house is rooted and can stand against the storm. It is the foundation that the faithful stand on when attacked by the untruths of this world. Peter reminds us of that blessing that God gives to all who place their trust in Him.

Strengthen. All people are powerless to stand against the adversary without the strengthening and sustaining power of the Holy Spirit. Satan is powerless against even the quietest whisper of the Holy Spirit, but is fully empowered when the Holy Spirit is rejected. One may be able to imagine an attempt to lift a very heavy weight on our own. Most healthy adults can lift several hundred pounds of weight, given the proper leverage and inspiration. However, one cannot lift several hundred tons without significant help. The weight of this world can feel like thousands of tons of weight, but God is not limited by the weight of any circumstance. Peter reminds us that God gives His strength to the faithful so that they would be able to overcome the overwhelming weights of this world.

Settle. This term can also be translated, “steadfast,” giving the idea that one who has been established and strengthened will be undaunted in the task, unimpeded by the darts thrown by the adversary, and focused on the one high calling of God’s grace. Too often we forget that God has empowered the faithful to continue steadfastly towards the goal line of His purpose and we sometimes find

²²² Romans 8:28-30, James 1:3-6.

ourselves knocked off of the path by life's circumstances, circumstances that are trivialities when compared with God's glory and His purpose. Peter reminds us that we need not be knocked off-course when God has given to us all of the resources to maintain a steadfast faith.

1 Peter 5:11. *To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

When we observe the hopelessness of our state apart from the blessings of God, and the hope that God has given to those who trust in Him, there is only one way to respond. Those who have rejected Him will continue to treat God with apathy. However, those who trust Him have no alternative but to give Him the praise and glory for what He has done for us that we could never do for ourselves. Those who trust in God give Him the sole and ultimate authority over their lives as they understand that God is the God over all creation and deserves our humble submission, a submission that brings with it an unfathomable depth of blessing.

The faithful also recognize that this dominion, this authority that God has over all creation, timeless, and we can know that the relationship that we have with God, the love and goodness that He expresses, and the blessings that He gives to the faithful are eternal and never-ending. This world and this universe will come to a final and violent end, but God's mercy endures forever, and the home that He has provided for the faithful will be eternally with Him.

1 Peter 5:12. *By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.*

As Peter brings the letter to a close, he makes reference to Silas. His reference to Silas without any additional clarification leads most to understand that this is the same Silas who worked closely with Paul.²²³ Some have argued that Silas actually wrote the letter, translating or applying Peter's message into the Greek letter as a secretary or amanuensis. This latter argument is made because of the excellent Greek grammar that is used, one that the relative untrained and Hebrew, Peter would not have been so likely to have used. However, the construction, "by Silvanus" implies that Peter is sending this letter out to its recipients by the hand of Silas,²²⁴ making no reference to Silas as its writer. Lacking a post office or an Email account, it was necessary that this letter be carried to the churches in the area, and it is probable that Silas was the chosen messenger.

²²³ 1 Corinthians 1:19, et. al.

²²⁴ Richards, E. Randolph. Silvanus was not Peter's secretary: theological bias in interpreting δια Σιλουανοῦ . . . ἐγράψα in 1 Peter 5:12. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 43 no 3 Sep 2000, p 432.

Peter states that the purpose of this letter was to encourage the church by sharing the true testimony of God's grace, a testimony that stands against the false teachings of the day. Peter's letter certainly stands against the false teachings of today's pagan and secular society.

Peter also notes that we stand upon this true grace, repeating the context of the previous passage. It is only on God's grace that we can stand, and God's grace is sufficient to stand against all of the opposition that He finds in the work of the adversary who would work to discourage and defeat us.

1 Peter 5:13. *The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son.*

Peter closes the letter with a customary salutation. The identification of Babylon has been open to wide speculation over the years. The physical city of Babylon has been abandoned in ruins for centuries, and there is no church established in the region of Babylon at this time. The symbolic Babylon of Isaiah and John's prophecies²²⁵ represents the human embodiment of evil in this world, clearly not a reference to the elect. Some, including Martin Luther consider Babylon to be a reference to Rome,²²⁶ an opinion shared by many scholars.

Some may be ignoring that this is the salutation of the letter. The context of the passage makes it clear that Babylon refers the location of the church fellowship wherein Peter is located as he writes. Since Babylon is always used in scripture as a metaphor for a place of evil, Peter is noting that the church wherein he is located is simply immersed in an evil culture. Consequently, Babylon could be any large city, whether Rome, or even Jerusalem, or it may not be referring to any specific city at all. Though many believe this to be Rome, there is no evidence to place Peter there, though there is much evidence that would place Peter in and around the city of Jerusalem. We can draw from this inference some encouragement as we realize that the stresses that are placed upon the modern church by this modern Babylonian culture were also experienced by the early church, and it was these stressors that led the writers of the New Testament to encourage those who are subject to Babylon's persecution and reproach of the faithful.

Peter also mentions Mark, who is the John Mark who accompanied Paul on his missionary journey.²²⁷ Peter may have met Mark when meetings of the church leadership were held in the home of his mother.²²⁸ Early church historians,

²²⁵ Revelation Chapters 17-18, Isaiah Chapters 13-14.

²²⁶ Luther, Martin (1990). 'Commentary on Peter & Jude,' Grand Rapids, MI: p. 226.

²²⁷ Acts, Chapter 12-15.

²²⁸ Acts 12:12.

including Eusebius, maintained a close association between Peter and Mark, so much so that Peter referred to Mark as his “spiritual son,”²²⁹ and many considered the gospel of Mark to actually be Mark’s record of the gospel as he learned from Peter, and to refer to the Gospel According to Mark as the Gospel According to Peter would be reasonable.²³⁰ In our search for an amanuensis for Peter’s first epistle, the Gentile, John Mark is a possible candidate.²³¹

1 Peter 5:14. *Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity. Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

Paul often closed his letters with an imperative to greet each other with a kiss, though Paul referred to the gesture as a “holy kiss,”²³² and Peter refers to a “kiss of *agape* love.” Greeting one another with a kiss on the cheek was a common practice in the first century, practiced among both those within the church and those in the community. There are still some cultures today who greet with a kiss, though the practice has been dropped by most. Peter and Paul redefined this common practice by adding a spiritual context to the kiss of greeting so that it would always represent the love that comes from the grace of God. If Christians would greet each other this way, they would always be starting their encounters with one another with a thought of the faith that they share.

Peter has been writing to a church in stress, and his last prayer for them is for peace, the peace that comes from the knowledge and experience of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are reminded that the peace and joy that God gives transcends circumstance. Christians do not need to allow the circumstances of this life, so shaped by the evil in this secular world, to steal away their joy and peace. Peace is found in one’s faith in the LORD, not in one’s trust in the world. Peace is found when one’s trust is placed fully in Christ.

²²⁹ McWilliams, Warren. Peter’s Epistles. *Biblical Illustrator* 43(1), Fall 2016, p 69.

²³⁰ Schreiner, Thomas R. 1,2 Peter, Jude. *The New American Commentary*, Vol. 37. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers. 2003, p. 251.

²³¹ However, do note that there is no reason why the amanuensis would necessarily be anyone who is mentioned anywhere in scripture.

²³² 1 Corinthians 16:20, et. al.

2 Peter 1:1-4.

God's Foundation of Grace

2 Peter 1:1a. *Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ,*

Peter begins this second letter much like he does the first, in the customary form of a first-century Hellenistic letter with the identification of the sender and receiver. However, like other letters in the New Testament Canon, the introduction contains far more important points than is typical for a secular personal letter as it uses similar forms in a meaningful way. As Peter provides his name, he identifies who he is using a self-description that lends authority to the messages to follow in this letter: a bond-slave and apostle of Jesus Christ.

Peter testifies that he is first a servant, *doulos*, or bond-servant/bond-slave, of Jesus Christ, a description also used by Paul. A bond-slave is one who chooses to place himself under the complete and uncompromised authority of another to the point that theirs is a master-slave relationship. This relationship would continue until the bond-servant has received from the Master the full reward for his faithful service, at which point the servant would be set free. Peter demonstrates in his own life that this is the appropriate relationship between a person of faith and the LORD to whom bond-service is given. This commitment frees the servant to serve His master without the compromise that would be necessary if he retained a submission to other authorities in his life. Bond service is not an onerous task, and did not necessarily have any negative connotation to it. First-century bondservants were often the highest educated and most skilled members of the family group and served as teachers and tutors. However, a bond-slave was always fully submissive to the master, and answered to no one else. The state of a bond-slave is a metaphor for the relationship that the faithful are to have with their LORD, Jesus Christ.

Paul also describes himself as an Apostle. The organized church that followed the first-century apostolic age tended to define an apostle as one of the twelve who were personally called by Jesus to follow Him, and often included the Apostle Paul. The term used here referred to one who was called by the LORD Jesus to proclaim the gospel as it is taken from community to community. Given this definition, a broader understanding of the term can be used to defend apostolic ministry and the work of those who are given a gift of apostleship. This gift may apply to many church planters and missionaries today.

Of the books of the New Testament, the identification for the source of 2 Peter is probably characterized by more controversy than any other, with some actually

holding that the letter is fictitious.²³³ “Indeed, from the very start this epistle has had a difficult journey. It was received into the New Testament canon with hesitation, considered second-class Scripture by Luther, reluctantly accepted by Calvin, rejected by Erasmus, and now is repudiated as pseudonymous by modern scholarship.”²³⁴ There is a stark contrast in the language used and in the manner that doctrinal points are presented between 1 Peter and 2 Peter.

“For many centuries ... there were strong doubts and serious misgivings as to its authorship and, therefore, its genuineness. In fact, even today there is quite a consensus among Christian scholars that Peter is not the author. We find no trace of this letter until 200 AD. The Muratorian Canon of 170 A.D., the first official list of New Testament Books, does not include it. Evidently Clement of Alexandria didn't know of it. Origen called it a disputed book although he himself considered it canonical. Didymus claimed that many looked upon it as spurious. Eusebius frankly admits: ‘We have received this second epistle to be not canonical, although, since it appeared to be useful to many, it has been diligently read with the other scriptures.’ These are fourth century men, yet it was in this century that II Peter was included in the canon.”²³⁵

The common grammar and passages that are shared between 2 Peter and Jude lead many to attribute both letters to the same source.²³⁶ “It seems obvious to all readers that there is some kind of close relationship between Jude and 2 Peter. For good reasons it is now widely accepted that 2 Peter is dependent on Jude.”²³⁷ However, this short letter makes use of fifty-seven words that are not used anywhere else in the New Testament.²³⁸ Some of this controversy may simply be explained by our modern misunderstanding of how ancient letters were written. It is easier to explain the differences by arguing that they were written by variant authors who used Peter's name. However, it is also well-defended that letters were commonly penned by a scribe who might be better trained in the literary arts, an amanuensis who simply took the narration of the author, cited in Aramaic and Hebrew, and penned the words in Greek using a complete and more formal manner than what was orally dictated. John Mark or Silas are two possibilities as amanuenses that may have served Peter in this fashion on the first letter, as Silas also assisted Paul on several of his. It is the opinion of this author that the source

²³³ Cavallin, Hans Clemens Caesarius. The false teachers of 2 Peter as pseudo-prophets. *Novum testamentum*, 21 no 3 Jul 1979, p 263-270.

²³⁴ Kruger, Michael J. The Authenticity of 2 Peter. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 42 no 4 Dec 1999, p 645-671.

²³⁵ Jacobs, Paul E. Exegetical-devotional study of 2 Peter 1:16-21. *Springfielder*, 28 no 2 Sum 1964, p 18-30.

²³⁶ Mathews, Mark Dewayne. The literary relationship of 2 Peter and Jude: does the synoptic tradition resolve this synoptic problem? *Neotestamentica*, 44 no 1 2010, p 66.

²³⁷ Callan, Terrance. Use of the Letter of Jude by the Second Letter of Peter. *Biblica*, 85 no 1 2004, p 42.

²³⁸ Callan, Terrance. The style of the Second Letter of Peter. *Biblica*, 84 no 2 2003, p 205.

of this letter is Peter, the Apostle, surnamed by Jesus Christ and penned by an undetermined amanuensis.

2 Peter 1:1b. *to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:*

Like his first letter, this letter is addressed to the church in general, without making a reference to a specific congregation. Tradition holds that this was a general letter that was shared among several small church groups to help them address some important doctrinal issues that had caused them to fall into controversy.

Peter speaks first to the preciousness of faith. This sensitivity to the importance of the gospel is something that may have become largely lost in the socially focused churches of today. Faith for many has been reduced to an experience of “church” once a week with little thought given to the true value, consequences, and the necessity of the holiness of faith. Peter recognizes that there is nothing in this world as precious as the salvation from eternal separation from God that has been graciously given to those who place their faith in God. People of faith would gain much if they would appropriate for themselves this same deep sensitivity to the preciousness of faith, a sensitivity that would lead the believer to a deeper relationship with God as their faith becomes a continually greater priority in life.

Paul also speaks of righteousness. The salvation that comes from faith is not given by God to those who are righteous, but rather to those who cannot possibly find righteousness because of their continual bent to sin and self-centered pride. Salvation is found only in God’s righteousness. When we understand our own unrighteousness we find there is no justification for the pride that would build one up to consider themselves better than someone else. Faith is found in the humility of understanding God’s holiness, greatness, and righteousness that overwhelms our prideful thoughts and actions.

Since we cannot do anything on our own to obtain righteousness, because we can never succeed in living a truly righteous life, we understand that salvation is a gift given by God, not a reward for any work of our own. It is a precious gift that the faithful must never take for granted. It is a gift that should lead us, like Peter, to words of thanksgiving and praise.

2 Peter 1:2. *Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,*

The first words of this greeting are literally identical to those of the opening of 1 Peter.²³⁹ We might add to the commentary on 1 Peter that the word grace, *charis*, is similar to a typical Greek greeting, and the word for peace, *eirene*, is a Greek transliteration of a typical Hebrew greeting. By using these together, both Peter and Paul provide a form of a bridge between these two cultures.

When these two words are used within the Christian context they have a meaning that is far more significant than that which the Greeks or Jews would gather from the similar, more commonly used words. Peter is specifically referring to the grace that God demonstrated when He “reached down” through time and space to touch the hearts and lives of those who would turn to Him in faith. This grace is not something that is experienced or fully understood by those who deny the Lordship of Christ.

Likewise, the peace that Peter refers to is a deep and unique peace that comes from the assurance of salvation, a peace that transcends the chaos of this sinful world, again something that is not experienced or fully understood by those who deny Christ. For these two benefits to be fully realized in one’s life, it is necessary to turn to God in faith. Peter’s blessing is a call upon his readers to gain an ever growing realization of that grace and peace as they grow closer and closer to God in their personal relationship with Him.

Peter describes this growth as available to those who continue to gain a greater knowledge of God. The word for knowledge, *epignosis*, refers to an intimate knowledge of another that comes from a deep and personal relationship. Peter’s call upon His readers is that they would receive an ever-increasing blessing of the benefits of grace and peace as their relationship with God continues to grow.

2 Peter 1:3. *According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:*

The phrase of verse 2 continues into the phrase of verse 3, implying that the former is connected to the latter, with the latter verse exploring some of the benefits that are realized as faith grows. We have done nothing to deserve these benefits (*charis*) and we can realize a great amount of peace (*eirene*) from knowing that God has provided us with them.

Using a literary form that is similar to an Hellenistic decree,²⁴⁰ Peter states that the LORD has given unto us everything that we need to know concerning the

²³⁹ 1 Peter 1

²⁴⁰ Danker, Frederick William. 2 Peter 1: a solemn decree. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 40 no 1 Jan 1978, p 66.

important things of life, and concerning how to live that life in a godly way. Though some would try to confuse Trinitarian doctrine by dividing Christ and God into two separate persons, as one might do through a literal, non-contextual, reading of verse 2, Peter drives quickly home the deity of Christ and the unity of the Trinity when he refers to “His” divine power, no longer separating the persons of God. There is one LORD (Hebrew, *YAHWEH*, Jehovah) and He is God. Though we have seen the LORD through the Father, through the Son, and through the Holy Spirit, both Peter and Paul understand and taught that there is one LORD and He is God. He is the Father, He is the Son, and He is the Holy Spirit.

Finally, Peter describes the purpose of His giving of us knowledge of life and godliness: He has called us to a life that is characterized by glory and virtue. God created mankind for one purpose: to glorify Him. Apart from Him, apart from the Holy Spirit, man has no interest or intent upon glorifying God, but rather spends his efforts in self-glorification, relegating his understanding of God to a system of his own, acceptable, design. To reject the calling to glorify God is to reject God’s purpose for man. God has given us these resources so that we are empowered to glorify Him. God is characterized by uncompromised virtue, and the call upon man to glorify Him is also a call to imitate Him through the example of Jesus Christ, living a life of virtue, a virtue that can only be found in a life that is submitted to the power of the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:4. *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

Peter has just stated that God gives us all things needed for life. The word, “whereby” links this promise to those who have placed their trust in the LORD. To these He has given great and precious promises. What are these promises? Peter describes the context of these when he states that the faithful find themselves to be (1) partakers, or “partnership with God in the covenant”²⁴¹ and in so doing take upon themselves a part of (2) God’s divine nature. “This divine nature does not refer to an abstract, divine essence or being, but to God’s dynamic character expressed in action in accordance with his promises. Being a fellow participant of this nature refers to taking part in the realization of the “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells”²⁴² The nature of the faithful Christian becomes in concert with the nature of God. God breathed an eternal soul into all people, so all have an eternal spirit, a part of man’s nature that separates him from every other being in this cosmos.

²⁴¹ Wolters, Albert M. 'Partners of the deity': a covenantal reading of 2 Peter 1:4. *Calvin Theological Journal*, 25 no 1 Apr 1990, p 28

²⁴² Hafemann, Scott J. 'Divine nature' in 2 Pet 1,4 within its eschatological content. *Biblica*, 94 no 1 2013, p 99.

However, when one comes to the LORD a second character of that nature is given: submission to the Holy Spirit and the impact that His presence has on the believer. God's promises to those who receive the Holy Spirit include eternal salvation from the just penalty for their native unrighteousness. By taking on this nature of God, one has "escaped" the penalty of sin that will be exacted upon the corrupt world, a world that is in rebellion against God. This passage is in agreement with Paul's testimony that his salvation is sure, and kept by God. Salvation is a gift of God, not earned by the cessation of sin, but by one's placing their trust in Him. God's promise to forgive unrighteousness destroys the ability of our natural bent for unrighteousness to separate the believer ever again. The promise of salvation is arguably the greatest of the precious promises that God has made to those who place their faith and trust in Him.

God's divine nature also includes His unconditional *agape* love that is in stark contrast with the conditional *phileo* and *eros* love of this corrupt world. This same nature is made available to every believer, and maturity in the faith is characterized by an ever growing submission to this form of love.

This submission to the Holy Spirit and the appropriation of an *agape* love for others makes one more like the LORD than like the lost souls of this world. In this way, truly faithful believers become more and more like Christ as they mature in their faith, in their relationship with Him, and in their understanding of God's purpose for them. This process of sanctification should be evident in each believer's life as they become more and more like God (*theiosis*). This is not to say that people will become gods (*deification*), but rather that they will share in some of the attributes of God's divine nature. This change in nature will cause these to be in dramatic contrast to the character of this lost world, and that disparity will be evident to all who choose to make any sincere observation. If no such change takes place in the life of the believer, the voracity of their profession of faith comes into question.

By sharing in God's nature, believers have escaped the world's corruption in that they already belong to God. However, at death or at the second coming of Christ, believers will completely escape this corruption when all sin and corruption is left behind. It is difficult to imagine a world or an environment where there is no sin: a place where satan has no influence. To be in such a place would be to escape all corruption. To be in such a place is the experience that awaits all true believers following the final judgment.

2 Peter 1:5-11. The Pursuit of Godly Character

2 Peter 1:5. *And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;*

A life that is submitted to the LORD and to the leadership of the Holy Spirit will be a life that is vastly different than that which is submitted to the corruption of this self-centered and evil world. In the following passage Peter lists eight virtues of a life that is submitted to the LORD. If one claims the faith but does not find these virtues to be growing in their lives, their claim of saving faith becomes suspect. Since true faith in God is demonstrated by sincere love for Him and obedience to His Lordship, virtuous living becomes a spontaneous fruit of that faith. The Holy Spirit works in the heart of every faithful believer to grow in godliness and both empowers and inspires repentance from ungodly attitudes and actions. This truth gives Peter an opportunity to list some of those virtues that are recognizable in the life of a faithful believer, and he does so using a curious literary approach.

There has been no little discussion pertaining to the grammar of this passage.²⁴³ In providing this list, Peter uses a literary formula referred to as *sorites*, that uses a step-by-step chain, a form of a literary staircase, that leads one from one level or relationship to another. This is a common literary form in ancient literature and is also found in several other biblical passages.²⁴⁴ Though some theologians insist on a logical progression of ascending priorities, the ancient *sorites* form does not dictate such an interpretation, and ancient readers would not have inferred any requirement of sequence. Also, the insistence of a stair-step sequence would lead one to think that one does not move on to the next step until the current step is completed. This is not Peter's intent, and is not the intent of the *sorites* form. The reader is free to examine each of the eight virtues with equal order, priority, and importance.

Peter's use of *sorites* is clearly to communicate a simple message: a life that is submitted to the LORD is one that is characterized by the diligent pursuit of a godly life. If one continually appropriates a growth in each of these eight virtues, integrating them more and more into their life, the result is a life that is transformed from the corrupt nature of this world to the very nature of God that Peter refers to in the previous verses.

²⁴³ Callan, Terrance. The syntax of 2 Peter 1:1-7. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 67 no 4 Oct 2005, p 634.

²⁴⁴ Proverbs 6:17-20, e.g.

1. Diligence.

James wrote, “I will show you my faith by my works!”²⁴⁵ James taught that a life of faith was not passive, but was actively engaged in the expression of spiritual gifts. Many treat their faith as a secondary or tertiary part of their character, drawing from it like an infinite bank account whenever there is a significant need. However, Peter understands faith quite differently. A fully developed and profitable faith is obtained only through a significant personal effort. Rather than treating one’s faith as a secondary part of life, faith is to stand at the forefront of the Christian experience. Faith in God is the foundation, the cornerstone, of the Christian life.²⁴⁶

Some treat their faith as if they are using it to fly a glider, hoping for occasional and repeated updrafts to give them enough altitude to continue on what otherwise is a steadily declining flight path. Perhaps a positive experience in a weekly or biweekly worship experience provides the uplift, but everything from there is a drag downward. Perhaps occasional blessings provide the lift. In their case all of the uplift comes from external sources as their faith is a completely passive experience that is buffeted up and down by circumstances, dependent upon others or outside circumstances for the voracity of their faith.

Neither James, Peter, or Paul teach that faith is passive. Faith is highly active and necessitates diligent effort on the part of the faithful. Compared with the glider metaphor, a vibrant faith is a fighter jet running with full-power, running wide-open afterburners. Vibrant faith has power to take one through circumstances rather than succumb to them. A vibrant faith lifts one over the obstacles that faithlessness faces alone. A fighter pilot has little time to sleep at the controls, but is highly alert and highly responsive to the task. This better conveys the idea of diligence. The remainder of this passage lists some of the areas where the faithful apply that diligence.

2. Virtue.

Beginning with diligence, we will find that Peter lists characteristics of Christian behavior that are quite possible to attain, but they do require decision and effort. The first, virtue, refers to moral excellence. There is simply no existing context for the expression of immoral behavior in the Christian life. This call to a virtuous life would have been as controversial in their contemporary epicurean culture as it

²⁴⁵ James 2:18.

²⁴⁶ 1 Peter 2:6.

is today. The world teaches moral compromise as it increasingly works to destroy the authority of any position that would stand upon any form of absolute truth. Moral excellence presumes a moral code of conduct, a code that is quite evident in the teachings of scripture. As God has placed His Word in the hearts of faithful believers, that Word exposes immorality, making the characteristics of true Christian virtue quite evident.

3. Knowledge.

One who is faithful to the LORD is going to strive to attain an ever-increasing knowledge of Him and His purpose. The non-stair-step intention of the *sorites* form is evident in this imperative since one does need some knowledge of the gospel before one comes to faith. However, the term and context used here goes beyond simple discovery or perception, referring to an intentional digging out the true facts as one would mine the earth for a precious metal. The context and Greek verb tense also identifies that these imperatives are continual.

One does not gain all knowledge and then stop. Just as diligence implies a continual and unending process, just as virtue is to be continually maintained, the pursuit of knowledge is a continual, life-long endeavor. The one who is faithful will put in the effort to mine the word on a continual basis. The image of the “dusty Bible” is famous. Many who claim the faith spend little or no effort in the task of learning more about their faith.

Though doctrinal positions vary greatly from author to author, there are many excellent contemporary writers who have much to share as they teach the Word. Some of these are commonly known names like Charles Swindoll, Henry Blackaby, and Adrian Rogers. There are many whose names are not so familiar who write with excellent conservative scholarship such as F.F. Bruce, Craig Blomberg, John Warwick Montgomery, Robert Stein, Gerald Borchert, John Polhill, Robert Mounce, Eldon Ladd, Ralph Martin, David Aune, Donald Guthrie, John Frame, Thomas Schreiner, and many others. Several of the points of this study can be found in the works of these writers.

Some defend a doctrine of ignorance in order to deny the need for the study of God’s Word. Statements like, “God said it, I believe it, and that’s good enough for me,” express such a position since the “it” in that statement is far too broad an article to so simply understand. We may be reminded that scripture itself defines a moral code when it states that the faithful are to meditate on God’s Word, day and night.²⁴⁷ One of the most significant scriptures in Jewish History is the Shema:

²⁴⁷ Psalm 1:2, 63:6, 77:12, 119:15-23, 143:5, et. al.

Deuteronomy 4:6-9. *And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: ⁷And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. ⁸And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. ⁹And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.*

One cannot teach what one does not know. The scriptures instruct the faithful to teach one another so that their knowledge of the LORD will continually increase. There are no fewer than 100 passages in the biblical narrative that instruct the faithful to teach the word.²⁴⁸

The faithful Christian life is characterized by a continual, diligent, and positive effort to learn more about God's Word and then apply that knowledge to the issues of daily life.

2 Peter 1:6. *to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;*

4. Temperance.

Another characteristic of the faithful is temperance: a word that refers to self-restraint, or self-control. Peter is establishing a stark contrast to the false teachers who seek to define and celebrate a hyper-liberal form of pseudo-Christianity that embraces the epicurean and humanist Hellenistic culture. "They are characterized by sensuality (2:2), inflamed by sinful desires (2:10), they live for soft and comforting pleasures (2:13), never cease thinking of adultery (2:14), and are enslaved to corruption (2:19)."²⁴⁹ A faith that is brought under the authority of the Holy Spirit is one that is restrained from submission to such sinful desire.

Like the other characteristics that Peter has shared, self-control also takes a positive, intentional, and continual effort. The need for virtue that Peter previously described implies that all people share a continual and natural bent to rebellion against the LORD. This bent to sinful desire is something that God has ordained in His creation of mankind, a bent that necessitates turning to Him in faith, away from the evil one who uses the tool of sinful and worldly desire to

²⁴⁸ Exodus 18:20; Leviticus 10:11, et. al.

²⁴⁹ Schreiner, Thomas R. 1,2 Peter, Jude. *The New American Commentary, Vol. 37.* Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers. 2003, p. 300.

separate people from God. Living a life of faithful virtue necessitates the decision to turn from such sinful behavior. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, one can take control over the natural bent to sin.

Faith teaches one to respond to life's situations with Christian maturity rather than to react to them out of natural and sinful instincts. Temperance, or self-restraint in Christian character is demonstrated in a thoughtful response to circumstances that is consistent with, and in full consideration of God's Word and the leadership of the Holy Spirit in those circumstances. One who is diligent in their application of temperance will not be as subject to giving away control to moral, physical, or emotional intoxicants that would affect one's decision-making, and hence, one's testimony and witness.

5. Patience/Endurance.

There is certainly no limit to the situations and circumstances of life that create pain, burden, and annoyance. The continual exercise of self-restraint that Peter has just described creates in us the power to endure such circumstances with calm assurance. This power is shown in faithful patience. Where self-restraint is exercised in a situation-by-situation basis, patience is that part of one's character that enables one to exercise long-term self-restraint. James teaches that the circumstances wherein self-restraint is necessary work together in the life of the faithful to develop patience so that through those circumstances one becomes more mature in the faith.²⁵⁰ Peter agrees with this completely as he states in his next virtue.

6. Godliness.

To be godly is to be like God, not in authority, but in character. Godly self-restraint produces patience, which in itself is a characteristic of God whose patience is beyond measure. There is a close connection between godliness and the virtue that Peter has just described since God is also characterized by infinite virtue. However, this word *godliness* carries with it the idea of *goodliness*, words that were once synonymous in the Old English language. One who demonstrates godliness is one who is always actively engaged in activities that show grace and goodness to others.

Like the others in this list of virtues, godliness requires action based upon choice. Godliness is not a passive characteristic of the faith. Those who are mature in the Christian faith will be consistently engaged in activities that serve others well, not because of the keeping of any law, and not for any hope of reward, but

²⁵⁰ James, Chapter 1.

because of the consistent goodness that becomes part of the basic nature of a mature Christian.

What are some characteristics that one might exhibit that would not be considered Godly? Any attitude or action that is not good is ungodly. This can be a prideful and demanding spirit, or a critical and judgmental spirit, or any other that fails to fully express God's love for others. It is God's nature to be good. As one becomes more godly in their character, as they become more like Christ, they will also develop a nature to be good and shed those attitudes and actions that fail to measure up to godly character.

2 Peter 1:7. *And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.*

7. Brotherly kindness.

When one is characterized by goodness, it would not be in one's nature to be unkind to others. Brotherly kindness, brotherly love, or *phileo* in the Greek, is a form of love that all people have the potential to possess. It is the strong bond that attaches a mother to its child, that connects close friends with one another. It is the ethos of ultimate sacrifice that develops between comrades in arms who would give their lives for one another.

It is a love that is so powerful and so pervasive that even Paul expressed that we need little instruction on attaining it, but he does state that faith in God takes *phileo* to a new level.²⁵¹ When the Holy Spirit empowers our *phileo* love, it takes on a new dynamic. When one diligently seeks to express brotherly kindness that is bathed in the power of the Holy Spirit, that love becomes:

8. *Agape* love.

There are at least two primary differences between the *phileo* love of this world and the *agape* love of God. The first, and most evident difference is that *phileo* love that is expressed apart from the Spirit of Christ is conditional and is variably expressed towards those of our own choosing. *Agape* love has no such condition and is fully expressed without regard to the worthiness of the one(s) receiving it.

A second difference is that the application of *phileo* love presupposes a relationship. *Phileo* love develops out of the circumstances and events surrounding a pre-existing relationship. *Agape* love requires no such relationship

²⁵¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:9.

and can be expressed towards any or all persons or any peoples without regard to any personal contact.

Agape love may be best understood when we consider the nature of God's love for His creation. God's love for people is unconditional and is not compromised or changed by circumstances or by the worthiness of individuals to receive that love. God loves us no less when we revile Him or become immersed in even the most grievous acts of sinfulness. When we hold back love from another because of any circumstance or logic, that love is not the *agape* love that is prompted by the Holy Spirit, it is worldly and fleshly *phileo*. Knowing this distinction can help us to be diligent as we seek to express *agape* love as a part of our nature.

2 Peter 1:8. *For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Peter has just listed eight important elements of Christian character that are worthy of continual development throughout our life experience: diligence, virtue, knowledge, temperance, endurance, godliness, *phileo*, and *agape*. "Making every effort to add to and practice these virtues is part of what it means to participate in God's goodness and hence God's nature."²⁵² Peter notes that the application of these in one's life will bring dramatic and positive change. Together, they "make you" into something new. Together they serve to effect the transformation that comes from a "renewing of the mind"²⁵³ that is necessary for one to turn from the depravity of this wicked world to the holiness of a sanctified life.

That change will result in the bearing of spiritual fruit such as those elements that Peter has just mentioned as well as others that Paul describes in his epistles. The fruit that Peter also describes is the "knowledge of our LORD Jesus Christ." The term used is not referring to book knowledge, but rather a relational knowledge. It refers to the literal merging of two individuals into one single entity. The Old Testament writers often used this term to describe a knowledge between a husband and wife that ultimately produces a child. Children are not conceived by book knowledge. It is this close, deep, and abiding relationship with His creation that the LORD seeks. It is a relationship that is found only when one is diligently seeking Him and turning from the overwhelming influence of this world and our own selfish desires.

²⁵² Corbin-Reuschling, Wyndy J. The means and end in 2 Peter 1:3-11: the theological and moral significance of theosis. *Journal of Theological Interpretation*, 8 no 2 Fall 2014, p 275.

²⁵³ Romans 12:2.

Often, when we look at people who profess faith, we can see in them a lack of Christian maturity. Their lives are characterized, not by a love of others, but rather by a self-centeredness, arrogance, and demanding hypocrisy that serves to create conflict, and can often serve to damage the cause of Christ. Why do we witness so many individuals who have been active in the Christian fellowship for many years who serve in any point from the apathetic sidelines to those who are busily engaged in the fellowship who do not exhibit Christian maturity? The early church was dealing with this issue as we still do today. Peter provides us with some perspective on this issue.

2 Peter 1:9. *But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.*

Note that Peter is still referring to members of the Christian fellowship, those who have found their sins purged. Some who have been Christians for years still exhibit the same self-centered world view that they had prior to their commitment to the faith. Or, because their original profession of faith was not followed by a sincere submission to His Lordship, they have returned to their previous world-views. Yet, these in their arrogance and self-justification still exhibit a fruit of sincerity, at least at some level. The conflicts in the early church, as well as the conflicts that diminish the ministry of the church today, stem from this same phenomena: sincere people who are sincerely hurting the cause of Christ due to a blindness to their own true testimony, and the nature of God's calling upon their lives.

Many of these poorly disciplined Christians do not desire to damage the cause of Christ, and they usually mean well, fully intending upon serving God with integrity. However, when they have spent year after year and not matured in the faith, when they have not been diligently seeking growth in the elements of Christian character that Peter describes, they simply lack the wisdom to accurately perceive the true nature of their own character and its negative impact on the work of the LORD through the church. Peter states that they have forgotten the significance of the grace that they received themselves when their sins were purged. Forgetting that grace, they fail to demonstrate the fruit of grace in their own lives. Blinded to their own arrogance and error, and ignorant of their self-centered pride, they tend to express that pride freely within the fellowship, plunging the community of believers into conflict when they cannot freely express their base and fleshly desires.

Blindness, a metaphor for *willful ignorance*, is a tough enemy to engage. "In the epistles, blindness usually carries the connotation of being unwilling to face the

truth.²⁵⁴ Peter listed some of the qualities a person must have to acquire spiritual sight, and without these, that person is 'blind.'²⁵⁵ Those who are blinded by their own presuppositions are not likely to accept the counsel of others. The power to remove the blindness is found in the power of the Holy Spirit to speak to the heart of an individual and produce a life-changing decision of repentance. Peter describes this process as a form of self-inspection.

2 Peter 1:10. *Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:*

Peter describes this process as a diligent inspection of the surety of one's calling in Christ. This does imply a doubt of one's salvation, but rather refers to an accurate and sure understanding of the nature of what it means to submit to the Lordship of Jesus, Christ and listen to the still-small voice²⁵⁶ of the Holy Spirit.

Over the centuries the church has often failed to hold to the standard of salvation and built a successful and meaningful social structure that used the name of Christ but failed to appropriate the power of Christ in its character. These socially-oriented churches do not place a great priority on leading their fellowship into true acceptance of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Nor do they lead their members in spiritual maturity and/or fruitful evangelistic work. Consequently, it is easy for an individual to become a very active member of this form of fellowship and never actually make a true profession of faith. Their "election" is not sure. They have not responded to a calling of the Holy Spirit, but have followed their base desire for acceptance and social influence. They may be very comfortable in their security as members of a fellowship, but lack the eternal security that is the fruit of sincere faith in the LORD.

Peter reminds his readers to take a diligent look into one's own calling and one's own profession of faith to be sure that their profession of faith is real. However, Peter is not referring to an introspection without an outcome. Peter provides only one form of positive outcome: surety. The only way to avoid the failures that Peter has been describing is to come out of this process with a clear and sure understanding of God's grace in one's life, an understanding that results in a response of total commitment to Jesus Christ as LORD.

2 Peter 1:11. *For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

²⁵⁴ James 1:23-24.

²⁵⁵ Ellenberg, B. Dale. Blindness as Biblical Imagery. *Biblical Illustrator*, 41 no. 1, Fall 2016, p. 88.

²⁵⁶ 1 Kings 19:12.

Does the character of the life of an individual make a difference in the way a Christian enters the eternal kingdom? It is apparent that the New Testament writers, including Peter, Paul and John had very clear views that there is an eternal consequence of our current behavior. Herein Peter describes the reward of an “abundant entrance” to those who have followed his instruction. John refers to the reward of symbolic crowns that are available to be cast at the feet of Christ.²⁵⁷

Whether we refer to the reward as abundance or crowns, the message of this passage of Peter’s letter is clear. The diligent pursuit of godly character is not an option, and is not to be taken lightly. The damage to the kingdom of God on earth that is done by those who refuse to submit themselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ is inestimable. The rewards in this life for the individual and for the community of believers that come from submission to Lordship is likewise inestimable. The choice is up to the believer.

²⁵⁷ Revelation 4:10.

2 Peter 1:12-21.

The Bible, God's Word for Mankind

2 Samuel 23:2. *The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue.*

What is the "Word of God"? If one were to ask ten different people, most likely one would receive ten different answers. Most Christians would probably point immediately to the Bible as "God's Word." There are many attributes of the Bible that warrant such a distinction when we consider its formation and content. Its sixty-six books were written over a period of about 1,200 years by approximately 45 authors, and contains not only the history of God's interaction with man, but also includes poetry, prophecies, and teachings in godly living that are attributable to God Himself as He spoke through faithful men who had a sincere desire to listen to Him. Its first chapters describe the natural and unavoidable fall of man into sinfulness as he always first chooses rebellion against God, and the remainder of the text describes God's plan to restore man to a relationship with Himself. Through it all runs a "scarlet thread"²⁵⁸ that unifies the message: the promised coming of the Messiah who would shed His blood on the Cross of Calvary to provide the means for the forgiveness of all who would place their faith and trust in Him.

When we think of a "word," we think of it as the spoken word much as we experience when we communicate with one another. Consider how the writer of the book of Hebrews opens the book:

Hebrews 1:1. *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,*

When we observe how God has chosen to speak to mankind, He has done so in a variety of ways. He spoke through the fire to Moses,²⁵⁹ through a still small voice to Elijah,²⁶⁰ through a vision in the Temple to Isaiah,²⁶¹ in family circumstances to Hosea,²⁶² through a basket of summer fruit to Amos.²⁶³ God used visions and dreams,²⁶⁴ angels, Urim and Thummim,²⁶⁵ symbols, natural

²⁵⁸ Criswell, Wallie Amos (1909-2002)

²⁵⁹ Exodus, Chapter 3.

²⁶⁰ 1 Kings 11-13.

²⁶¹ Isaiah 6:1,66:6.

²⁶² Hosea 1:2-10.

²⁶³ Amos 8:1-2.

²⁶⁴ Job 7:14; Daniel 1:17; Joel 2:28.

²⁶⁵ Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8; Deuteronomy 33:8; Ezra 2:63 ; Nehemiah 7:65.

events, ecstasy, a pillar of fire,²⁶⁶ smoke, or other means.²⁶⁷ God even used a donkey to speak to Baalim.²⁶⁸ It was God's purpose from the beginning of the creation of man that He would reveal Himself so that man could have a relationship with Him. God's interaction with mankind was dynamic and varied, as God not only revealed who He was, but revealed His purpose and His will.

However, God's Word does more than communicate, and an understanding of the power of God's word is instructive. How did God bring this universe into existence? Whether we argue that the event was a big bang or not, God created it by the power of His Word. When used in scripture, the word, "word," or *logos* in the Greek, means more than simply the speaking of an intrinsic vocabulary. *Logos* refers not only to the message of the word spoken, but both the authority of the one speaking it, and the power that the word has to affect change. How can words have power?

One might consider a simple example of two people walking down the street, one several feet in front of the other. The one in the rear calls out the name of the one in the front. What will the person in the front do? Most likely, that person will respond in some way such as stopping and turning around. By speaking the word, an action was projected on someone else. In this manner, the spoken word has the ability to affect change. An example of the authority of the word might be similarly illustrated if the person in the rear shouts, "Stop! This is the Police!" Now the word not only has the power to produce change, but the authority to do so. Though this may be an oversimplification, the *logos* concept is another thread that is woven through every part of the Word of God. The Word of God not only contains a message, but it has power to affect tremendous change, and it has all of the authority that is necessary to do so.

Hebrews 1:2. *Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;*

It might be interesting to note that we see the Trinity in the *logos*, as the work done by the Word is empowered by the Holy Spirit, and we will see that the authority of the Word is held in the Person of Jesus Christ. As we observe the history of the nation of Israel we find that the diversity of God's revelation of himself to mankind continued despite man's wickedness and disobedience until finally, when Israel and Judah were taken into captivity in Assyria and Babylon, God's Word fell silent. The last Old Testament prophet, Malachi, preached God's

²⁶⁶ Exodus 13:21-22, 14-24; Numbers 14:14; Nehemiah 9:12,19.

²⁶⁷ Morris, Leon. Hebrews. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12. Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation. 1981. p 12-13.

²⁶⁸ Numbers 22:21-39.

Word to the people around 400 BC. At this same time, Ezekiel prophesied of the coming silence when he described the Shekinah Glory of God leaving the Temple.²⁶⁹ For the first time in about twelve-hundred years the Pillar of Fire and Cloud, the Shekinah Glory, was gone from its place over the Holy of Holies, the sacred center of the Jewish Temple. For the next four-hundred years God's Shekinah Glory failed to come down and burn the offering in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, and the High Priest simply had to clean up the mess, leading to the cessation of the annual sacrifice.

However, after this four-hundred year silence, the Shekinah Glory of God returned. We find in the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 2 that there were shepherds abiding in their fields watching over their flocks by night and the angel of the Lord appeared unto them and the *Glory of the Lord* shown around them. God's Word came back.

The writer of the gospel of John further develops the *logos* concept as he starts the book with,

John 1:1-4. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²The same was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life; and the life was the light of men.*

We may again observe, as was described in Genesis, and in Hebrews, the communicative and creative power of God's Word. John also clarifies one very important issue in verse fourteen.

John 1:14. *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

The Word is not only the communicative and creative power of God, it is fully embodied in Jesus Christ, Himself. It is this one attribute of Jesus Christ that is a stumbling block²⁷⁰ to mankind. How can Jesus be a man, but also be God? This makes no logical sense to man's reasoning, but is entirely consistent with the nature of God. Jesus Christ, is the promised Messiah, the Word, the communicative and authoritative person of God, through whom the universe was created, and through whom is found the source of grace and truth. It is through this Person of the Holy Trinity that God speaks directly to mankind, and it is

²⁶⁹ Ezekiel 10:18.

²⁷⁰ 1 Corinthians 1:23.

through His work that forgiveness for sin is found. The Word is eternal. The eternal Word was made flesh when Jesus was born, and in Him God's full glory is again revealed.

We observe in God's revelation of Himself to mankind a harmony of authoritative sources, God Himself as the Father, the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, and the Bible. Though we find varied sources, their message is always the same, so there is never any conflict or inconsistency between them. Consequently, God's Word is without any error or contradiction. Likewise, the Bible, in its original form, is also without any error or contradiction.

So, if this is true, how accurate are the Bibles that we read when compared with the original documents. None of these original documents are known to exist. However, we have over thirty-thousand ancient manuscripts of the New Testament alone, and many of these date back to within one-hundred years of the originals. By examination of these documents, their consistency verifies their accuracy. The Old Testament manuscripts demonstrate a similar and astonishing accuracy. When the Dead Sea scrolls of Qumran were discovered in 1946, they predated the oldest known manuscripts by a thousand years. Two important discoveries were made. First, their age proved that the Old Testament prophecies were, indeed, written prior to the events they prophesied, and second, there was virtually no difference between these documents and those that were produced a thousand years later. The most complete scroll from the Qumran discovery is that of the prophecy of Isaiah. In this book there were only 16 variations in punctuation, and one word difference. That word, translated "light", has no effect on the meaning of the text.

God's written Word, the Bible, was preserved over multiple millennia by a meticulous set of copy rules that were set in place by the scribes who duplicated them.

- A synagogue roll must be written on the skins of clean animals,
- prepared for the particular use of the synagogue by a Jew.
- these must be fastened together with strings taken from clean animals.
- every skin must contain a certain number of columns, equal throughout the entire document.
- the length of each column must not extend over less than 48 nor more than 60 lines; and the breadth must consist of thirty letters.
- the whole copy must be first-lined; and if three words should be written without a line, it is worthless.
- the ink should be black, neither red, green, nor any other color, and be prepared according to a definite recipe.

- an authentic copy must be the exemplar, from which the transcriber ought not in the least deviate.
- no word or letter, not even a, *yod*, must be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the original before him.
- between every consonant the space of a hair or thread must intervene;
- between every new *parashah*, or section, the breadth of nine consonants;
- between every book, three lines.
- the fifth book of Moses must terminate exactly with a line; but the rest need not do so.
- besides this, the copyist must sit in full Jewish dress,
- wash his whole body,
- always write the name of God with a pen newly dipped in ink,
- and should a king address him while writing that name he must take no notice of him.²⁷¹

Extreme care was taken to maintain the integrity of the scriptures in both the New Testament and the Old, and the result is the accurate preservation of God's Word. After the ascension of Jesus Christ there was a similar need for the preservation of the truth. The work and words of Jesus Christ were known by the Apostles and disciples who used that knowledge to spread the gospel throughout the region. However, as time progressed and the church and its needs grew, the apostles started producing written documents so that the truth could be similarly preserved. These documents that found their way into the Canon of the New Testament first took the form of personal and general letters. Then toward the ends of their ministries, the writers of the gospels recorded their four unique historical and theological testimonies of the ministry of Jesus. It is evident that the accurate remembrance of the truths of the faith was extremely important to the apostles.²⁷² They fully understood that the faith was entrusted to the saints.²⁷³ Peter expresses this concern in his second letter.

2 Peter 1:12-15. *Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. ¹³Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; ¹⁴Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me. ¹⁵Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.*

²⁷¹ Geisler, Norman L., and Nix, William E., "A General Introduction to the Bible, Revised and Expanded," Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1986.

²⁷² Luke 1:1-4.

²⁷³ Jude 3.

During the initial formation of the Christian church, there were no authoritative New Testament documents available. Many of its first members retained their Jewish faith, and continued to attend the Temple activities on the Sabbath Day. These Jewish Christians continued to use the Old Testament scriptures as the written Word of God, but now they viewed them through the illumination that comes with the understanding and acceptance of the gospel. As Peter states, the apostles were not negligent in communicating the truths of the faith, as it is these truths that provide such illumination.

However, the apostles were also recognizing that they will not live forever. Some, including James the Apostle and the deacon Stephen had already been martyred. Many Christian leaders, like Peter and Paul, were in constant danger of persecution and imprisonment. As Peter writes these words he is thinking of "putting off this, my tabernacle," as he considers the end of his life on earth when he goes to be with the LORD. Consequently, we might think of this epistle as a form of a farewell address, which may serve to emphasize the importance of its content to the author. "Peter knew because of Christ's revelation, that his days on earth were limited, and this motivated him to ensure that his readers would remember his message after he died."²⁷⁴ Because of this, Peter writes. The gospel was entrusted to the saints, so it is imperative that they record the truths of the faith.

2 Peter 1:16. *For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.*

Many over the years have argued that the Apostles' testimonies about Jesus were greatly exaggerated,²⁷⁵ mythological,²⁷⁶ or even a hoax.²⁷⁷ Certainly, we see that even during their ministry, most who heard the message of the Apostles would not believe their testimony of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and its meaning for their lives. The inviolable consistency we may observe across the various testimonies that come from these different personalities, at different times, and from writings to different groups, shows internally the truth of their words. Furthermore, every Apostle gave his life wholly to the ministry following the resurrection when, prior to the resurrection they were marginally committed and spiritually immature. This is even more subtle evidence of the truth of the

²⁷⁴ Bergen, Martha S.. Simon Peter's Farewell Address. *Biblical Illustrator*, 41 no. 1, Fall 2016, p. 40.

²⁷⁵ Sheehan, Thomas. "The first coming: how the Kingdom of God became Christianity. New York, NY: Random House, 1986.

²⁷⁶ Bultmann, Rudolf. "Myth & Christianity: An Inquiry Into The Possibility Of Religion Without Myth," translation 1958 by Noonday Press, Prometheus Books, 2005.

²⁷⁷ Atwill, Joseph. "Caesar's Messiah: the Roman conspiracy to invent Jesus." Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press. 2005.

record. If the Apostles were trying to present such a message in their own power, much of what is recorded in New Testament scripture would not have been included.

The inclusion of these and other similar events points to the desire of the Apostles to present an accurate account, not a cleaned up story.²⁷⁸ They were eye witnesses of the ministry period of Jesus' life, and carried with them His commission to spread the gospel. Though the gospel was first spread by word of mouth, at the point in time of Peter's writing, the Apostles were already busily engaged in creating the written Word in the form of letters sent to the churches and individuals.

The sincerity of the purpose of these Apostles and their calling of God to record God's Word was no different than those who wrote the documents of the Old Testament. As Jesus spoke to the Apostles, He is able to speak through them the truths of the faith. As Peter notes, he was an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry. The statement of "His Majesty" is a reference to his own witness of Jesus' transfiguration,²⁷⁹ and is presented within the context of his own experience, and is not based upon the canonical gospel narratives.²⁸⁰ "The entire originality of the grounds for St. Peter's authority in this epistle attributed to him are based not upon his personal relationship to Christ the Savior during His earthly life, nor upon any special appearance of the risen Lord to him, about which we have record in St. Paul²⁸¹ and in St. Luke,²⁸² but upon his participation as one of the three witnesses of the Transfiguration,"²⁸³ Consequently, these documents that were created by the Apostles carry just as much spiritual authority as those of the Old Testament. The New Testament is not a replacement for the Old Testament, but is rather the fulfillment of it.

2 Peter 1:17-18. *For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. ¹⁸And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.*

²⁷⁸ Luke 1:1-3.

²⁷⁹ McWilliams, Warren. Peter's Epistles. *Biblical Illustrator* 43(1), Fall 2016, p 68.

²⁸⁰ Neyrey, Jerome H. The apologetic use of the transfiguration in 2 Peter 1:16-21. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 42 no 4 Oct 1980, p 504-519.

²⁸¹ 1 Corinthians 15:5.

²⁸² Luke 14:35.

²⁸³ Klinger, Jerzy. Second epistle of Peter: an essay in understanding. *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 17 no 1 - 2 1973, p 153.

The apostles were eye witnesses not only of Jesus' ministry, but of Jesus' glory and majesty as the Son of God. They witnessed his transfiguration²⁸⁴ as well as his resurrection and ascension. These three events alone are sufficient to affirm the deity of Christ.

2 Peter 1:19. *We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:*

The word of the prophets of the Old Testament and the word of prophecy of the New Testament are one and the same, and the transfiguration is a foreview of their fulfillment.²⁸⁵ Their complete and first-hand knowledge of the truth of the nature of Christ and the voracity of the gospel message made their prophesy fully and altogether reliable, a “more sure word.” The prophecy of the New Testament writers is as a light that shines in a dark place, this sin-filled dark world.²⁸⁶ What is the function of light in a dark place? It chases away the darkness. It is the light that has the power, not the darkness. When the source of light enters the room, the darkness flees at the fastest speed possible, being totally impotent against the light's source of power without any regard for the amount of that power. Likewise, the Word of God chases away the darkness of ignorance and untruth. It illumines the heart of the ignorant to understand the truth and positively respond to it. It is the Word of God that has the power, not the word of the world.

Peter also understands that the Word of God will be sustained, and will sustain its purpose until the end of the age. We have seen how God has preserved His written word through the ages already, protecting its accuracy during tens or hundreds of thousands of copies. However, God's Word is also consistent with God's unchanging nature, and as the Holy Spirit illumines readers to understand His nature, even the context and message of God's written Word is preserved. God's Word is dynamic in that it is a living source of truth and guidance. At the same time it is eternally static, in that it will never change. Due to the timeless nature of eternity, God's plans and promises do not, and cannot change. This age will come to an end, and God's Word will continue. “Such scriptural prophecies as were judged in apostolic times to refer in one sense or another to Christ's parousia bear convincing testimony to the truth of that coming event. These

²⁸⁴ Matthew 17:5.

²⁸⁵ Blum, Edwin A. (1981), Hebrews through Revelation. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12. Frank E. Gaebelin, Gen. Ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. p 274.

²⁸⁶ Callan, Terrance. A note on 2 Peter 1:19-20. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 125 no 1 Spr 2006, p 145.

prophecies should be pondered and heeded by every Christian right down to the day of their fulfilment."²⁸⁷

2 Peter 1:20-21. *Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. ²¹For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

Verse 20, in the original language, refers to the source of the prophecy, not its distribution. This is attested by the context of verse 21. Some would use the word translated "interpretation" to develop doctrines of prophetic interpretation. However, this is not the point of Peter's statement here. Peter is continuing to defend the reliability of the Word of God by identifying its source. Yes, the experiences recorded in the scriptures were eye-witness accounts of the authors. However, as Peter states, the presentation of these and the doctrines, truths, and conclusions made concerning them are not of their own personal interpretation, but rather came from the same source without regard to whether the prophecy was before or after the life of Christ: the Holy Spirit. When we read the words of the New Testament writers we can be fully assured that not only what they describe did, indeed, take place, but also that their presentation of the context and purpose behind all of those accounts is fully reliable. When we uncover what we hold to be an inconsistency in the biblical narrative, the error is in our understanding of the text, not in the text itself. Just as the Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets of the Old Testament, He spoke through the writers of the New Testament. "It was not through a process of dictation or through a state of ecstasy that the writers of Scripture spoke but through the control of the Spirit of God ' as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."²⁸⁸

The Bible, the written Word of God, was authored by men who were led of the Holy Spirit to create an accurate and reliable account of God's revelation of Himself and His purpose to mankind.

"Peter's statement recognizes both the divine and the human element in the production of inspired Scripture. Any balanced doctrine of the origin of Scripture must recognize both. Peter accepts the fact of the divine inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, but he does not define the relationship between the divine and the human elements. The moving of the Holy Spirit on the speakers was the primary and indispensable element, but

²⁸⁷ Curran, John T. The teaching of II Peter 1:20: on the interpretation of prophecy. *Theological Studies*, 4 no 3 Sep 1943, p 347-368.

²⁸⁸ Blum, Edwin A. (1981), Hebrews through Revelation. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12. Frank E. Gaebelin, Gen. Ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. p. 274.

in using human beings as His spokesmen the Spirit worked in and through their varied personalities to produce the very result He desired.”²⁸⁹

Unlike any other book on the planet, it is dynamic and alive with the power of God, through the Holy Spirit, to guide, direct, teach, rebuke, and otherwise interact with mankind.²⁹⁰ It furthermore contains the full revelation of God's plan for mankind through the authority and saving grace of Jesus Christ, the one theme that courses through all of its pages. The Bible was not written to be read by a subset of scholars or priests, but rather, it was written to be read by all people. The Bible is not to be a dust collector on a shelf, but rather to be read by all, and through that reading, all can be edified, and many can be saved.

Revelation 1:3. *Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.*

When we hold the Bible in our hands, we have the very Word of God that has the capability of communicating virtually everything we need to know to live an obedient life of faith that is filled with joy, peace, and blessing. If we are dedicated to its study and its application in our lives, we will find our whole experience radically changed. Let us covenant with God to renew our commitment to His Word, to take the time to read its pages, and seize opportunities to take part in Bible studies and Bible-based teaching.

²⁸⁹ Hiebert, D. Edmond. The prophetic foundation for the Christian life: an exposition of 2 Peter 1:19-21. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 141 no 562 Apr - Jun 1984, p 166.

²⁹⁰ 2 Timothy 3:16.

2 Peter 2:1-22.

A World of False Teachers

2 Peter 2:1. *But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.*

Up to this point in Peter's second epistle he has focused primarily on

- (1) presenting God's plan for the salvation of mankind,
- (2) encouragement for living a godly life and
- (3) standing firm on the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

By the time we encounter the second chapter we begin to get an idea of where Peter is leading with this discussion as he refers to those who had arisen to positions of influence in the church who openly promote heresies, ungodly living, and question the authority of the Apostles and the truth of scripture.²⁹¹ "Only Christ's withering woes on hypocritical leaders in Matthew 23 and the parallel picture in the Epistle of Jude convey the same severe denunciation of false teachers contained in this chapter."²⁹²

We live in a world that promotes many different messages and ideologies that are certainly as varied and as influential in today's cultures as they were in the ancient near-east. The ascetism of today's pagan cultures, typical of eastern religions, is relatively unchanged from those that Peter was familiar with. The humanism and relativism of today's hyper-secular western cultures parallels the Greek Hellenism and epicurean philosophies of the first century. We even receive a variety of messages from a Christian church that has divided itself into well-defined and well-organized denominations that differ from one another in both doctrine and practice, often considering themselves superior to other denominations. None of these basic philosophies have varied much since ancient times.

Peter describes some of the characteristics of the false teachers that are vexing the first-century church (and will continue to do so) as they bring into their fellowships:

²⁹¹ Schreiner, Thomas R. 1,2 Peter, Jude. *The New American Commentary, Vol. 37.* Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers. 2003, p. 325.

²⁹² Hiebert, D. Edmond. A portrayal of false teachers: an exposition of 2 Peter 2:1-3. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 141 no 563 Jul - Sep 1984, p 255-265.

Damnable heresies. These are quite strong words to describe the content of the teaching of these leaders, including deacons and bishops, who are either ignorant or antagonistic to the gospel and have been given influence in the church. Peter's description exposes the depth of the egregious ungodliness of their doctrine. Since their positions are not led of the Holy Spirit, they are of the world: of the flesh and carnal. That which is of the flesh and carnal is unholy and led of the unholy spirit, satan, making them worthy of spending eternity with him in the "lake of fire."²⁹³ Any heresy that would serve to alienate an individual from hearing and responding to the true gospel in sincere saving faith is one that results in that individual's eternal separation from God, making it a *damnable heresy*: one that rewards its proponents and followers with eternal separation from God.

The heresies that were spread in the early church are too numerous to consider in depth here, but we may consider a few.

- Some held that Jesus was not a man, but a spirit who revealed himself as a man. Such a position explains the resurrection by denying Jesus' humanity.
- Some held that Jesus had already fulfilled His promise of the second coming.
- Some held to an autocratic sovereignty of God that denies personal choice, a heretical position that remains today.
- Some taught that the spiritual and physical were sufficiently separated that one could do anything in the physical without impacting the spiritual, declaring sinful behavior irrelevant to salvation.

When one considers the writings of Paul and Peter, one can come away with the idea that the normative position of the early church fellowships was based primarily in doctrinal error and outright heresies, leading the apostles to aggressively teach and write to the churches and its leaders in an attempt to communicate the truth. Peter already stated in the previous verses that this was the purpose of his writing.

The introduction of heresies into Christian doctrine has been a constant source of conflict since the church began. Heresies often enter when those who have influence in the church choose to turn away from sources of true doctrine, either through ignorance or through deliberate rebellion, and turn to only what they themselves have determined, focusing on their finely honed interpretations of their own "revelations." Often, submission to their own theological positions becomes the litmus test of "obedience" on the part of their adherents.

²⁹³ Revelation 19:20; 20:10,14-15.

There is certainly a great deal of heresy being taught today by sincere, but uninformed, church leaders. Some who use the media as their platform for propagating their ideas are openly communicating their false teaching to people who themselves are uninformed, spending little if any time in true Bible study. Some charismatic leaders like David Koresh and Jim Jones have made themselves famous for the suicidal danger of their heresies. However, for every Koresh and Jones there are thousands of others who trade the true gospel of Christ for a pride-filled stump to stand on, and they mislead others in an orgy of greed, self-aggrandizement, or self-fulfillment.

The influence of false teaching is most successfully diminished simply by a deliberate, comprehensive, indoctrination of the faithful in the basic truths of the gospel when they first come to faith. When people know the scriptures from Holy Spirit-lead, teaching, personal, and in-depth study, they are not easily misled by false teachers. Peter is writing to bring some of that truth to the people so that they can discern false teaching from sound doctrine.

Denying the LORD that bought them. Peter clearly identifies that these teachers were “bought,” so at some point they did profess to have faith in God to those in their community. Jesus died on the Cross of Calvary for them but they, like many who claim the faith but lack its power, never appropriated for themselves the benefit of Jesus’ work. Theirs was a self-proclaimed and self-defined faith that denied the Lordship of Jesus and His identity as the Christ, a problem that is still predominant today. Such a faith is a false-faith and lacks the presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of such “believers,” and is serving to keep them separated from the salvation that the LORD offers. These people may refer to themselves as Christians but have not made Jesus the true LORD of their life. In this way they are denying Christ, and living a life that is not characterized by obedience, claiming identity with the faith but experiencing none of its power. It is these who live lives of hypocrisy as they profess faith but live in the flesh.²⁹⁴

When people who embrace a false faith are elevated to positions of influence in the church the entire fellowship suffers. Such people lack the basic understanding of Lordship and are unable to demonstrate the truth either in their teaching or in their example. Rather than serve under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, it is these who lead others based upon their own self-fulfilling skills, agenda, and interests.

²⁹⁴ Some have used this verse to teach a false doctrine of limited atonement, that salvation is not provided for all people, but some are eternally excluded. Chang, Andrew D. Second Peter 2:1 and the extent of the atonement. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 142 no 565 Jan - Mar 1985, p 53.

Swift destruction. This prophesy of Peter should bring a spirit of sobriety to all who profess to share Christian doctrine with others. We may be reminded of James' statement that few in the fellowship should be set apart as masters or leaders because theirs is the greater judgment.²⁹⁵ This is simply because of their greater responsibility to represent the truth of the gospel among those whom they have influence. John writes that the deeds of all people will be exposed for all to see at the final judgment.²⁹⁶ The writer of Proverbs reveals that the most grievous abomination to the LORD is one who "sews seeds of discord in the fellowship."²⁹⁷

Peter describes the reward for such heretical leaders as "swift destruction." For some, that destruction begins this side of the grave, as exemplified by Adam House,²⁹⁸ David Koresh,²⁹⁹ Jim Jones,³⁰⁰ the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God,³⁰¹ and many others who have been exposed for their murderous heresies.

Removed from the LORD's hand of protection, there are a myriad of circumstances that can serve to bring calamity to those who abuse the church. Others take their heresies with them to the grave, and in so doing they take with them a host of followers who have been misled. For these who have missed the truth of faith and never embraced the Lordship of God, the destruction is particularly swift. The final judgment is described as taking place at the end of this age and when all people come before God. This is the first step into eternity for carnal man, a step that comes quickly with respect to the infinite abode of heaven and hell.

2 Peter 2:2. *And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.*

Those who have been given positions of influence in the Christian fellowship carry a great responsibility as their leadership is always paired with a "follow"-ship. Those who submit to a leader's doctrine are trusting in the truth of that doctrine, and when that truth is a lie that is accepted by the fellowship, without regard to the sincerity of the leader, the entire body lives a lie.

What are the unsaved to think of a fellowship that is divided into so many doctrinal positions by leaders who both teach and demonstrate behaviors that are

²⁹⁵ James 3:1.

²⁹⁶ c.f. Revelation, Chapter 20.

²⁹⁷ Proverbs 6:16-19.

²⁹⁸ 2007. 9 dead, Bangladesh.

²⁹⁹ 1993. 78 dead, Waco, Texas.

³⁰⁰ 1978, 917 dead, Guiana.

³⁰¹ 2008. 718 dead. Uganda.

clearly inconsistent and ungodly? We may have heard testimonies like, “If this is what Christianity is, I want no part of it.” Fellowships who are taught doctrinal heresies that preserve their prejudices destroy any opportunity to evangelize the target of their prejudice, and at the same time teach the target of prejudice that the Christian church is a collection of hypocritical bigots. Ungodly behavior by those professing the faith generates no limit of criticism as the body that should be demonstrating unconditional agape love is exposed, and their “evil” is spoken of.

2 Peter 2:3. *And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.*

False teachers often apply their gifts of leadership and administration in order that they would find personal gain, whether material or emotional. That gain can be broad and far-reaching, limited only by that which people use in their mission to satisfy their base desires. We have seen those who use their position of spiritual notoriety to amass great personal wealth. Some over-the-top examples of today’s most unabashed American wealth-seeking evangelists include Kenneth Copeland,³⁰² Benny Hinn, Joel Osteen, Creflo Dollar, Eddie Long, Jimmy Bakker, and many more. Others may not be seeking material wealth, but seek to gather for themselves power over their fellowship as their notoriety and celebrity gives them a sense of great personal pride. This need for personal significance is found in congregations of every size, from the largest, to most commonly, the smallest. Many small churches remain small and unchanged by their fortress doctrine that does not welcome any others into their chapel than the few families and friends who define it.

Regardless of the fleshly desires that are satiated by their heresies, Peter describes the heretics as using their skills to communicate powerless words that simply use those in their group of followers as “merchandise” to fulfill their own desires. The false teachers are using their followers as tools of their trade for no more than a form of personal profit.

This argument should also catch the attention of church leaders today. Peter and Paul both attest that there are only two types of Christian leaders and teachers – those who serve God, and those who serve themselves. If you have been given influence in the Christian fellowship, do you use that influence to meet your needs and propagate your desires and agenda, or do you sacrifice your needs and

³⁰² As the fund-raising king, Kenneth Copeland has amassed a fortune of \$720 million, more than eight times the \$40M amassed by the two in second place, Joel Osteen and Benny Hinn. Before his conviction on fraud charges, Jimmy Bakker had amassed a fortune of \$129 million.

desires to meet the needs of the body? It is evident that Peter is referring to those who use their position to satisfy their own needs.

Again, Peter reminds us that the reward for such service is very short-termed, because the judgment of God is not far off: it is only a heartbeat away. When the heretic takes the rewards of his efforts to the grave, they are all left behind, as the judgment of God will always give the just and proper reward. Peter describes this reward as a damnation that is neither delayed or sleeping.

Sometimes those who have established positions of influence in the church, and present themselves as unchallengeable within the limits of their fellowship, act as if they are invincible. They act as if there is no challenger to their throne of power and influence, and among the people who make up the core of the fellowship that may be true. However, Peter reminds us of just how powerful we are against the truth of God's word:

2 Peter 2:4-8. *For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; ⁵And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; ⁶And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; ⁷And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: ⁸(For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)*

Using several examples, Peter notes that from the angels down through the patriarchs, there are none who escape the judgment of God. The angels who were cast down are those whom we now refer to as Satan's demons as they who were created as God's messengers turned against Him. Peter also reminds us that God once executed a quite graphic judgment upon the wickedness of the world when He destroyed all but one family, the family of Noah, the eighth generation of "proclaimers of righteousness" after Enoch.³⁰³ "Noah thus fractions, together with "righteous Lot", as the positive counterpart to the sinful angels, the ungodly ancient world, and the notorious cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, all of which suffered God's judgment."³⁰⁴

³⁰³ Jensen, Matthew D. Noah, the eighth proclaimer of righteousness: understanding 2 Peter 2.5 in light of Genesis 4.26. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 37 no 4 Jun 2015, p 458.

³⁰⁴ Hafemann, Scott J. 'Noah, the preacher of (God's) righteousness': the argument from scripture in 2 Peter 2:5 and 9. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 76 no 2 Apr 2014, p 306.

The reference to Lot may be curious, and quite consistent with the context of Peter's exposition of false teachers. Peter refers to Lot, the nephew of Abraham, as "just." This could come as a surprising description to those who have studied the life of Lot. Most of what we know of him comes from his experience in Sodom when, attracted by its sensuality, he "pitched his tent"³⁰⁵ towards the city, and then moved into it. He led his family into an immersion in Sodom's sinfulness, and took them so deep into it that its sin impacted his family in a very significant way. However, Lot's sins were illustrated as coming from his willingness to allow himself to be "indoctrinated" into the sinfulness of Sodom. This illustrates the power of sinfulness to "vex" the faithful and pull them in as it did Lot.

The LORD delivered Lot from the city before He destroyed it. Note that Peter places the blame, not on Lot, but on the city. Even the faithful can be misled by those who offer to satiate their base desires, and Peter makes it clear that the LORD is not mocked by the false teachers who mislead them. The LORD can both deliver the faithful from the influence of the false teacher, and promises to provide the appropriate judgment for the false teacher.

Because the false teachers lived wickedly and disseminated their wickedness to others, they will certainly be judged by God.³⁰⁶ These are words of encouragement to the faithful who are constantly abused or bullied by these leaders who seem too powerful or distant to approach. It also clearly vindicates their sincere desire to live a life of godly integrity when they are so deeply immersed in a wicked world that even the false teachers support and emulate.

2 Peter 2:9. *The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:*

We see God's preservation of the faithful in the examples of Noah and Lot who were both spared of the consequences of God's wrath towards the wicked world in which they were immersed. God clearly knows and intends upon defending the faithful while executing an appropriate judgment upon the wicked. Peter points out some of the characteristics of the judged wicked, many of whom had been given significant influence in the church,³⁰⁷ that serve to separate them from the characteristics of the faithful whom he is serving to encourage:

³⁰⁵ Genesis 13:12.

³⁰⁶ Schreiner, Thomas R. 1,2 Peter, Jude. *The New American Commentary, Vol. 37.* Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers. 2003, p. 334.

³⁰⁷ Desjardins, Michel R. The portrayal of the dissidents in 2 Peter and Jude: does it tell us more about the 'godly' than the 'ungodly'?. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 30 Jun 1987, p 90..

2 Peter 2:10. *But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.*

Walk after the flesh. Some false teachers are characterized by a life that rejects the Lordship of Christ in favor of following their own, worldly, agenda. With no interest in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit, they prefer to satiate their own base desires. They lust after the things of this world, its power, its personal pride, and its pleasures. Their life-style and demeanor is not characterized by meekness and humility, but rather by pride and a strong personal agenda. The word that is rendered “uncleanness” is often used to describe sexual sin, and in the case of Peter’s argument may have likely referred to the practice of infidelity, polygamy, and homosexuality among some of those teachers, a practice that was common in the community of those Greeks who held to a separation of spiritual and physical responsibility.³⁰⁸

Despise Government. The false teachers demonstrate an unwillingness to submit to authority. The word that is rendered *government* or *authority* is the Greek *kyriotes*, not referring as much to secular government authority as it is to the call to leadership given to those Apostles, pastors, and teachers who maintain their focus on the sovereignty and Lordship of Christ, and to whom the false teachers are to be submissive.³⁰⁹ The false teachers despise those who have spiritual authority over them, thinking themselves superior to them. They reject the authority of the Apostles and deny their teaching.

Presumptuous. Translated as “bold (*tolmetai*) and arrogant (*authadeis*)” in the NIV, many of the false teachers are characterized by a spirit of arrogance. They are gifted with extraordinary confidence but lack in humility and wisdom. Because of this boldness they have no reverence or fear of any level of church authority, *doxas*, even rejecting the messengers who are sent by God with God’s Word.

2 Peter 2:11. *Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord.*

Though Peter (and Paul) go to great lengths to teach the church how to recognize false teachers, it is evident that they do not actually attack them personally. They do not single out individuals for judgment or condemnation. We may recall the

³⁰⁸ Green, *1 Peter and Jude*, 114; Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 107.

³⁰⁹ Luther, Martin, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 265-66; Calvin, *Catholic Epistles*, 401;

singling out of the Nicolaitans,³¹⁰ and a few others, but these accusations were made by Jesus who is given all authority to judge.

The false teachers easily pass judgment upon those whom the LORD has placed in spiritual authority over them. However, those who do exhibit godly behavior, even those who are messengers of God, do not presume to pass such judgment on the false teachers. Though the false teachers would unapologetically reject the spiritual maturity and authority of God's messengers, that same maturity promotes in those angels a spirit of humility that would not presume to pass judgment, reserving that task for the One Judge, Jesus Christ. While the false teachers take a stand against the existing church leadership, including Peter, Paul and the other apostles, the leadership does not lower themselves into sin by passing judgment on the false teachers, rather they put their trust in the LORD to exact judgment.

This methodology of teaching and illumination allows the LORD to work in the heart of the false teacher without creating internal strife in the fellowship. Peter and Paul are free to love the false teacher while they teach solid doctrine, expose false doctrine, and describe false teachers in enough detail that those teachers have the opportunity to hear, to respond to the message, and to repent. The resulting repentance has the potential to produce a wonderful redemption, restoring the false teachers to the truth, and enables the Holy Spirit to restore their gifts to the purpose that God intends. In this scenario everyone gains, and only satan and his dominion loses.

2 Peter 2:12. *But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption;*

The false teachers pride themselves on their insight and wisdom, thinking that their lack of fear and trembling is a manifestation of their superiority.³¹¹ This is quite a contrast to Peter's description as he refers to them as irrational, acting upon natural instinct rather than the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Like animals, the false teachers engage personal and carnal desires and feelings instead of spiritual reasoning.³¹² They think of themselves as wise and learned, but they

³¹⁰ Revelation 2:6,15.

³¹¹ Schreiner, Thomas R. 1,2 Peter, Jude. *The New American Commentary*, Vol. 37. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers. 2003, p. 349.

³¹² In his critique of the false teachers in 2:1-22, the author of 2 Peter is dependent on Jude 4-16. He has taken the comparison of the false teachers to irrational animals from Jude 10. He has also taken the connection of the false teachers to Balaam from Jude 11. Callan, Terrance. Comparison of humans to animals in 2 Peter 2,10b-22. *Biblica*, 90 no 1 2009, p 101-113.

expose their folly when they speak against things that they themselves do not understand.³¹³

Peter then describes the ultimate consequence of the behavior of these false teachers as a product of their own corruption. The metaphor that Peter uses likens their fate to that of a dangerous animal that is captured and destroyed by the hunter, not because of the desire of the hunter to capture or kill, but because of the dedication of the hunter to the protection of those he is committed to protect against the threat of injury posed by the presence of the animal.

2 Peter 2:13. *And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you;*

As Peter has just noted that the false teachers will be judged, he now states some reasons why. The final judgment will be sure, and will be based upon God's fair dispensation of reward. They may be thinking that the reward that they are receiving is great. The source for this statement, Jude 11, indicates that their expected reward is monetary.³¹⁴ The indictment is brought upon the false teacher because his own actions and he bears the full responsibility for his refusal to repent.

When we think of a "reward" we tend to understand it to be something good that is received as a form of payment for something we have done. However, Jewish tradition held no such distinction on the use of the term, as a reward was given that was consistent with the act that initiated it. Ancient Jews perceived a reward of good things for righteous behavior, and a reward of bad things for unrighteous behavior. In many ways it was a misunderstanding, based upon this tradition, that caused the Jews to attribute sickness and other crises of life as a sin judgment. Some of the reasons Peter gives for this sure judgment:

Riot in the daytime. The expression of sin in the daytime is an allusion to the boldness of that sin.³¹⁵ Ancient tradition held that sin is typically practiced in darkness, and these are so bold that they do not wait until dark, but practice their sin in the full light of day, all day long.

Spots and blemishes. These false teachers are part of the church body, that which is to be brought to the LORD as a pure and unblemished bride.³¹⁶ The

³¹³ Romans 1:22.

³¹⁴ Skehan, Patrick William. Note on 2 Peter 2:13. *Biblica*, 41 no 1 1960, p 71.

³¹⁵ Romans 13:12-13; Ecclesiastes 10:16.

³¹⁶ Revelation 18:23, 21:2, 21:9, 22:17.

words that Peter uses is a reference to the demand that the LORD gave to the Israelites to present their sacrifice without spot or blemish.³¹⁷ The idea is that, though they consider themselves righteous and pure, the LORD considers them wholly unacceptable. Their sin stains and defiles the church. At the close of this letter Peter returns to this metaphor when he calls upon the church to be the direct opposite of this as they stand spotless and blameless before the LORD.

Of course, all people sin and come short of the mark of God's perfect glory,³¹⁸ so we recognize that it is a spotted and blemished people who come before the LORD. However, God has forgiven the sins of those who have placed their faith and trust in Him as their LORD when their lives have been characterized by repentance. The daytime sin of the false teachers implies no such repentance. Consequently, even as Peter writes, the false teachers can find forgiveness and redemption through the simple avenue of repentance that comes from a renewed and sincere faith in God.

Feast with You. As is still true today, ancient Jews placed a lot of emphasis on the experience of fellowship that surrounds the act of eating together. The traditions surrounding eating were deeply integrated in their theological traditions as they incorporated much prayer and prophetic ritual in the meal. The application of the word translated "deceivings" here does not refer to an open act of deception by the religious leaders as they share in the prayers and rituals, but refers to their being deceived. These teachers are in complete denial of their unrepentance, carrying their stains and blemishes into the feast, reveling in their pleasures, "sporting themselves," in their self-appointed righteousness.

1 Peter 2:14. *Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children:*

Eyes full of adultery. It may be curious that Peter does not note that these false teachers are engaged in the practice of adultery, though some certainly may be. If the false teachers were engaged in the open practice of adultery, their overt sin would be soon discovered, they would lose their credibility among the people, and they would lose the power over others that they so strongly desire. Instead, their adultery is in their eyes. Their lust and desire may be held back from their actions, but that lust is still seated in their heart. The Greek phrase is literally, "eyes full of an adulteress," that may be an allusion to a pun in Greek literature that a man with no shame does not have maidens in his eyes but harlots.³¹⁹

³¹⁷ Leviticus 1:3,10; 3:1,6; 4:3,23,28. And many others.

³¹⁸ Romans 3:23.

³¹⁹ Plutarch, Mor. 528E. Cited in Schreiner, Thomas R. 1,2 Peter, Jude. *The New American Commentary*, Vol. 37. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers. 2003, p. 352.

These look upon women as candidates for adultery, though they are limited to their lust since no opportunity for such illicit behavior actually exists.

Cannot cease from sin. This phrase is still attached to the imagery of the use of “eyes,” presenting the idea that the individual is constantly scanning the surroundings for opportunities to satiate their own desires. If the sin were sexual lust, the individual is continuing to imagine others as potential candidates for adultery. If the sin is pride, the individual is continuing to imagine him/herself as superior to others. The false teacher is enslaved to any number of sins that, though may be hidden from others, continually vex and may even frustrate the individual.

Beguiling unstable souls. The term for “beguiling” or “seducing” is a hunting term that is used to describe the process of setting a bait that is deliberately put in place to ensnare an unsuspecting prey. These false teachers have little or no influence over those who are mature and stable in their faith. However, they have the gifts and social skills to take advantage of those who are not as well-grounded in the faith. They seek to satiate their own needs by drawing spiritual babes into their little circle of power in order to obtain what they want from others.

Covetous practices. Peter shifts from the sensual sins to the sins of desire for power. The word translated “exercised,” *gegymnasmenen*, from which we derive the word, “gymnasium,” implies that the expression of self-centered sin is not spontaneous, but something that has been continually practiced and developed, strengthened as one strengthens and trains muscles to perform a physical task. This exercise has brought them to the point of a demonstrated skill and proficiency in the practice of drawing others into their influence.

Cursed children. Peter returns to the tragedy that is the consequence of the behavior of the false teachers. It is evident that these individuals started their faith journey with some knowledge of the gospel. It is also evident that they are quite gifted in many ways since they are able to use those gifts to elevate themselves among the fellowship to the point of political and spiritual influence. It appears that, if those skills were brought under the power of the Holy Spirit, these individuals could be like Paul who changed from an antagonist of the Spirit to a tremendous leader in God’s kingdom work simply through the act of repentance that comes from genuine faith. Prior to Paul’s conversion he was cursed. Peter is probably remembering his own self-centeredness and his own pride that drove his own gifts prior to his salvation experience. Remembering the curse that he himself was subject to, he reminds the false teachers and those who follow them that those teachers are still subject to that same judgment for their choices as they have taken the gifts that God gave them to promote kingdom work and are using them to satiate their own personal desires and agenda.

2 Peter 2:15-16. *Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; ¹⁶But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet.*

Peter recalls from the history of Israel, how they went astray. This implies (consistent with his earlier statements) that the false teachers started out on the right path, or the right “way,” but turned away from some point and followed their own path, one that drew them further and further from God’s purpose until they get to the point that they have not only left the gospel purpose, but are now antagonists to it.

Peter draws an example from the life of the prophet Balaam,³²⁰ who was quite satisfied with the acclaim that he received with his status as a prophet, but who wandered so far from God’s purpose that his own donkey had a better idea of God’s purpose than he did. Balaam had wandered so far from his calling that he found himself on a mission to curse the people of Israel, doing so for personal and financial gain. Balaam was turned back by God’s word, spoken through the voice of his donkey. Likewise, the false teachers have wandered away from their calling and are using their skills to seek their own rewards and, like Balaam, are in need of a word from God to turn them around. In some ways, this passage, written by Peter serves as such a word, as do several similar passages by Paul and a parallel passage written by Jude.³²¹

2 Peter 2:17. *These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever.*

Peter continues to describe some of the characteristics of false teachers and their impact on those whom they influence. Again, this description is both intended to expose them to the body of believers, and also to allow the false teachers to recognize some of these characteristics in themselves so that they can repent, turn back to God, and fulfill the marvelous purpose that God had originally intended for them.

Wells without water. Peter turns to a pair of metaphors that are quite relevant to the arid region of the ancient near-eastern community to whom he writes. The quality of life in the ancient near-east is closely tied to the availability of water. Such life-sustaining water comes from several sources, including wells and rain

³²⁰ Numbers, Chapters 22-24.

³²¹ Jude 4, i.e.

clouds. Peter likens the character of the false teachers to dry wells. One approaches what looks like a well, purports to be a well, but when an attempt to draw water from the well is made, one finds only dust. Only thirst and death results from the effort. The false teachers purport to live and teach the truth, but upon close inspection the truth simply is not found. One comes away from the examination with an understanding of who they are, but do not find the fountain of God's love and truth in their words.

Clouds that are carried by the wind. One might use this passage to refer to the false teachers as “wind bags,” and such an assessment may not be far from the truth. When rain clouds approach the arid land, the people are excited and ready for the receipt of life-giving showers that seem to be forming before them. However, the clouds that Peter describes are simply carried by the wind and pass without a drop of rain.³²² When one listens to the words of these false teachers, and when one examines their life, they find their life and their words devoid of life-giving truth. One hears no shortage of opinions and judgments that are the product of the individual's pride and arrogance. These statements can be lofty and inspiring, but they are not the product of God's Word as revealed and illuminated by the love of God and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, once the opinions and judgments have passed, they are gone and like the dry clouds, leave nothing of true value behind them.

Midst of darkness. Peter has already noted that the false teachers who are misleading and misdirecting the early church had the opportunity to know the truth, but chose to hold tightly to their own desires, enjoying the notoriety and respect that their position in the body brings to them, yet by leaving the truth behind, they have chosen to immerse themselves in the darkness of their own self-will. They have chosen to live in the frustration of this darkness, and without repentance, it is within this darkness that they will remain. Peter reminds us that the darkest judgment is reserved for those who propagate error.

2 Peter 2:18. *For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.*

One of the primary needs of these false teachers is that of a worldly significance, one that influences others. They use “great swelling words of vanity” to achieve this end, thinking somehow that the influence that they gain is of great profit. They are successful in drawing to themselves others who share in their worldly wantonness. They prey on the ignorant to share in their own ignorance. Recall

³²² c.f. Jude 12; Jeremiah 2:13.

that much of the false teaching of the first-century promoted sensual and ungodly behavior, so those who reveled in that behavior would flock to these teachers.

Perhaps we are witnessing a form of Christian denominationalism where different fellowships accreted into identifiable groups with distinctive beliefs and behaviors, dividing the body of Christ, and creating pockets of heresy. The members of these groups reinforce each other's error, as they wander farther and farther from the truth until that error is evident to some of those who have been so deceived. In this way, the "clean," those who are recently new to the faith, find themselves to be prey to these predators, pressured into renouncing their belief in the gospel. Those whose faith was mature would not be so tempted, and easily escaped the snare.

2 Peter 2:19. *While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.*

When one is listening to the teachings of these false teachers, they may hear lofty words of freedom, freedom from the many moral restraints that would seem to hold them from obtaining what they truly desire. Many in this world still perceive the Christian faith as a faith of bondage with a long list of "thou shalt nots," that serve only to restrict one's freedom. Perhaps the faithful have added to this misconception by practicing forms of legalism that do, indeed, place bondage on one another. The false teachers can and do capitalize on this misconception and offer liberty as a freedom of personal expression that is submitted to no authority (except, perhaps, their own). They are not teaching their adherents to submit to God, or to submit to the counsel of the Holy Spirit, nor are they teaching their adherents to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The very freedom that they espouse serves only to hold them in the bondage of unrepented sin that carries the penalty of eternal death.

Consequently, by teaching this form of freedom, the false teachers are "servants of corruption," leading the people to death instead of life. Peter literally states, "a man is a slave to that which masters him." Their master is not Jesus Christ, but rather the fruits of their own sinful desires. Rather than preaching of a LORD and Savior who has come to deliver them from destruction, they teach a pagan, secular, and/or humanistic philosophy that rejects the Lordship of Christ and serves only to keep their adherents in their own lost state.

"They promised water and clarity to those who were thirsty and confused, but instead they left them parched and confused. Hence, their judgment is just. ... They spoke with a kind of assertive confidence that made the weak think they must have known what they were talking about. They appealed to sinful human

desires, arguing that it made no difference at all if we indulge our sexual appetites to the full. They maintained that their teaching was the pathway to freedom, arguing that the gospel originally received is nothing other than bondage.”³²³

2 Peter 2:20-22. *For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. ²¹For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. ²²But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.*

Peter ends his exposition on the character of the first-century false teachers and the impact on their adherents with a tragic indictment. Like James, who teaches of a greater judgment for those who take on for themselves the responsibility of leadership in the Christian fellowship,³²⁴ Peter describes the greater judgment that comes upon those who have so turned from the knowledge of the truth and have taken others with them. Peter refers to these as “overcome” by the pollutions of this world, even though they had at some point in their experience made a profession of faith.

His implication is that their original profession of faith was sincere, but lacked the sincere trust in God: the commitment to Lordship that is the fruit of true repentance. Without that commitment, they have nowhere to turn but back to the pollution that they were given the power to overcome. This is particularly true of those who are teaching the antinomian and humanistic philosophies that separate spiritual and physical responsibility. These heresies teach that all manner of physical gratification is acceptable since salvation is a spiritual gift, and is not related to one’s actions.³²⁵ Adherents to antinomianism fall back into the physical sins, but do so in a state that is worse than those who have never heard the truth. When one compares them to those who have never heard the gospel, they are found to be in apostasy and direct rebellion against God. Peter states that it would have been better if they had never heard the gospel in the first place. “Peter was warning those most susceptible to the bait being offered by false teachers. He was not attempting to depict the awful consequences of apostasy. Nor was he dealing with the problem of whether or not one can lose his salvation in Christ. Instead he was warning those recently saved that the subtle

³²³ Schreiner, Thomas R. 1,2 Peter, Jude. *The New American Commentary*, Vol. 37. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers. 2003, p. 355.

³²⁴ James 3:1.

³²⁵ Romans 6:1-2.

enticements of false teachers and the wooings of their old natures not lead them into the snare of sin.³²⁶

False teachers were having a devastating impact upon the early church. Consequently, each of the New Testament writers contribute a large amount of text to this subject as they take a firm stand against such destructive behaviors. They serve to describe the character and impact of those who pervert the gospel message and lead others away from the saving grace of the LORD. Through their efforts, the false teaching of the apostate leaders can be recognized by those whom they seek to mislead. At the same time, the false teachers may be able to see the error of their choices and repent.

The era of false teaching did not end in the first century. The propagation of heresy has continued through the centuries and is certainly still common today. Rather than be unified under the Lordship of Christ, the church has been divided into “denominations,” that each teaches some distinctive form of the gospel, and many of these reject the teachings of other Christians. There is no shortage of Christian cults who teach a brand of religion that denies the basic tenets of the faith. Most cults can be readily recognized by their rejection of Jesus as Yahweh, Jehovah. Still others teach worldly philosophies that promise all manner of freedom and reward to those who summarily reject the tenets of the gospel, replacing them with systems of thought, rites, and rituals that are claimed to bring one to righteousness. Some have removed the gospel message of salvation and commitment to the LORD and replaced it with a set of programs focused on social justice. By “including” all people in the fellowship, they have rejected holiness for worldliness, and exchanged purity for unrighteousness.

The church has always been under attack by philosophies that are promoted by the evil one. We may be reminded that the enemy is satan who seeks to poison the minds of all potential believers so that they would join him in his rebellion against God. His attacks can be averted by a heart that sincerely loves the LORD, who submits to His Lordship, and to His Word so that one can be set free, indeed.³²⁷

³²⁶ Dunham, Duane A. An exegetical study of 2 Peter 2:18-22. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 140 no 557 Jan - Mar 1983, p 51.

³²⁷ John 8:36.

2 Peter 3:1-12.

Preparing for the Coming Day

2 Peter 3:1-2. *This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: ²That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour:*

Chapter three demarks a clear break from Peter's lengthy discussion concerning false teachers turning his attention back to his readers. Peter uses a term that is rendered *beloved* that probably deserves some attention. The first-century Christians redefined the Greek term, *agape*, to refer to that unique unconditional love that characterizes God's unconditional love for His creation and is to characterize Christian's similar love for Him and for others. Peter takes this new word usage and adds a suffix, making the word, *agapetoi*, rendering it "one who is loved with God's unconditional love." This term came to be used by literally all of the New Testament writers,³²⁸ reminding us of the importance of loving one another in this unconditional way. Peter uses the term four times in this one chapter alone. Some translations render this word, "*dear friends*," incorrectly implying that the basis of this word is *phileo* rather than *agape*.

Peter brings this reminder of love, "a reminder about the coming of the Lord and how believers are to live in light of that coming,"³²⁹ following the hard-hitting exposure of false teachers in the second chapter of this letter, probably bringing some encouragement to his readers as they are reminded of this love. Peter also describes a desired result of this reminder: that the minds of those to whom he writes would be purified. The term for pure refers to something that was previously impure and has had its impurities removed. The previous chapter was replete with examples of impurity, and Peter is reminding his readers that the truths that he presents can serve to "stir up" their minds and serve to remove those impurities much like the smelting process serves to separate out impurities from molten metal. An occasional reminder of the truth can serve to remove from our minds that which is impure and unholy and that which is not profitable to God's kingdom purpose for the individual. Peter reminds his readers to remove from their minds that which is unholy, and replace it with holy patterns of thought.

One of the fruits of "right thinking" is a restoration of the truth by shedding the errors that they may have accumulated from these false teachers of chapter two.

³²⁸ c.f. 1,2 Corinthians, Philippians, Hebrews, James (3 times), 1 John (6 times), Jude (3 times).

³²⁹ Blaising, Craig A. The day of the Lord will come: an exposition of 2 Peter 3:1-18. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 169 no 676 Oct - Dec 2012, p 387.

Peter reminds them to return to the teachings of the Old Testament prophets and to the commands that the LORD gave to His Apostles and has been shared with them through their visits and their letters. “Peter had been with the Lord on all of the occasions when the Lord spoke of His coming. He was with Him when the Lord delivered the Olivet Discourse. He was present at the Lord’s ascension and personally heard the angelic proclamation that the Lord will come again in the same way in which He went. Peter could speak as an eyewitness, as he did in 2 Peter 1. But repeatedly in his preaching and his teaching, Peter called attention to the Old Testament prophets.”³³⁰

2 Peter 3:3-4a. *Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, ^{4a}And saying, Where is the promise of his coming?*

It is apparent that one of the primary areas of false teaching that Peter was correcting is that of eschatology: beliefs concerning the end of the age. Peter’s second epistle “is almost universally regarded as evidence that the early Church was seriously disturbed by the delay of the Parousia.”³³¹ We face a similar dilemma today with our most successful cults finding that success in a platform of well-defined eschatological beliefs. Referred to as “eschatological cults,” they include some of the fringe groups of the Seventh Day Adventists (e.g. Branch Davidians), the early World Wide Church of God, the People’s Temple of Jim Jones, and many others. Often these groups teach that the end is imminent and they lead their members to make unreasonable preparations, or even in the cases of the Branch Davidians, and the People’s Temple, they orchestrate their own violent deaths.

The distraction from the true gospel that characterizes these cults was as dangerous in the first century as it is today, and probably more-so among a fledgling Christian community that had little written doctrine to stabilize it. Peter refers to “their own lusts,” something we see in the leadership of these eschatological cults today. Their leaders invariably use their teachings to establish themselves as a form of savior, building their religion around themselves as one who is going to save the people from the dangers of these imminent last days. Peter describes the lust they have for their own power and worldly glorification among their followers.

Peter points out that, prior to the coming of the false teachers, the eschatological truths were already known. Furthermore, even the prophets argued that there would be scoffers in the last days. Peter sees these prophecies fulfilled in the

³³⁰ Ibid. Blaising, Craig A. p. 388.

³³¹ Talbert, Charles H. 2 Peter and the delay of the Parousia. *Vigiliae christianae*, 20 no 3 Sep 1966, p 137.

appearance of these scoffers. "The problem is not with Jesus, or the apostles' memory or integrity. The problem is with the false teachers' depraved and "deliberate" ignorance of the ways and word of God."³³² The Apostles agreed that the "last days" refer to the period from Jesus' ascension to His second coming. They believed that this time would be short, and would probably have been astonished had they known that we would still be awaiting His coming with a similar spirit of anticipation a full two millennia later.

The failure of Jesus to yet fulfill the prophecy of His return fueled the antagonists' criticism of the teachings of the Apostles.

2 Peter 3:4b-5. *for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.*

One argument that the false teachers used is similar to that still used today: little in this physical world has changed. They argue that there is no physical evidence of the promise His coming, so this promise may be dismissed and replaced by their own system of belief. The false teachers held that God clearly has not intervened in the world since its beginning, and so the Apostle's teaching of any sudden change is reactionary, fanciful, or mythological.

Worldly minds are ignorant of spiritual things, and these whose minds are worldly simply do not perceive the dramatic work that God has been doing since the beginning of creation, a work that culminated on the Cross of Calvary. They do not understand or teach of the spiritual dynamic of sin and death. They cannot see the dynamics of God's continual intervention in both the physical and spiritual dimensions of this universe.

2 Peter 3:5. *For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:*

Those who are leading their followers in ignorance are ignorant by choice. They have chosen to ignore some of the most obvious evidence of God's presence and purpose that has been clearly seen by those whom He created. This is in full agreement of Paul's similar argument that he made in his letter to the Romans.

Romans 1:18-20. *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; ¹⁹Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. ²⁰For the invisible*

³³² Kuhn, Karl A. 2 Peter 3:1-3. *Interpretation*, 60 no 3 Jul 2006, p 311.

things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

Peter gives three arguments to refute the ignorant position of the mockers.

The first example of God's intervention in the cosmos is the creation of the world itself in what was already an aged universe. The universe, created by the Word of God, was in chaos before God provided a place that is inhabitable by human life.³³³ Even the earth itself was formed with dry land emerging from the water.³³⁴ Peter's description of the creation of the earth is consistent with the Genesis narrative.

2 Peter 3:6. *Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:*

The second example describes the destruction of the world by flood, a reference to God's judgment of man's sin in the days of Noah. This event clearly shows the intervention of God within the time frame of man's experience. The flood did not result in the destruction of the world: it resulted in the destruction of the sin that so came to characterize the "world that was." This intervention of God was directly related to His interrelationship with mankind. Peter argues that, if God intervened in such a dramatic way specifically because of man's presence, He can certainly do it again.

2 Peter 3:7. *But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.*

Peter argues that the present stability of the universe can be traced back to God's graceful intervention, allowing for God's repeated intervention again at any point He wishes.³³⁵ Having been created by God's intervention, and at least once disrupted by God's intervention, the earth and heavens are now stable, "kept in store," reserved in its present state until God intervenes again for the purpose of the final judgment, a judgment that will visit both the heavens and the earth. Peter reminds his readers that all of this is done by the power of God's Word, a power that has authority over all of the universe, a power that is total, and has been exacted in this cosmos in a plan that does end with the judgment of sinful

³³³ Genesis 1:2.

³³⁴ Genesis 1:9-10.

³³⁵ Schreiner, Thomas R. 1,2 Peter, Jude. *The New American Commentary, Vol. 37.* Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers. 2003, p. 375.

men. If the false teachers refuse to repent, they will find out too late that (1) the judgment is no myth, and that (2) God does intervene in the world.³³⁶

2 Peter 3:8. *But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*

The argument that is being made by the false teachers relates to what they perceive is an inordinate amount of time that has passed without experiencing the fulfillment of God's promise. Peter has already argued that much of God's promise has been unfolding since the creation of the universe, a time period that was unfathomable to ancient man's sensibilities. Peter then makes an important point about the nature of that time, a point that has made this particular verse the most well-known in the chapter: God is timeless.

Though the concept of God's eternal and timeless character was not well-understood in the first century, the concept did have its adherents, including many of the framers of early Christian thought such as Eusebius, Jerome, and Augustine of Hippo. The understanding of God's timelessness has become a basic and non-controversial doctrine in modern times because of our clearer understanding of the physical properties of the universe.

Peter understands this when he severs the connection between physical time as we experience it and the unknown chronological nature of an eternal heaven. We understand today that we experience the passing of time as a function of our moving through an expanding physical universe. If we travel at different rates of speed, we experience the passing of time at different rates. We also experience the passing of time at different rates when we are subject to differing amounts of gravity. Time, as we experience it is just one (very important!) dimension of the physical properties of this universe that was created by God's Word.

If God created physical time when He created this physical universe we can better understand how He views this universe from His place in Eternity, a place that is entirely separated from the natural limitations of this physical universe. God is eternal, and is not limited by or bound to the passing of our moments, hours, and days. Consequently, as God observes all of creation from His position in Eternity, He does not have to remember our past or predict our future. All of the events that take place in this creation are in the "palm of his hands."

When we understand that God is not limited by the passing of time that we experience, we can recognize that God's promises also transcend any limitations

³³⁶ Ibid. Schreiner, Thomas R.378.

of physical time, the very point that Peter is making. Peter effectively removes time as an issue, removing one of the primary arguments made by the false teachers who do not understand or even consider God's timelessness. God created time and He is free to interact with it in any way that He pleases.³³⁷

2 Peter 3:9. *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

The miracle is not that God created time... the miracle is that YAHWEH stepped down from His position in Eternity and entered time as the Messiah, Jesus Christ to fulfill the promise that He made to mankind: that He would provide a means of salvation.

Peter, from his own understanding of God's timelessness, recognizes that the passing of time itself is not an indicator of God's faithfulness to His promises. Peter states that God's patience for us transcends the character of time, and He can extend the period of physical time before the second coming of Christ to any length that He chooses without compromising His promise. Peter notes that as the days continue to pass, this is an opportunity for more people to come to the LORD, stating that it is clearly God's will that all people would come to repentance and be saved.

Though the power of sin keeps most people from salvation, many thousands of people are still coming to Christ every day, and coming at a rate greater than any time in history, particularly in areas of the world that have been traditionally closed to the gospel in modern times such as India, China, and Russia, home to nearly half of the world's population. Africa, once referred to as the "dark continent" has also experienced sweeping revivals that have seen the salvation of millions of souls.

2 Peter 3:10. *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.*

So, how long will God continue to tarry before the end of the age? Peter repeats the metaphor of the "thief in the night" that was also used by Jesus and by Paul.³³⁸ The promise of the coming of the end of the age is not abrogated by the

³³⁷ Carter, John W. (Jack). The Epistemological Impact of an Omnitemporal Eternity on Theological Paradigms. *The American Journal of Biblical Theology*. 2(01). March, 2001.

³³⁸ Matthew 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thessalonians 5:2-4; Revelation 3:3, 16:15.

passing of time. The end will come with little warning, though the signs of the end are now and will continue to be apparent.³³⁹ Peter then adds his words to the prophesy of the nature of the end as one that is violent and ultimately destructive to both the heavens³⁴⁰ and the earth. God will end this age, and that end will involve the destruction of the universe itself, a prophecy that is in complete agreement with the violent end that is described in the latter chapters of the Revelation of John as well as many other biblical references.³⁴¹ The voracity of Peter's description of the end of the age is defended by its consistency with these other biblical sources.³⁴²

2 Peter 3:11-12. *Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, ¹²Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?*

Certainly there has been no shortage of speculation as to the details of the prophesied end of the age. "In the process of erasing the stain of original sin, God must completely obliterate all physical substance, creating a new substance that is not tainted by decay and death."³⁴³ There is little question that the exploration of such speculation is interesting, but it should not become distracting, and speculations surrounding end-of-the-world theories should not be considered authoritative, and should not be allowed to distract us from the sincere work of the Gospel. Rather than explore the cosmic, Peter brings us back home immediately, taking for granted the violent and imminent nature of the end, and turning attention to the need for the faithful to live lives that recognize the very sovereignty of God, an uncompromised sovereignty that empowers Him to end the age.

Peter does not in any way diminish the importance of the end-times prophecies. Eschatological cults tend to overemphasize end-time doctrines to the point that they become their most important focus. Because of this, many Christian groups tend to shy away from any eschatological focus, often rationalizing away the need to consider eschatology.³⁴⁴ However, Peter uses words that are translated,

³³⁹ c.f. 1 Thessalonians, Chapter 5.

³⁴⁰ The word rendered heavens in this verse refers not to the eternal home of the LORD, but the skies and those objects that Peter and his readers observe when they look up.

³⁴¹ See also, Isaiah 13:10; 24:23; Ezekiel 32:7; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15-17; Amos 5:20; 8:9; Zephaniah 1:14-18.

³⁴² Tresham, Aaron K. A test case for conjectural emendation: 2 Peter 3:10d. *The Master's Seminary Journal*, 21 no 1 Spr 2010, p 65.

³⁴³ Heide, Gale. What Is New about the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 40 no 1 Mar 1997, p 47.

³⁴⁴ The most complete biblical narrative on eschatology is found in the Revelation of John, and is often overlooked because of the inability of many to understand how to read its apocalyptic literature style.

“looking for and hasting unto...” as he notes that the faithful are to be looking towards the coming of the promise, as well as working towards its end. “This discussion of the destruction of the cosmos is, in other words, a highly ethical matter for Peter. Eschatology is a thoroughly ethical doctrine in the New Testament and that is no exception here. Because the Lord will return in judgment, where even the heavenly bodies burn as his holy fire sifts through the wheat and the tares of both people and their works, his people, his body, ought to be pursuing Christlikeness.”³⁴⁵

How does one work towards this end? A simple illustration might help us to understand: You are observing a gathering of children who are playing in the middle of a quiet, freshly paved, street. As they are playing, a huge street-wide steam-roller is slowly approaching them. The children are unaware of the approaching machine, and its driver is unaware of their presence. You have no way of communicating with the driver. What do you do? You communicate with the children with the sole intent of saving them from their impending doom.

This is what Peter is referring to as “hasting to the coming day.” We may not be able to save people from the impending doom of the coming judgment, but we can warn them. We would think that one who would fail to warn the children in this illustration would be less than despicable. However, those who are lost are like those children because they simply do not understand the nature and surety of their doom. It is the task of the faithful to communicate the good news of God’s saving grace to those who are in need of it. We do not know if the last days are imminent, or if they are many millennia away. However, as God tarries, people still have no assurance of tomorrow. “This should have a definite resulting effect on the lives of Christians both in their attitudes and their expectation of the Savior’s consummating work.”³⁴⁶ The time for sharing the message of salvation is today, and that message is shared through godly living and sharing both the context and the message of God’s love with a lost world.

³⁴⁵ Emerson, Matthew Y. Does God own a Death Star?: The destruction of the cosmos in 2 Peter 3:1-3. *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 57 no 2 Spring 2015, p 292.

³⁴⁶ Overstreet, R Larry. A study of 2 Peter 3:10-13. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 137 no 548 Oct - Dec 1980, p 371.

2 Peter 3:13-18.

Waiting in Righteousness

This passage brings us to the close of Peter's second letter to the early church. He has presented a compact and powerful presentation of the gospel message that includes a call for godly living as the faithful await the end of the age, an end that will be ushered in by the second coming of the Messiah, Jesus. Peter speaks to the form of behavior that is consistent with the appropriate expression of one's faith in one's life.

2 Peter 3:13. *Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.*

Look Forward.

When we look at the past or present, it is easy to become overly focused upon the pain, and suffering that is such a part of a world that is immersed in the secular and pagan behavior of the greater population. When we focus upon the evil of this world we can lose sight of the blessings that God has provided for those who have placed their trust in Him. We can also lose sight of the promises that God has made, promises that we can find encouraging when the messages of this world work to discourage us. Consequently, Peter reminds us to keep our attention focused upon those promises.

In a form similar to the writings of Paul and John, Peter reminds us to look forward to the coming age when the faithful will be ushered into place that will be new and different to us all. The very nature of this world will be replaced with an entirely new experience, characterized by a completely different environment, one where righteousness dwells rather than evil. The time of this physical universe will be ended, and the faithful will join God in eternity, either through death, or through the second coming of Christ. We can only look forward now, though as through a "glass darkly."³⁴⁷ God has revealed this promise of a new heaven and new earth, but He has revealed few of the literal details of this new existence.

As people who are fully immersed in this physical cosmos, we lack the experiential knowledge to understand the context of an entirely different environment. Like the fish who know of no other world than their underwater surroundings, unable to comprehend an environment without water, we have no context to fully grasp an environment where we are not immersed in the nature of this cosmos and the sin that so characterizes its people.

³⁴⁷ C.f. 1 Corinthians 13:12.

Though Peter cannot describe the “physical” characteristics of this promised new heaven and new earth, he clearly states that this new environment is characterized by righteousness. Instead of finding ourselves immersed in a sin-sick world as we now do, we will find ourselves immersed in righteousness. The faithful will find themselves in the presence of God where no sin may dwell.

Live Faithfully

2 Peter 3:14. *Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.*

Peter now simply assumes that the faithful will be obedient to his call to look forward to this new heaven and earth with great joy and expectation. His “wherefore” identifies that the following behavior is directly related to that joy and expectation: that the faithful will be found living lives that rise above the sin-nature of this world, lives that are submitted to the Holy Spirit. Peter describes some of the evidence of that obedience:

Be diligent. Using the same word that he uses in chapter 1, verse 5, Peter prefaces the statement with a call to a consistent, conscientious, earnest, and persistent effort towards righteous living. One who does so diligently, does so with a focus on that which is godly.

Found at peace. Peter’s admonition may remind us of Paul’s recommendation to the Philippians:

Philippians 4:8-9. *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. ⁹Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.*

The opposite of peace may be turmoil, and when we look at our own lives, do we find ourselves more focused upon the turmoil around us, or on the peace that God’s Holy Spirit inspires in us? We may need an occasional reminder to turn our focus upon the LORD and receive from Him the encouragement and resources of love and blessing that serve to overcome the consequences around us that bring us turmoil. Peter states that the faithful should not be “found” in turmoil, but rather in peace. Peace is found when one’s heart and mind are brought under the control of the Holy Spirit who communicates the truth of the

LORD's love, a truth that makes impotent the lies of the evil one who seeks to bring turmoil.

Without spot or blemish. The biblical narrative makes it clear that all people will be subject to the final judgment of God³⁴⁸ and that all people will be shown that Jesus Christ, is indeed the LORD, YAHWEH.³⁴⁹ However, in that immense sea of peoples, all will be judged according to their faith in God. Though all are held accountable for their actions in this life,³⁵⁰ and all come before Him having been spotted and blemished by sin, God has forgiven the sin of the faithful through the work that Jesus Christ did on the cross when He took upon Himself the punishment for the iniquity of the faithful.³⁵¹ The power of the cross served to destroy sin's power to condemn the faithful,³⁵² presenting them to the throne of God as without spot or blemish.

The only way to be found without spot or blemish is to be found with a genuine faith in God that is characterized by complete submission to Him. Those who lack faith in God may look forward to the new heaven and earth with great anticipation, not realizing that, without faith, that new heaven and new earth will be eternally outside of their grasp as they find themselves separated from God in death as they chose to be in life. Peter's statement is an admonition to be found to be a person of faith, for a person of true faith will be found without at peace, without spot, or blemish.

The LORD's Forbearance.

2 Peter 3:15. *And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;*

Peter reminds us that the purpose of Jesus' work is to provide a means for the salvation of the faithful from the condemnation for sin that they truly deserve. All of us deserve eternal separation from God, but Jesus provided a means that we would find forgiveness from that sin, a means found simply by one's placing their full faith and trust in God. In doing so, one submits to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, evident in the truth of His word and the work of His Spirit.

One of the conflicts that entered the early church was precipitated by Jesus' apparently delayed return. It would appear that the apostles, though never

³⁴⁸ Revelation, Chapter 20, e.g.

³⁴⁹ Isaiah 45:23, Revelation 14:11, e.g.

³⁵⁰ Ibid. Revelation, Chapter 20.

³⁵¹ Isaiah 53:6.

³⁵² 1 Corinthians 15:55.

expressly stating so, believed that Jesus would return in their lifetime. When Jesus did not promptly return, some were becoming discouraged and disillusioned. Both Peter and Paul wrote that the delay in Jesus' return (longsuffering) serves to keep the door of salvation open longer, allowing more people to come to God in faith.

Peter also cites the writings of Paul to remind his readers that the two apostles are in complete agreement on these points. Paul also writes of a new heaven and new earth, the second coming of Christ, and the call to the faithful to live godly lives until Jesus' return.

The Lost's Foolishness

2 Peter 3:16. *As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.*

Again Peter refers to the agreement between his letter and the letters of Paul, noting particularly that this entire doctrine is difficult for the "unenlightened," those who are unlearned and unstable, find very difficult to understand.³⁵³ The teachings of Peter and Paul are rejected by those who reject the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and the rejection of the LORD brings eternal separation from God, eternal destruction.

The people to whom Peter writes are immersed in their sin-sick world as we still are today. They witness violence, hatred, and persecution all around them. They often find themselves the objects of that persecution. Peter reminds his readers that the gospel that both he and Paul present is the true gospel, a gospel of peace and promise that this wicked world rejects. The faithful can be assured that they can wait for Jesus return, waiting on God's promises in peace and in anticipation. Destruction awaits those who persecute them, those who blaspheme the Name of God, those who so vex the faithful.

2 Peter 3:17. *Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.*

Like that fish that is immersed in a world of water, the faithful are immersed in a world of sin that touches us on every side. We do have the opportunity to hear and learn the truth of the gospel when we spend time with God's word either

³⁵³ 1 Corinthians 1:23, 2:14.

alone or in community. However the bulk of our experience often involves hearing the false truths of this wicked world, falsehoods that are accompanied by arguments that could be convincing to those who are not well-steeped in their faith. Peter's use of "beware" is consistent with his call to diligence, as he notes the pervasive danger that the falsehoods of this world pose to the faithful. It is easy to be misled into falsehoods when one is not well-versed, or well-focused on the truth. The falsehoods of this world can lead the faithful into discouragement, depression, and all manner of ungodly thoughts and actions. The power of Satan to mislead and misdirect the faithful is not something to be taken lightly.

Peter notes that there is the possibility of a "falling away" of those who are misled and misdirected by the lies of this world. It is important to note that Peter does not imply that such falling away is a falling away from salvation. Salvation is an act of God, not an act of man. Salvation is a gift of God that is given to people of faith as He forgives them for their sins, a promised forgiveness that is empowered by Jesus' death and resurrection.

Paul refers to a "falling" from one's "steadfastness." One is steadfast when one is diligently working toward a specific goal. This form of work implies that there is a genuine and well-defined focus in the heart and mind of the faithful that keeps them steadfast in their journey through this life, a journey that is taking them to the new heaven and new earth. That focus can be influenced by the messages and doctrines of this world that work, under the influence of the prince of this world, to distract the faithful. When a faithful Christian has been distracted they lose that peace and anticipation that Peter describes. The faithful can lose the joy of their salvation when they allow it to be overwhelmed by the circumstances of this world.

It is not God's purpose that the faithful would be defeated by the circumstances of this perverse and evil world, but rather that the faithful would be encouraged and lifted up by the power of the Gospel as God has promised to the faithful that this time is short, and the reward of a new heaven and new earth, the reward of righteousness, is eternal.

Know Love Forever.

2 Peter 3:18. *But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.*

"But" implies a distinct break between the behaviors of the previous verse and the behaviors of the last. Rather than be stunted by the circumstances of this world, the faithful are to grow:

Grow in grace. We understand that God's gift of salvation to those who place their trust in Him is an act of His grace. God's grace is an unmerited gift that is given to those who love Him. Yet, the character and consequence of grace in an individual's life is far more significant than a simple act of God. The results of that grace serve to impact every facet of the life of a faithful individual. The very thoughts and actions of a person of faith are shaped by God's act of grace. As one experiences more and more the power of grace to bless an individual's life, the individual's faith is strengthened. The obstacles of this world become less and less significant as one grows in their faith. Many Christians fail to grow because of the lack of diligence that Peter prescribes. These can be faithful believers who have been Christians for a lifetime but are still overcome and discouraged by the slightest of this world's distractions. Peter calls for a life that is growing in grace, maturing in the faith, so that through the power of the Holy Spirit one's life can become more and more characterized by joy, peace, and anticipation of the heaven and earth to come.

Grow in knowledge. It may be important to understand that the word, "knowledge," as used here does refer to the form of knowledge that comes from "book learning," but it also refers to a deeper form of knowledge that comes from an intimate relationship with the object of that knowledge. When Peter calls upon the faithful to grow in the knowledge of God, he is referring to a maturation of relationship with God that comes from knowing Him better.

One simple illustration can serve to clarify the minimal value of a "head knowledge" of the LORD. One can easily argue that satan knows God better than any man. No man will ever know more about God than satan does, and it is rather obvious that this form of knowledge does not serve to bring satan to a beneficial relationship with the LORD.

Peter states that the faithful should be continually growing in their knowledge of God in the same manner that two individuals gain in their knowledge of one another. This implies an active effort in building that relationship. For the Christian, that relationship is built through a love for God, a continual and open prayer life, and a consistent study of the biblical texts. When one observes a Christian who is immature in their faith, it will be invariably found that the individual does not diligently exercise these three traits, (love, prayer, and Bible study).

Grow in Praise. Peter closes this letter quickly with a spontaneous proclamation of praise to the LORD. Peter shows, by his own example, the priority of praise in the life of a Christian. One who is mature in their faith, one who diligently seeks to grow in their faith, will always be one who is quick to praise God for what He

has done. We can praise God for His love, for His act of grace, and for the continual manna of blessing He gives to those who trust in Him.

Peter writes to a people who are experiencing much of what we are still witnessing today: a secular, pagan, and sin-sick world that seems to serve as the primary influence in a world that denigrates any who place their faith and trust in the One True and Living God. It would be easy for us to be discouraged when we wait for Jesus to return, yet recognize that He has given us over two millennia for more people to be saved. Peter reminds us to be encouraged by the voracity of God's promises. He promises to bless those who trust Him. He promises to vindicate the faithful by the judgment of the wicked. He promises to return, and to provide an eternal home that is free from the influence of sin. Instead of living in a world immersed in sin, the faithful will reside in a new heaven and new earth where they are immersed in righteousness, immersed in the very love and light of the One Holy God who created us for that very purpose.

Let us be diligent as Peter admonishes: diligent in prayer, diligent in Bible study, diligent in godly living, and diligent in our love for God and in our love for one another that we can, indeed, experience the fullness of the blessings that God has promised.

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