

1 Peter

1:1-2 Although some debate the authenticity of the authorship, for purposes of our study, we will assume that the text is accurate in identifying the apostle Peter as its author. This is for numerous reasons, not the least of which being that the early Church clearly believed that this text was authored by Peter and, consequently, worthy of inclusion in the biblical canon.

It is understood that although Peter's ministry may have branched out beyond the borders of Israel during his life, his primary mission was still with the Jews. It seems quite sensible, then, that this letter would be written to the "exiles of the Dispersion" throughout the world. It should be noted that the book of James was also written to the Jews of the Dispersion (see James 1:1). Following the Babylonian exile, the Jews became scattered throughout the world. It was these dispersed Jews to whom the apostles would write.

It is noteworthy that Peter does not write to all of the exiled Jews, but specifically to the "elect" or "chosen" exiles. Essentially, Peter is writing to those who are in Christ – chosen by Him and walking in faithfulness to His call upon their lives.

Peter goes on to elaborate on the ways in which the elect are called:

1. "according to the foreknowledge of God" – Not mere knowledge is implied here, but also "according to the decision of God." God's foreknowledge involves His choice; although He knows what will occur, He has also made decisions which encourage history to move in a certain direction according to His will. All those who are the elect of God, He has already known. They are "elect" for a reason!
2. "in the sanctification of the Spirit" – notice what Peter is doing here by using a Trinitarian formula in order to greet the people. They are the elect of God, but only insofar as the Spirit has worked within them to prepare them for His Kingdom. Election requires the work of the Spirit within us rather than our own efforts.
3. "for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with His blood" – Why have the elect been chosen and sanctified? It is for a purpose, and that purpose is to demonstrate obedience to Christ. We are obedient to Christ because of His sacrificial atonement for us, and just as He poured Himself out for us, we are to pour ourselves out for Him.

Finally, Peter wishes grace and peace to his hearers, but specifically that these things be "multiplied to" them; in other words, the hope is not just that they have an isolated experience of grace or peace, but that they continually experience grace and peace in greater and greater ways throughout their lives.

1:3-5 Peter begins by blessing God, specifically the Father. This blessing is then expanded upon in the statements which follow. Why is God to be blessed? Because of all that He has done for us! Specifically, the focus of the sentence which follows is that "He has caused us to be born again."

"According to His great mercy..." – God has acted toward us in accordance with His mercy rather than His wrath. As James has declared, "mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). God chose to treat us with mercy, though we were (and are, until we are in Christ) deserving of His judgment. This raises the question, how we can be judgmental toward others when we consider how vast the mercy of God has been toward us? His mercy toward us is so great, in fact, that it is

because of this mercy that we were chosen in Christ Jesus to receive eternal life! We are alive in Christ not because we did something to warrant His kindness; rather, we are alive in Christ because of the mercy of God. Nothing more.

“He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...” – Notice that God is still the One acting in this moment. He has caused us to be born again. It is not merely that we hope to be “good enough” for God. It is not that He said He hoped we would do better because He went so far for us. No, God actively brought about our salvation and our new birth in Christ Jesus. He accomplished this through the Resurrection, which will also lead us to be raised to new life one day in Him.

Also interesting here is the way in which we have been born again – specifically, “to a living hope.” Paul will make the point in 1 Corinthians 15 that “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (15:17). If Christ is dead, then so is our hope. Christ, after all, is our hope. If, however, Christ has been raised to new life (an idea which we would all happily declare to be true!), then we have, quite literally, a “living hope.” He is the source of light and life within each of us, and because of His victory, we have hope for what is to come.

“...to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading,...” – The resurrection in which we will all share is not simply for the sake of being raised. Although there is much which Christ has given us because of the Resurrection, there is actually a reason we have this hope of resurrection in Him, and it is to gain the gift of God in Christ Jesus. Yet we are also promised the rewards of our ministries in heaven. These are undefiled and imperishable gifts given to us in Christ.

“...kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” – The good gifts of God are kept in heaven for those who are being kept in the faith. What is particularly interesting is that God is apparently actively guarding us as His people through our faith in Him. Note that this text identifies faith as that which protects the people of God. This is in line with Paul’s “shield of faith” in Ephesians 6:16 as he discusses the armor of God – God’s people are kept safe by our faith in Him. This makes sense, as that which seeks to corrupt us can only do so insofar as we are willing to doubt God. Think back to the Garden of Eden: Satan’s deception of Eve begins by making her doubt the legitimacy of God’s words. “Did God really say...?” “You will not surely die!” All it took to make us fall was a tiny seed of doubt. But Christ will also counter this by saying that all we need in order to have victory is a tiny measure of faith. The question is simply where we choose to give our loyalty.

We are guarded in faith “for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” This is not to say that we have not yet been saved by Christ, but rather that the fullness of salvation is yet to come. We still have sin in our lives, but when we are raised with Christ and glorified with Him, the fullness of the salvation which Christ achieved for us will be revealed. We still see “as in a mirror dimly,” as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, but the day is fast approaching when we will see the entirety of God’s salvific work.

1:6-9 “In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.” It is in the full salvation of God, kept for us by faith, which we have reason to

rejoice. As previously noted, however, this salvation has not yet been fully revealed to us in the sense that we are not yet fully sanctified. We rejoice in knowing that God will one day make these things known to us, and yet we also know that in this world we still have forces against which we struggle. The implication of Peter's statement is that the day will come when these trials will no longer exist; indeed, that the day will come when Christ is finally revealed as King of kings and Lord of lords, and none can persecute His people.

The trials which we face in this life, however, do serve a purpose. We are put through trials, Peter says, "so that the tested genuineness of your faith... may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." The understanding is that our faith, once proven, actually results in commendation from Jesus Christ Himself at the end of all things.

Though Christ remains unseen to us now, our faith in Him results in salvation. This is not to say that we earn salvation, for even our faith itself is a gift of God. We who believe have been blessed to be able to do so. We who believe without having seen are spoken of by Christ in John 20, as He spoke to Thomas: "Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." There is a special blessing we receive for having believed even without sight. To be sure, this is certainly more difficult to do than to see and believe as a consequence of our sight. We who believe in the absence of sight have an inexpressible joy, Peter reminds us, for we know that one day our faith will be realized and we too will see face-to-face.

1:10-12 The salvation which we now have from God is actually the realization of all that the prophets foretold and longed to see with their own eyes. Peter says that as the Old Testament prophets worked, to the glory of God, they asked the Holy Spirit about the Messiah. They wrote and spoke mysteries, knowing that they themselves would not get to see that about which they prophesied. The Old Testament Scriptures pointed forward to the time in which we now dwell, in which Christ has been revealed and His salvation has been made known to all of God's people. Scripture has a way, however, of continually pointing forward to what is yet to come, and we see this throughout this passage. Christ has been revealed, and yet the fullness of His salvation is still yet to come when He returns in glory and brings glory to us as well. We too will be glorified, Peter tells us, to the point that things like "praise and glory and honor" – terms once reserved for that which we give to God – will be given to us in our glorification (see again 1:7). The work of the prophets was done so that we could know the goodness of Christ Jesus.

Volumes could be written on the work of God in His people as revealed through the prophetic witnesses (and, indeed, there have been!), but that which has been done through Christ Jesus is not only a mystery to the world; it is mysterious even to the angels themselves. Even they desire to know the mind of God, to discover why He chose to work in the power and majesty of His divine plan. These things and more will be made known to us as an additional gift of God at the revelation of all things.

1:13-16 Peter begins this new section with "therefore," a textual marker indicating the contingency of what follows on what preceded it. In this case, Peter's focus is that we "set [our] hope fully on the grace that will be brought to [us] at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Knowing that we are the recipients of the entirety of the work of the prophets and have been blessed even with that

which angels themselves cannot quite comprehend, we have extraordinary hope. Notice, however, that our focus is not hope – but grace.

Peter's focus for our hope is the grace of God. There is nothing else in which we have hope but in the fullness of His grace toward us. This grace is soon to be brought to us in its fullness as well, but is apparently not yet ours in its entirety. One cannot help but note the immanence of the end in Peter's theology – the end is soon to come for Peter, and when it does, it will bring with it the realization of many things, including the fullness of God's grace and the sanctification of God's people. Peter states that the requirements for Christians in the here and now are to 1) prepare our minds for action, and 2) be sober-minded (NASB: "keep sober in spirit"). In order for Christ followers to reach that day where we ourselves will join in the realization of these things, we must do what Christ calls us to do (action), and set our minds and hearts on Him (sober-minded/in spirit). These things naturally prepare us for the day when Christ returns.

Peter almost echoes Paul in v.14, as his statement sounds very similar to Paul's command in Romans 12:2 to "not be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." In Peter's version of this statement, the "patterns of this world" are identified as the "passions of your former ignorance." Our willingness to follow the ways of Christ stem from our desire to walk in obedience as a child obeys their parents. As children watch their parents, they desire to be like them. Likewise, Peter will say that our desire to be holy is because we know God is so – and this is that to which He has called us.

1:17-21 Peter continues with his emphasis on our deeds in these verses to build on the idea that our faith requires action. Specifically, we are required to walk according to a certain standard because we identify ourselves as the children of our heavenly Father. Paying attention to sentence structure, the reason we "conduct ourselves" a certain way is specifically because we "call on Him as Father." Peter says we conduct ourselves "with fear" – that is, with reverence toward God. Again we remember that this letter is written for Jews scattered throughout the ancient world in exile from the Holy Land, which is why Peter mentions "the time of [their] exile."

We have reason to walk according to the ways of God because we no longer have to walk in futility, following laws for the sake of following laws. The ancient Jews once found themselves stuck in the cycle of law-breaking and atoning sacrifices that could never truly atone for their sins completely. God has brought us out of that futile cycle (and the futile thinking that results from it!) and given us the gift of Jesus Christ. This ransom was paid not by monetary loss but by the loss of Christ's own blood, worth far more than any precious metal.

It is interesting to note the lamb reference here. This would have been highly relevant to Jewish readership, who would have associated the sacrifice of Christ with the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. For them, Christ serves as a very real reminder that God passed over the people of Israel and continues to work on their behalf to spare them from the wrath of God and the hatred of their enemies. Jesus may have extended the scope of His work to include salvation for the Gentiles, but He is absolutely a very Jewish Messiah.

Christ is said to have been "foreknown before the foundation of the world" (v.20). Peter acknowledges the divinity of Christ while also noting that Christ's incarnation was "for the sake

of you,” meaning that this occurred so that God’s people could finally be fully atoned for. All of this, from the incarnation to the belief in Him that we now share, is for the glory of God. We must remember that it all stems from God and will one day be reunited with Him. Our faith and hope are in Him because He has given us reason to hope in Christ.

1:22-25 All of what preceded was concerning the obedience owed to Christ as a result of His work of salvation, and what is subsequently stated is that our pure obedience is for the purpose of loving our brothers and sisters. We who have become a part of the family of Christ, who have been adopted into His house by His grace, are now no longer mere human beings; rather, we are born of the Spirit (“born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable”). In order for us to be raised to eternal life, we must be born not of that which is perishable, but that which is eternal; hence, this is the birth we receive by the Spirit.