

1 Peter--The Christian in a Hostile World Introduction to Peter's First Epistle

Intro: Everyone knows the story of Peter's failure in denying the Lord. There are two amazing things connected with that event.

First the Lord knew that Peter was going to be tested and predicted his failure.

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." And he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the cock will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me." (Lk. 22:31-34)

Second, the Lord knew Peter's heart and was willing to forgive Him and entrust to him the great work of teaching the gospel to the whole world.

*So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus *said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He *said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He *said to him, "Tend My lambs." (Jn. 21:15)*

With the experience of having failed when tested and with the experience of the wonderful grace of the Lord, Peter carried out his mission with boldness and care for the people of God. Jesus' charge that he strengthen his brethren and tend his lambs was carried out in part by a wonderful letter to the people of God who lived in northern Turkey.

Peter begins his letter in the typical epistolary style of the first century:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure. (1 Peter 1:1-2)

Peter's self-identification--apostle of Jesus Christ

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

On the face of it, it would seem strange that anyone would deny that this letter is properly an epistle from the apostle Peter. It is true that there were spurious works assigned to Peter in the early centuries of the church; but both the internal and external evidence favors Peter's authorship.

Peter is identified as the writer in this verse and an apostle.

He later identifies himself as "*a witness of the sufferings of Christ.*"

Peter's teaching is consonant with the material we find in his sermons in the book of Acts.

If one listens carefully, he can even hear echoes of many of Peter's personal experiences with the Lord.

The early church accepted the book as originating from the apostle Peter.

Yet some scholars today have questioned Peter's authorship of this book primarily on the basis of the Greek Peter uses.

It is easy for us as English students to roll our eyes at such a suggestion; but there really is among good Greek students an awareness that the Greek of 1 Peter is quite different from that of 2 Peter. 1 Peter is more polished and written in a classical literary style. This however doesn't mean that Peter is not the author of this epistle.

First there is no reason to believe that Peter was not conversant in Greek. He was a businessman who dealt with Gentiles around the Sea of Galilee.

Peter indicates that he is writing with the use of an amanuensis. *Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it! (1 Pet. 5:12)*

This then could account for the variation in style some Greek scholars see. An amanuensis did more than merely take dictation. They could also express the writer's thoughts with a more polished syntax and grammar.

Peter describes himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Peter claims no superiority in relation to the other apostles;

Later Peter would describe himself: *"Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed..." (1 Pet. 5:1)*

Peter claimed no special role as the head of the church on earth as the Roman Catholic Church assigns to him. He dared only call himself a "fellow elder" to those shepherds in the congregations to which he was writing.

But he could claim the authority that is implicit in the Lord's provision of the Spirit and His commission to go preach the gospel to every creature.

Peter's recipients--The People of God

to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

First Peter describes who they are physically. These Christians lived in those Roman provinces that would today be a part of northern Turkey. Some suggest they are ordered as a messenger might deliver the letters in a circuit.

Second Peter's description of them "as those who reside as aliens, scattered..." might be understood two ways:

Sociologically: They could be transplants. There is some evidence to suggest that the Christians Peter writes to knew him from another location, perhaps Rome. One interesting theory is that they were Christians who had been forced to leave Rome due to the edict of Claudius. And thus in a real and physical sense they were "aliens" to

the territory in which they lived. That of course also set them up sociologically for suspicion and mistreatment. Peter writes to them from Rome (Babylon) to encourage them in their hostile culture. Spiritually: Peter may also be using the term in the figurative sense. These Christians because of their relationship to God could no longer be called "citizens" of this world. They were a part of the family of God and the heavenly kingdom. And thus, in that way they could be considered "aliens." It is an idea common in NT thinking. The Hebrew writer uses similar terms to describe believers like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (Heb. 11:13)

Peter's further describes how they became the people of God.

Selected by the Father--"chosen by the Father..."

The KJV says "elect"; the NASV "chosen".

God has the sovereign right as creator to choose who His people are!

He made this choice prior to the creation. Thus, "according to the foreknowledge of God".

God's people are those whom He chose to be His people!

In what sense are God's people "elected" or "chosen" by Him?

God chose that those who believed in and accepted His Son would be His people, i.e. He chose the grounds or conditions of their adoption into His family.

In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. (Rom. 11:5)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. (Eph. 1:3-4)

If indeed, he foreknew who they were individually, this foreknowledge did not remove the free moral agency of man in accepting the gospel as Reformed theology claims.

However Peter points out that they were God's people through the sanctification of the Holy Spirit.

Sanctified by the Spirit

Peter is referring here to the means by which God's sovereign choice is made real in this world. He sent the Holy Spirit to call unto Himself those whom He had chosen to be His people.

How did this happen? Peter later explains this to his readers very clearly:

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

The Holy Spirit came upon the messengers of God endowing them with the message of God for a world lost in sin.

The messengers proclaimed the “good news” of a way of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Consequently, those who receive the “good news” were and are “sanctified by the Spirit”.

It’s hard to find a really good English synonym to translate the word Peter uses. The most common translation is “sanctified” since it conveys to our minds the idea of separation to God or holiness. In fact, the kindred words are commonly translated “holy” or “saint”. A good word might be “consecrated”.

The idea is that God acquired for himself a consecrated people by His Spirit. The proclamation of the gospel brings about a great division among men and separates out those who would be God’s people, a people who would be obedient to Jesus.

Submissive to Jesus Christ

The objective of the Holy Spirit’s work is to find those people who will “obey Jesus Christ”. Every time the gospel is preached the thoughts and hearts of men are judged by the preaching of the word. The gospel sorts out those who would obey God.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Heb. 4:12)

And note that it is those who obey Jesus who are God’s people. What we obey is what Jesus himself taught for salvation and entrance into the kingdom.

and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Lk. 24:46-47)

And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. (Mark 16:15-16)

Sprinkled by the blood of Jesus

Note the connection “and”. Those chosen and sanctified are “obedient” and sprinkled.” The two may even be seen in terms of cause and effect. Those who “obey Jesus” are consequently “sprinkled” with the blood of Jesus. Again Peter explains himself:

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

“Sprinkled” does not refer to a “mode” of baptism; but instead derives its meaning from the imagery of the OT. Under the Law people were “cleansed by the sprinkling of blood”.

For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, “This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you.” And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. (Hebrews 9:19-22)

Under the new covenant, people are cleansed by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. Notice it is not water that is sprinkled but blood that is sprinkled.

let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Heb. 10:22)

Through obedience to the gospel we are sprinkled by the blood of Jesus in order that we are cleansed from sin. Through this cleansing we come into the kingdom of heaven. That changes our relationship to this world.

Peter's prayerful wish--Abundance grace and peace

May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.

Peter wants his readers to experience in abundance the favor of God and the peace that comes through this relationship with God.

Thus Peter's opening words set the tone for the entire book. He wants to speak to His readers as the people of God and enable them to experience God's manifold grace and peace.

Lessons Practical Lessons for us

Peter's identification of the believers makes it clear that God's chosen people today are no longer merely those who were a part of the nation of Israel; but rather those who in the foreknowledge of God respond to the revelation of Spirit in obedience to Jesus Christ and thus receive the cleansing of His blood. As God's people, we accept an identify that dislocates us here on earth, and makes us citizens of the heavenly realm. God's true people have a sense of

alienation in this world. We live by a different law. We are citizens of a higher government. We are on a journey to a heavenly country like the patriarchs.

It behooves us not to get too settled down in what is a temporary residence. Instead we need to keep our sights on our heavenly home and conduct ourselves as citizens of the heavenly kingdom. Peter will teach us how to do that.

Conclusion: Are you among the people of God?