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# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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## **A Final Word, 6**

1 Peter 5:5-14

Throughout the world, “greetings” come in all shapes and sizes. For example, in France, the greeting is “Bon Jour!” which is a wish that the person being greeted might have a good day! The same is true in German with “Guten Tag”, and Greek with “Kalimera”, and Australia with “G’day”. Then there is the kiss-greeting which, depending on the culture, could be 1, 2, or even 3 pecks on alternating cheeks. Another non-verbal greeting is that done in Asia with bowing to show respect/honor. In Hebrew it is “Shalom” which is wish that the individual might know and enjoy peace!

But then there is the meaningless “Hello!” or “Hi!” which we use. A variation of that is “How are you doing?” So you walk by me in the grocery store and say, “How are you doing?” And I say... “Great! How are you doing?” Now think about it. Is the grocery store really the place for me to share how I am doing? The doubts and fears I might be having about my place in the Kingdom of God? The struggle I might be having in my marriage. The deep concern that may lay just beneath the surface on account of my children. The current condition of my health? Absolutely NOT!

So really, the greeting we give to one another in the US is rather empty.

That is why when we read a passage in Scripture which speaks about “greeting each other” — as in our text — it is easy to look lightly upon the exhortation as if Peter was calling his brethren to say “Hi!” to another. How worthless! Which is about how you might view the closing verses of this epistle. Yet I remind you that “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable...” (2 Timothy 3:16) and that “...not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law until all is accomplished.” (Matthew 5:18)

And so it is in 1 Peter 5. To the people of God in Christ’s day, a greeting was far more than a verbal grunt. It meant something. When Moses greeted Jethro we read this:

Exodus 18:7-8, “Then Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and he bowed down and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare, and went into the tent. And Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel’s sake, all the hardship that had befallen them on the journey, and *how* the Lord had delivered them.”

This is what a greeting was in the Kingdom of God- which is why we read this in Luke 10 when Christ sent out the seventy and instructed them to carry this greeting:

Luke 10:4, “Carry no purse, no bag, no shoes; and greet no one on the way.”

Why weren’t the 70 to “greet” people on their way to their place of ministry? Because if they did, they’d never get to the mission field! For a “greeting” in Scripture was a genuine expression of love and support which involves both:

- A willingness to involve yourself in another person’s life (if you were able to be there, cf. Romans 1:11-12), as well as...
- The longing that the other person might prosper in Christ.

In other words, it was an expression of the commitment of love and encouragement<sup>1</sup>- which is why Peter here says, “Greet one another with a kiss of love.” (v. 14a)!<sup>2</sup>

So, how do you close an epistle which in that generation was written at one of the darkest hours of the church’s experience? How would you end a letter to a loved one knowing that

soon they would be executed? In biblical fashion, Peter closed this epistle both with an example as well as a command of love!

1 Peter 5:5, “She who is in Babylon... sends you greetings.”

1 Peter 5:6, “Greet one another with a kiss of love.”

Behind both statements is an affirmation of love and genuine concern/care for the other’s health and growth in grace! So, in the final words of Peter the call is to let love endure! Notice the example of this love.

1 Peter 5:13a, “She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings...”

What makes this expression of love more meaningful is the knowledge of who was in fact expressing this love. So, who is the “she” of this passage? And why is Peter being so cryptic? There is little question that the “she” is in reference to the church of which Peter was apart.<sup>3</sup> It is an appropriate moniker as the word for “church”- ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*)- is feminine in the Greek.<sup>4</sup> So the church is a “she”.

Why is Peter being so cryptic? To identify those associated with this epistle during this time — the Neronian persecution — would put all at grave risk if this letter were intercepted by a Roman official. With that, the remaining question revolves around the origin of this epistle, which here is identified as “Babylon.” Three of the more common suggestions for this reference are these:

- The ancient city of Babylon in Mesopotamia. Yet in 64 AD that region was sparsely populated. Accordingly, it is unlikely that Peter, Mark, and Silvanus would have been there at this time.
- Others point to a city called Babylon at this time on the Nile River in Egypt. Yet in 64 AD it was little more than a Roman military outpost. And again, it is unlikely that Peter, Silvanus, and Mark would have taken up residence there.
- The third possibility, which is what most believe today, says that there is little question that at the writing of this epistle, Peter was in Rome<sup>5</sup>, the epicenter of Nero’s hatred toward Christ!<sup>6</sup> Well then, why the mention of “Babylon”<sup>7</sup>? For a couple of reasons:
  - “Babylon” was the perfect description of the debauchery and idolatry of Rome (cf. Revelation 14:8 where John uses “Babylon” to represent the corrupt world system controlled by Satan). Furthermore
  - “Babylon” in the mind of the Jew at this time stood for nothing less than the Diaspora, where God’s people were taken *en masse* in 586 BC. And as this epistle was written to those living in the “diaspora” (cf. 1 Peter 1:1) as was he, the title is an appropriate reference!

As such, most believe that this epistle was written from Rome during this horrible time of persecution.

If that is the case — and it most likely is- then for the church in Rome to send their love and concern for the welfare of their brethren throughout the rest of the Roman Empire is of incredible significance! See, this “greeting” was NOT extended from a group of people on vacation in a five-star hotel on a tropical beach. RATHER, it was sent in and so from the belly of the beast! Imagine receiving such an expression and concern from a group of Jews suffering in Auschwitz!

That is the significance of this reference! As bad as their current situation was, nevertheless, the Christians in Rome were concerned about their brothers and sisters throughout the empire!<sup>8</sup>

For us, that means that no matter how severe our situation, we are not exempt from looking outside of ourselves to others and the work of God in their lives! This loving concern was also expressed on the part of Mark.

1 Peter 5:13c, “She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and *so does my son, Mark.*”- who is Mark?

Mark (who was also called John) was a native of Jerusalem. One of the earliest churches met in his house (Acts 12:12). Because of his promise as a Christian leader, he was chosen to go with Paul and Barnabas as they set out on the first missionary journey.

But when they “came to Perga in Pamphylia... John [Mark] left them [abandoned them] and returned to Jerusalem” (Acts 13:13). Now, whatever Mark’s specific reason for abandoning Paul and Barnabas (we do not know), nevertheless what he did was cowardice. As such, Paul refused to allow Mark to join he and Barnabas as they embarked on their second missionary journey; yet Barnabas disagreed severely (Acts 15:36-38). And so, Paul took Silas and went to Greece and Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus (Acts 15:39-40).

It is significant that some twenty years later, when Paul was imprisoned in Rome, he called for Mark (Col. 4:10) and later would count him among his devoted “fellow workers” (Philemon 24)!

God did a wonderful work of grace in the life of this sinning Christian- which ultimately led to him penning the Gospel of Mark! Because of this, Mark stands as the poster child of what God can do with His people in the face of their cowardice and rebellion. What a comfort and encouragement it would be to be commended by this man in this hour of trial! For none of us wants to fail and so dishonor Christ. But if we listen, we can take it from John Mark, that even then Christ’s grace will be sufficient!

And so once again, the message is clear. We have no excuse for not involving ourselves in the lives of God’s people around us. Even if you look back at failure and disappoint in your walk, there is no excuse! As God used Mark in the lives of God’s people, so He can and will use you!

From The example of love that Peter gave as he closed this epistle, we conclude that God's Kingdom Ministry — the ministry of loving care and concern — ought NOT to be thwarted by external trial or internal weakness and failure! If we let it, God's preserving, and sanctifying grace will always win out! That brings us to the basis of this love and Peter roots the call and so the command for our love here in two massive doctrines of Scripture.

1 Peter 5:13b, "She who is in Babylon, chosen<sup>9</sup> together with you, sends you greetings..."- we are talking here about the doctrine of election — which is mentioned many times in this epistle<sup>10</sup>. In fact, Peter *began* this letter in much the same way as he ended it.

1 Peter 1:1-2a, "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..."

What is this doctrine? Simply stated: before the world began God set His love upon us and so chose to redeem us through the work of God the Son and God the Holy Spirit that we might co-reign with Him over a restored Heavens and Earth.

Ephesians 1:4-5a, "...He [God] chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself..."

What would be the ultimate end of this choosing? Peter answers that question as he elaborates upon the inheritance for which God in His forelove saved us.

1 Peter 1:3-6a, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

You cannot get away from God's election in Scripture, nor would you want to! See, election does NOT presuppose an elite people. RATHER, it presupposes a people who have nothing to offer the Lord (which is why they need to be elected). It's the flip side of justification by faith! As that is the case as a sinner, I don't need a small God who can only forgive me if I turn toward Him. I need a God who can bring me to Himself and keep me there (cf. John 15:16)!

Now this does NOT mean that in His selection of us that God pushes others away. RATHER, it means that through His electing grace, the Lord brings dead sinners to life- He resurrects them- unto a specific end/purpose which cannot be thwarted. Listen to the assurance Christ gave His disciples and us.

John 15:16a, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you, // and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain..."

In other words, part and parcel of the doctrine of election is the certainty of our perseverance! This has been a major theme of 1 Peter! Consider just some of the statements Peter has already made.

- 1 Peter 1:4-5: We were saved in Christ, “To *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”
- 1 Peter 2:6, “For *this* is contained in Scripture: ‘Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner *stone*, and he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed.’”
- 1 Peter 3:18, “For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.”

Truly, God doesn’t save us half-way, leaving the end up to us. Rather, God saves us all the way unto His glory in Christ! And that practically is what Election is all about!

How is it that in the midst of the crucible I am able to take my eyes off myself and be concerned for others as the Romans did here? Because no one or thing in this creation is able to separate us from God and the inheritance that is ours in Christ (cf. Romans 8:39; Philippians 1:6)!

Election tells me that God is in control of my life such that my perseverance does NOT depend upon my feeble grip on Christ, BUT on Christ’s firm grip on me! As Christ said in John:

John 18:9, “Of those whom Thou hast given Me I lost not one.”

This has and will continue to be Christ’s boast throughout eternity! Because we have been Chosen by God nothing can take us out of His hand!

What a difference this makes in ministry. Remember Jesus washing the feet of the disciples who were arguing as to who was the greatest amongst them (John 13:4)? How was He able to do that?

John 13:1a, 4, “Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father... rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about...”

It was the knowledge that His future was secure in God! Such is the glorious confidence we have in Christ as we rise and serve the people of God!

There is another doctrine mentioned here which enables the Christian to love in the midst of the fire. Notice the last statement.

1 Peter 5:14c, "Greet one another with a kiss of love<sup>11</sup>. Peace be to you all who are in Christ."

Anytime you read in the Bible the expression "in Christ" you are reading about the doctrine of union with Christ. Simply stated it is that in His eternal plan God has literally united us to Christ. Dr. Robert Reymond put it this way:

The Scriptures make it clear that, though it is spiritual and mystical, this non-material union with Christ is as real as though there were in fact a literal umbilical cord uniting them, reaching all the way from Christ in heaven to the believer on earth. (Reymond, 1998, p. 738)

Think of it in this way. One of the most beloved promises that we read of in Scripture is the fact that in and through all things, God is with us. Moses exhorted Israel:

Deuteronomy 31:6: Moses exhorted the nation, "Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you."

Recall how Christ ended the Great Commission:

Matthew 28:20, "...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

God indeed is with His people! And yet there is more... The Doctrine of Union with Christ takes this promise to the next level... NOT ONLY is God with us, BUT because we are "in Christ" we are always with Him (we literally are attached to God "in Christ")! So, NOT ONLY does God's eternal plan involve our complete and total restoration to a New Heavens and Earth, BUT in and through all things God is with us and we are with Him!<sup>12</sup> That means, the divine provisions of Christ (cf. Ephesians 1:3) are always accessible to us... we need only ask! As Christ said:

John 15:7, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you."

This is how the Roman believers living in the epicenter of the Neronian Persecution were able to be other focused at this time! They enjoyed the glorious resources that come "in Christ" — specifically divine enabling (cf. Ephesians 1:3).

Now, when we avail ourselves of Christ's encouraging presence in our lives and so serve each other in love, notice the consequence of this love.

1 Peter 5:14b, "Greet one another with a kiss of love.<sup>13</sup> Peace be to you all..."

This properly is a benediction. Yet as a benediction it is conditioned by our walking with Christ — essentially living in light of all that Peter has taught in this epistle. As it here follows close on the heels of an exhortation for us to love each other (the "kiss of love"), we understand that

the “peace” that Peter here wishes upon his brethren is enjoyed as a consequence of living in this love!

What is the “peace”? The “peace” referenced here most definitely does NOT have in mind an external, physical peace. For we know what Peter and God’s people were facing at this moment under Nero! RATHER, the “peace” referenced here comes as a result of a saving relationship with Christ.

Romans 5:1, “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The “peace” referenced here has in mind our relationship with God. Prior to Christ, we were alienated from God (He was our enemy, and we were His). But with the work of Christ on the cross, God is now reconciled to man such that rather than warfare, we now “have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”!<sup>14</sup> (cf. John 15:15)

Because of this, we can have a disposition of peace when the world is falling to ruin around us! That is the “peace” referenced by Christ when He said this:

John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.”

This is the “peace” which Horatio Spafford experienced when he received news of his family’s death. You know the words: “When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll; whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, ‘It is well, it is well with my soul.’” This is the “peace” Paul spoke about in Philippians.

Philippians 4:6-7, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

When you and I live in trust and dependence upon God, we can accept any trial, tragedy, complication, or inconvenience as coming from the hand of a Being who loves us, is in complete control, and has our best in mind.<sup>15</sup>

That is the “peace” referenced here. It is that which comes from walking by the Spirit and so enjoying the fruit of His presence in our lives- which is “...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...” (Galatians 5:22b-23a)

That is the peace God’s people would enjoy as they in their suffering honored the Lord and blessed the body. And that is the peace that can be ours today if we decrease, Christ’s increases, and we find our all-in-all in Him!



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## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 2 John 10-11: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds."

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the best example of the "greeting" Peter is referencing here is that of a state dignitary or ambassador when visiting a country. What does he do? Stand before the media and press, pull out a piece of paper, and then, looking straight into the camera, say "Hi!" and then walk away? No! He gives a formal address containing encouragements and words of appreciation. When the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi "greeted" the US back in February, he said far more than "Hello!" In fact, he spoke for over 55 minutes!

<sup>3</sup> Cf. how John referred to the church in 2 John 1, 13!

<sup>4</sup> "While some older commentators have argued that 'she' was Peter's wife, who did apparently travel with Peter (1 Corinthians 9:5; cf. Matthew 8:14), it is highly unlikely that he would not have named her had she been well enough known to the Christians in Asia Minor to send greetings, nor is it likely that she rather than Peter would be linked to 'Babylon.' Rather, as is the case in 2 John 1, 13, the 'lady' in question is 'Ekklesia,' the church. She is indeed 'chosen along with you' (a compound word in Greek used only here in the New Testament), 11 for as the Christians in Asia Minor were 'chosen,' 'called,' or 'elect' (1:1, 15; 2:9, 21; 3:9; 5:10), so were the Christians in 'Babylon'; they share something (cf. 5:9 where he links the churches in suffering as well)." (Dauids, 1990, pp. 201-202)

<sup>5</sup> "Moreover, there is historical evidence that Peter was at Rome at the end of his life. In AD 203, Tertullian wrote: 'Since, moreover, you are close upon Italy, you have Rome, from which there comes even into our own hands the very authority of apostles themselves. How happy is its church, on which apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood! where Peter endures a passion like his Lord's! where Paul wins his crown in a death like John's!' This testimony is supplemented by that of Eusebius, writing in AD 325. Speaking of Peter and Paul, he writes: 'And that they both were martyred at the same time Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth [c. AD 170], affirms in this passage of his correspondence with the Romans: "By so great an admonition you bound together the foundations of the Romans and Corinthians by Peter and Paul, for both of them taught together in our Corinth and were our founders, and together also taught in Italy in the same place and were martyred at the same time".' Eusebius continues his history with more details about Peter and Paul: 'Peter seems to have preached to the Jews of the Dispersion in Pontus and Galatia and Bithynia, Cappadocia, and Asia, and at the end he came to Rome and was crucified head downwards, for so he had demanded to suffer. What need be said of Paul, who fulfilled the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem to Illyria and afterward was martyred in Rome under Nero? This is stated exactly by Origen [died c. AD 254] in the third volume of his commentary on Genesis.' Finally, Eusebius explicitly states that Peter wrote his first letter in Rome: 'The bishop of

Hierapolis, named Papias [c. AD 60–130] ... says that Peter mentions Mark in his first Epistle, and that he composed this in Rome itself, which they say that he himself indicates, referring to the city metaphorically as Babylon, in the words, “the elect one in Babylon greets you, and Marcus my son”.” (Grudem, 2009, pp. 35-36)

<sup>6</sup> The earliest histories of the church place Peter in Rome during this time. Furthermore, it is believed that Mark lived in Rome as he was there during Paul’s first imprisonment (cf. Colossians 4:10).

<sup>7</sup> “Our author is concerned with holiness (1:15–16), so Rome would surely impress him as the center of the evil in the world (cf. Revelation 18). He is also concerned with persecution, and the Neronian persecution came from and centered on Rome (the expulsion of the Jews from Rome under Claudius may also have been viewed by Christians as persecution). Finally, the theme of exile runs throughout the book (1:1, 17; 2:11; implied in passages that refer to their cultural estrangement), so Rome equals Babylon becomes a beautiful symbol for the capital of the place of exile away from the true inheritance in heaven.” (Davids, 1990, pp. 202-203))

<sup>8</sup> “...believers in the early church had a great sense of kinship with fellow believers and churches throughout the world. This kind of concern for other Christian churches besides our own is an important lesson to remember today.” (Swindol, 2014, p. 251).

<sup>9</sup> συνεκλεκτός (*suneklektos*) whose root is ἐκλέγω (*eklegō*).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. 1:1, 15; 2:9, 21; 3:9; 5:10.

<sup>11</sup> “In the ancient world kisses were normally exchanged among family members (parents and children; brothers and sisters; servants and masters) and at times between rulers and their clients.” (Davids, 1990, p. 204)

<sup>12</sup> Reymond continued, “Since the Christian’s very existence as a Christian as well as his growth in grace (Romans 6:1–14) and his hope of glory (Colossians 1:27) are all grounded in his spiritual union with Christ, from whom he derives all his strength and power to live the Christian life (2 Corinthians 12:9), to deny or to ignore one’s union with Christ is not only to deny or to ignore a cardinal aspect of the Christian life but also to open the way to soul blight and a stunting of the Christian’s growth in grace.” (Reymond, 1998, p. 739)

<sup>13</sup> “The holy kiss- men to men, and women to women- was a customary outward sign of affection among believers in the early church (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1Thessalonians 5:26; cf. Luke 7:45; 22:47–48).” (MacArthur, 2004, p. 290)

<sup>14</sup> “This blessing is given to all in Christ Jesus, but to none else. ‘There is no peace,’ says Yahweh, ‘for the wicked’ (Isa 48:22). Restlessness here, and woe forever, are the portion of those who are out of Christ.” (Spurgeon, 2014, p. 1 Peter 5:14)

<sup>15</sup> That is what Joseph had when he looked at his 10 brothers who earlier sought his ruin. Recall what he told them, “...you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good.” (Genesis 50:20b)