

EXPOSITION OF I PETER

Message #2

I Peter 1:1-2

If you lived in the first century and were a Christian it was a very rare blessing to get a letter from a big name apostle like Peter. **In the lists of apostles, Peter's name always stands first.** He had been part of the inner three personal disciples of Christ (Peter, James, John) and he was the leading Apostle at the beginning of the Church Age in Jerusalem. So getting a letter from him was a tremendous blessing. **But even more than the shock of getting a letter from Peter, is that these hurting believers were getting their own letter from God.**

Peter had never been to the locations mentioned in **verse 1**. He had learned of their plight and as the premier Jewish apostle, he decided to write to encourage them. These scattered believers certainly had the backing of the Apostle Paul, who had founded many of the churches, but it would be extra special for them to learn that they also had the backing of the Apostle Peter. Peter at one time was shocked God would include Gentiles into His program (Acts 10:14). However over time he had changed and now he deeply cared for them for they too were the sovereign work of a sovereign God. By the time Peter actually wrote this, his name was known all over the world. In fact, Peter's name is mentioned some 210 times in the N.T., whereas Paul's name is given some 162 times and the other apostles are found only 142 times (Robert Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, p. 347). **Peter literally was the biggest name in Christianity.**

As we come to the opening salutation of the letter, it is jammed packed with information. It is not a typical salutation. It immediately zeroes in on the specific recipients, how they became Christians and what they were presently experiencing. It is so interesting that Peter is viewed as impetuous and impulsive, but when he writes this, he is a serious thinking scholar who is systematic and thorough. It seems to me the first point he communicates is this:

GOD HAS SPECIFICALLY CHOSEN YOU AND NO MATTER WHAT YOU ARE FACING IT IS POSSIBLE TO HAVE AND TO DEMONSTRATE THE FULLEST MEASURE OF GOD'S GRACE AND PEACE BY CAREFULLY UNDERSTANDING AND APPLYING GOD'S WRITTEN WORD.

Regardless of what you are facing right now, you can experience God's grace and peace. One of the first things to remember is that you have been chosen by God. The doctrine of election is so critical to one hurting or suffering.

Dr. Edwin Blum said the doctrine of election is always presented in Scripture as "the ground for comfort" (*I Peter*, Expositors Bible Commentary, Vol. 12, p. 219). What is happening to us is not unforeseen by God. God has His sovereign hand of Grace in it and we may actually further develop as we go through troubles and trials.

It was customary in the first century to begin a letter by stating who the author was and to whom the letter was written. In this way, one did not need to unravel the entire scroll to figure out who wrote it. In this opening salutation, there are three introductory parts to it:

INTRODUCTORY PART #1 – The writer of the letter. 1:1a

We may observe two key facts concerning the writer:

Fact #1 - Peter was the writer of the letter.

Peter wants these readers to realize he wrote this letter. He brings this up here in **verse 1** and again in **I Peter 5:12**. Peter wanted these Gentile believers to know he cared about them.

Peter was originally named Simon. He was the son of Jonah from Bethsaida, located in the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee (John 1:44). He moved to Capernaum (Luke 4:31, 38) where he married (I Corinthians 9:5) and where his mother-in-law lived. He had been called by Jesus to be one of His disciples early (Mark 1:16-18) and later he was elevated to the status of being an apostle (Mark 3:13-19).

The first thing that catches your eye when you look at the first word of the book is how . Peter identifies himself. He had several proper names he could have used to identify himself.

He could have called himself Peter (his Greek/Christian name), which is what he does. He could have called himself Cephas (his Aramaic name for Peter). He could have called himself Simon (his Jewish name). He could have called himself Simon Peter (combination of Jewish name and Christian name - II Peter 1:1).

We may recall that Peter's given Jewish name was Simon, but Jesus had changed it to Peter (John 1:35-42). The name means "stone" or "rock." Nearly 50 times in the N.T. he is called Simon and often he is called Simon Peter (over 15 times). It may be that this is done to show that we have two natures as a believer, the old nature, prone to fail (Simon) and the new nature that may have victory (Peter). The name Cephas is the Aramaic equivalent of Peter, meaning a stone or rock and is used about 6 times.

By using the name Peter, he is emphasizing his Christian name, which would be another indication that he is writing to Gentiles, for had he been writing to Jews, Simon or Cephas would have been very appropriate. By using the name Peter, it shows that he is now a rock-solid Christian and it also showed he was relating to all kinds of people.

What had changed Peter? What had caused this premier Jew to now be concerned for the hurting Gentile? It was Jesus Christ who changed Peter and Peter was rock-solid in his relationship with Him.

Fact #2 - Peter was an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Everyone knew Peter was an apostle and he certainly did not have to say this for identification purposes. He is saying this to establish that this is an authoritative letter. The fact that he was an apostle was a tremendous demonstration of God's grace, because he had been reinstated as an apostle after he had failed and denied the Lord. Now Peter does not use an article "the" before the noun apostle, which means he does not consider himself to be the preeminent or superior apostle and he certainly does not consider himself to be the pope. He was simply a gifted apostle.

The gift of apostle was a foundational gift of the Church (**Ephesians 2:20**; I Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:12). **The actual noun “apostle” means one has been commissioned or sent directly from God as a sent messenger.**

The word “apostle” in Greek (αποστολος) literally means one who is sent on a mission or expedition (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 54-55). In other words, one had to be specifically authorized by God and given a specific assignment or directive.

Now to be an apostle one had to meet several prerequisites: **1)** One had to have been personally selected by Jesus Christ (Acts 1:24); **2)** One had to have spent time physically with Jesus Christ (Acts 1:21-24); **3)** One had to have been an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:21-22); **4)** One had to have been given a specific gift of an apostle (I Corinthians 12:28); **5)** One had to be able to perform apostolic signs (II Corinthians 12:12). **Obviously, there are no apostles in existence today, but Peter was an apostle and he wrote this letter to hurting believers.** This was a very rare man of God through whom God worked.

Now Peter identifies himself as an apostle “of Jesus Christ.” That prepositional phrase means two things: 1) Peter was an apostle whose source of apostleship was Jesus Christ; 2) Peter was an apostle whose object of apostleship was Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ made Peter an apostle and Peter’s whole object in life was Jesus Christ.

This letter was very personal - from Peter, but very authoritative - from an apostle.

This is not just a letter from a well-wishing friend; this is a letter from an authoritative representative of God. This apostle knows first hand what it is to suffer. This is no ivory tower theological professor who is just postulating theory.

INTRODUCTORY PART #2 – The recipients of the letter. **1:1-2**

Peter identifies the recipients of the letter in two ways: 1) He identifies them theologically; 2) He identifies them geographically.

Identification Way #1 - Peter identifies them theologically.

Peter goes to great length to theologically identify these believers. The truth is, **the only people who can make any sense of suffering are believers**. Suffering for non-believers is senseless and hopeless. There is no hope for one without Christ.

We may observe that in **verse 2**, believers have their salvation linked to God the Father, God the Spirit and God the Son, Jesus Christ. **God’s people are eternally linked to all three members of the Godhead and that is good to remember when suffering.** There are three realities brought out about God’s people:

(Reality #1) - God’s people are elect or the chosen (εκλεκτος).

The term “elect” or “chosen” was a term used for Israel. Scot McKnight said Peter raids the O.T. for vocabulary that describes the Church of God on the same level as Israel (*I Peter*, p. 31).

Now the Greek word “chosen” or “elect” is strong and it refers not only to the process of making a choice, but also of calling out what you choose (G. Abbott-Smith, p. 138).

By using this term, the Apostle Peter is giving the church the same elevated status as the nation Israel. **The great Jewish Apostle is communicating that God chose them as individuals, just as He chose the nation Israel.** Peter refers to these believers as God's elect or chosen more than once in this epistle (2:4, 9). The emphasis of the word is that people were saved by God's choice and initiative, not their own. When you are hurting it is a tremendous theological comfort to know that you are God's property and that you have been chosen by Him. You have not been abandoned by God, you have been chosen by God. God closely watches His property and those who harm His property will be destroyed. Dr. William Mounce said the comfort of this word for God's people is that there is a surety to things "because it is grounded in God's sovereign actions" (*Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*, p. 108).

Now there are three prepositional phrases that establish the process of election and actually may be related to those who are suffering:

Prepositional Phrase #1 - Believers are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God.

God's people have been chosen by God and He foreknew and foreordained their salvation. Foreknowledge does not mean God foreknew that you and I would believe, rather God foreknew He would elect us before the foundations of the world. He foreknew when, where and how He would save us. His massive sovereign plan included you. This is a marvelous doctrine to realize that even with your faults, sins, failures, personality quirks and struggles, God foreknew you and foreordained your salvation. Our circumstances, including our suffering and scattering were foreknown by God. Peter wanted these Gentiles to know that God was on their side.

Prepositional Phrase #2 - Believers are chosen by means of the sanctification of the Holy Spirit.

Sanctification means one is set apart unto God as His sacred property. There are three types of sanctification - **Positional** Sanctification - one is set apart as a child of God the moment of salvation; **Progressive** Sanctification - one progresses in one's Christian life and becomes more and more holy set apart for God as one grows; **Ultimate** Sanctification - one is in Glory with God and is set apart forever with Him. **Peter is referring to positional sanctification here** - it was the Holy Spirit that convicted the believer and set him apart as a child of God. **This is not just a clean up of the old life, this is a brand new impartation of a new life.** The Holy Spirit did not just clean up the old life, He gave the believer a brand new life. He sets a believer apart as God's child. God the Father foreknows who will be saved and who He will save and God the Spirit actually does the saving work. Robert Leighton said by the Holy Spirit we come under a conviction that brings us to justification into sanctification

Prepositional Phrase #3 - Believers are chosen to the obedience and sprinkling of Christ's blood.

At one point in time, Peter had tried to prevent Christ's blood from being shed (Matthew 16:22), but now he understood the necessity. The obedience to which Peter is referring is twofold:

1) Salvation is by obeying the Gospel and believing on Jesus Christ, which Christ's blood work accomplishes (John 3:36; Romans 1:5; 10:16; II Corinthians 10:5); 2) Our salvation may be demonstrated as we obey the Word of God, and it is the blood of Christ that makes it possible for sinful believers to actually live a Christian life. Christ's blood covers moments of disobedience.

What Peter is communicating is that the believer is intricately linked to the Trinity. You were chosen by God the Father before the foundations of the earth. You were chosen by God the Son when He shed His blood for you on Calvary. You were chosen by the Holy Spirit the moment you believed. No matter what you are going through, the entire Godhead has its claim on you.

(Reality #2) - God's people are living as aliens.

When a believer lives obediently, he will at times suffer as if he were an alien. The Greek word "alien" refers to one living in a strange place other than where their citizenship exists (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 344-345). The idea is we live along side the citizens, but we aren't actually citizens ourselves. The term "stranger" refers more to people just passing through an area temporarily. **Peter wanted hurting believers to remember their home is not here, it is in heaven.** Believers are living on earth as "resident aliens." When you are going through trials, it is great to remember that you don't really belong here and you aren't going to stay here forever. We are transients in the world. We are not permanent citizens on earth.

We live as aliens here at the present time. That is why so often we just don't fit in with the goals, objectives and standards of this world. We don't fit into the system. We just don't feel at home here. We are not part of the in power crowd or the pleasure crowd.

The eschatological truth is ultimately we are not the real aliens here, the lost people are. Truth is we will leave here for a while and then come back and will inherit the world. The world has never taken too kindly to aliens. Our recent border wars have proved that.

Perhaps one of the most applicable illustrations to just how alien we are in this world is in the world of education in public schools and universities.

(Reality #3) - God's people are scattered.

God's people have different shapes and sizes, different colors and backgrounds and different interests **but all of God's people know what it is like to hurt - physically and emotionally.** These believers had been scattered for their faith. They had lost jobs, homes, family and friends. They had not just decided to move to a nicer place, they had been forced to move. Let's face it, who of us would choose to move to a place where we are always hated and persecuted? Who of us would stay long in a place where we would be deprived of worship and freedom?

The truth is they were not only scattered from their original home, but from their eternal home. God's people are scattered all over the world. They may be scattered but they are also all known. God knows every one of them and cares for every one of them.

Identification #2 - Peter identifies them geographically.

Peter's intent was to have this epistle circulated among these church areas. The places named here were mostly Pauline. In fact, this very point leads Huther to conclude that Peter was martyred after Paul, because he would have never interfered with a Pauline church during Paul's lifetime (Vol. 10, p. 171). Today most of these places are in Turkey. Pontus was rugged country, Galatia had some swampy areas, Cappadocia was mountainous, Asia was the big city area, Bithynia was highland country. These were all areas Peter had never visited but these were

the kind of areas God's people lived. The order of listing is basically from north to east to south to west. This would lend itself that Peter was in Babylon not Rome when he wrote. Peter had visited Antioch (Galatians 2:11-21) and perhaps Corinth (I Corinthians 1:12). Paul refers to the fact that he was traveling quite a bit with his wife (I Corinthians 9:5).

It must have been a great thrill for these believers to see that Peter cared about who they were and where they were. It must have been wonderful for them to learn that Peter cared about their hurts and hardships. This must have been a real shot in the arm for the great Jewish Apostle to care about the Gentile believer. By writing to so many Gentile areas, we may also relate it to us. The content of the letter is certainly something we all need to take very seriously.

INTRODUCTORY PART #3 – The greeting of the letter. 1:2

The grace of God is the unmerited favor of God which gives salvation that cannot be earned nor is it deserved. God the Father chose you, God the Spirit sanctifies you and God the Son's blood saves you and there is your grace package. There is no work we could ever do that would merit this, it is pure grace. Peace is the harmony between Holy God and sinful man. **No one will ever have peace until they have experienced God's grace.**

Now Peter's greeting is that the grace of God and the peace of God may be experienced by these believers in the "fullest measure." This is a rare mood of a Greek verb, the Optative mood. It is the mood of wish. Peter's greatest wish, as the great Jewish apostle, was that these Gentile believers experience the fullness of God's grace and peace. **His ambition was that God's elect may experience and demonstrate the full grace and peace of God and part of the process of that happening, is difficulty, hardship, suffering. When you are in the trenches of tough times, you are able to experience God's grace and peace at a new level.**

If you are suffering right now, remember - you have a relationship with the Trinity. Remember you are an alien, just passing through and soon your tough journey will be over.

As the John Peterson song says - "Some day life's journey will be over ... Jesus led me all the way."