

Dear Friends,

The traditional ordination certificate for a newly ordained minister in our faith contains a prayer of the ordaining men, the "Presbytery," that the Lord bless this man's ministry "Wherever God in His providence may direct him." For example, I was born and raised in northeast Mississippi. My uncle, and one of my all-time favorite relatives and friends, was a respected elder in that region. He, and most of the people in regional churches, fully expected that I would remain in that area and fill his shoes. Despite this expectation, I had a powerful experience just a few months after my beginning to speak in the church that convinced me that my ministry would be somewhere else. Several years later the Lord showed me where my labors would be.

As we study the New Testament, we learn that the Lord "In His providence," appointed Paul to preach to Gentile believers and Peter to Jewish believers. However, the Lord also directed both men to His hungry sheep in both cultures. He directed Peter to first preach to Gentiles, House of Cornelius. (Acts 10) And He directed Paul to labor to bring harmony in the churches between all believers regardless their cultural identity. This often appears in Paul's New Testament letters in his teaching Jewish and Gentile believers to put aside their past culture and grow into one united body of believers in Jesus.

Often Bible teachers approach 1 Peter as his letter to Jewish believers scattered throughout the regions named in the opening verses of the book. I suggest that Peter's description of his readers' past lives before the Lord touched them more identifies Gentile believers than Jewish. No doctrinal issue is involved. Regardless the cultural identity of that first audience to Peter's letter, he opens the letter by reminding them--and us--of their spiritual identity. We need never to forget Paul's teaching in Ephesians 2. Jesus broke down the "middle wall of partition" that separated believers in God based on their race or culture. Now all believers are one in Him.

Peter's primary emphasis in 1 Peter is to suffering Christians. This letter richly instructs us how to deal with the challenges, struggles, and, yes, even the sufferings, we may encounter as believers in Jesus. It gently points us to the path that grows us from children to strong-in-faith mature and faithful believers in Jesus. We need this lesson.

Lord bless,  
Joe Holder

## **1 Peter: For Suffering Christians**

**Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. (1 Peter 1:1-2 KJV 1900)**

Most New Testament letters were "Occasional" letters. That is, some problem or need "Occasioned" or prompted the letter to be written. A thoughtful read will uncover the reason for the letter. One need read 1 Peter only briefly to see that suffering as a Christian was the reason for this letter. Christians may suffer at the hands of a hostile government, from a wicked culture that despises the disapproval of a godly Christian life, spoken or merely lived out, or we may suffer from our own stumbles in faith. Peter teaches us how to deal with suffering, either from a hostile civil authority or from a wicked culture. His one exception is a strong exhortation that we never live so as to "Suffer as an evildoer." (1 Peter 4:15 KJV)

The regions named made up much of the Northern Territory of modern Turkey. Some commentaries suggest that, as apostle to the Jews, Peter wrote this letter to Jewish believers dispersed throughout this region. However, Peter's description of his intended audience indicates a Gentile audience. As you read through 1 Peter, notice Peter's reference to the past wicked lives of his readers, a more accurate description of converted Gentiles than of converted Jews.

While the Lord directed Paul to the Gentiles and Peter to the Jews, both men preached to and labored with both. Paul never lost his tender heart for his people. He visited Jerusalem several times during his ministry, he even organized a collection for the persecuted Christians in Jerusalem, and he worked to relieve the frequent tension between Jewish and Gentile believers in many of his letters.

In similar fashion, the Lord sent Peter to first preach to Gentiles, the House of Cornelius, a Roman military officer, so we should not be surprised that the Lord also sent him to minister to suffering Gentile believers in this remote region.

**"...to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia."** "Strangers" refers to someone who temporarily lives in a place not his home. When the Lord touches our heart, the more we learn of His work in and for us, the more we live with a sense that we are not "At home" in this world. In Hebrews 11:13-14, Paul expands this thought. When we live by the rule of Biblical faith in Jesus, we "Confess" our pilgrim status in this world, and we pass our time here looking for that "City" whose builder and maker is God. Bunyan affirmed this thought when he named his famous allegory **"Pilgrim's Progress."** A professing Christian who lives too comfortably in this world is not in touch with his spiritual life.

What do we know about these people? Once Peter identified them as "Strangers," and named the region where they lived, he moved to a far more substantial description of their spiritual identity. What were the distinguishing marks by which Peter described these people, these "Strangers"?

**"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father."** "Elect" refers to an action which God performed, not to the action of those so elected. Our choice to love and serve God is the fruit or consequence of His choice of us to be His own children, vessels of His amazing mercy.

"Foreknowledge" does not refer to God's knowing our decision to love and serve Him in advance. The next descriptive term excludes that idea. God didn't elect us because he knew our faith and obedience in advance. If that were the case, the next phrase should read, "through our obedience and faith."

The simplest definition of this word is "Fore," something that occurs first, "Before" something else. "Knowledge" may refer to intellectual awareness and understanding. However, in Scripture, a form of this word, "Know," refers to love, as in the intimate love between a husband and wife. God used this term in Amos 3:2, a reference to His own love for His chosen people. Are we to conclude from this verse that God was oblivious to the existence of all the other people alive, that He was aware only of His people, Israel? The sense should be obvious. God looked upon His chosen people with special love and favor. In the Book of Amos, God sent a warning message; even His special love would not ignore their growing sin and rebellion against Him. Unless they repented, His judgment was imminent. They must repent, or severe chastening was coming. Given this sense of the word in Scripture, I believe the correct interpretation of this word should be "To love in advance." (Jeremiah 31:3 KJV) Peter wrote to Gentile believers whom he primarily describes as chosen of God and loved of God before they were born.

**"... through sanctification of the Spirit."** A good definition of "Sanctification" in this phrase, "...a process by which a person is made a part of God's own people, and it is the Spirit who does this." (A Handbook on the Letter from Peter) Yes, as a believer, the Christian is taught in Scripture to "...sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." (1 Peter 3:15 KJV) But the sanctification of which Peter here writes is not what we do, but what the Lord did. In his assessment of Paul's use of this word, Colin Brown (The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Volume 1, Page 693) writes, "It assumes the aspect of a personal relationship with a group of people which originates in God himself." Brown rightly follows Peter's description of sanctification in this verse. The sanctification of which Peter writes is "...through the Spirit," not through the believer's faith or works.

**"...unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."** Peter's division of our salvation in this lesson follows a united cooperative work by God-in-Trinity. The Father elected His people based on His love for them, not based on His foreseeing their obedience or faith. The Spirit sanctifies them, a work which He performs. And this glorious work is enabled only by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Often commentaries teach that the obedience of this phrase is our obedience. The Trinitarian subdivision of the details of our salvation in the lesson refutes this idea. The Father elected, the Spirit sanctifies, and you complete the process by your obedience? No, you and I are not the third member of God-in-Trinity. Based on Peter's simple structure, the Father chose His people in love, the Spirit sanctifies them to God and His choice, thereby continuing the salvation process, because of the obedience and the sprinkling (Sprinkling, not pouring. The intelligent and purposeful application) of the blood of Jesus. Peter links the obedience of which he writes directly with the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Louw-Nida (Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains) defines

the Greek word translated “and” in this phrase as “markers of a sequence of closely related events.” Thus, grammatically, and doctrinally, we should hold the obedience of which Peter writes and the sprinkling of the blood of which he writes to refer to “closely related events.” Jesus’ blood, His life, given up in crucifixion, always obedient to the will of the Father, was effectual as full satisfaction for all the sins of all those contextually identified as “**Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit.**” If Jesus had not lived His life in the flesh, in “Incarnation,” without sin, in perfect obedience, His death would have no value or meaning for our salvation.

By uniting obedience with the sprinkling of Jesus’ blood, Peter urges our minds to a high regard for Jesus and what He did to secure our eternal salvation in full completion of the Father’s intent in His election of the same people for whom Jesus gave His life.

Peter’s focus in this lesson is on the “Sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ,” not the shedding of His blood at Calvary. The sprinkling of Jesus’ blood directs us to His administration of the benefits of His death in heaven after His resurrection and ascension, not to His crucifixion. The symbolism of the point mirrors the sacrifice of the goat on the Day of Atonement under the Law of Moses. The goat was taken to a location outside the perimeter of the camp where it was killed by the high priest who captured its blood in a container and took it into the tabernacle or temple to the inner sanctuary. There he “Sprinkled” that blood on all the vessels in the inner sanctuary, focusing on the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat. The sprinkling of the blood represented the application of the sacrificial goat’s life (Blood) for Israel. However, Paul reminds us in Hebrews 10:1-3 that the Day of Atonement goat’s blood could not truly atone for the sins of the people of God. It was rather offered as a remembrance of sins which needed the true atonement of Jesus, accomplished in His death—and in His administration of His obedience and His life—on behalf of the elect of God. When the high priest performed his official duties on the Day of Atonement, he must wear specific clothes. One feature of his wardrobe that day was a breastplate which contained the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. He offered the goat’s blood for Israel, not for all humanity. Accordingly, Scripture, including our study passage, teaches that Jesus’ death accomplished full atonement for the sins of those for whom He died, all, Jew or Gentile, whom the Father chose.

As an added point, in Hebrews 10:1-3, Paul in no way suggested that the Day of Atonement sacrifice “Pushed sins forward” till Jesus came. All those annual sacrifices didn’t move sins! They remembered sins and thus the need of the people of God for a true atonement for their sins.

The people to whom Peter wrote this letter were people whom he had good reason to believe were the true people of God. He reminds them—and us—of their blessed peace with God because of the Father’s election (And not because of their race or culture), the Spirit’s perfect application of what Jesus did for the elect (For each individual chosen vessel of God’s mercy), and the fully satisfaction for their/our sins based on Jesus’ obedience **and** death.

**Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.** For those so blessed with eternal security in their eternal salvation, Peter greets them with this opening note, this prayer. God saved us by His grace and thereby gave us eternal peace with God. However, every blood-bought-born-again child in the family of God needs both grace and peace to travel this journey in close fellowship with each other and with their God.

Much contemporary thinking refuses to see anything other than in a binary way. Whatever they think or do, it must be all or none, black or white. If you are a child of God, this idea holds that you have all the grace and peace at the moment of regeneration that you’ll ever have. Supposedly, you are born again immediately with a full measure of faith and of all the qualities which Paul described as the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, a point which Paul refutes in that context, “If we live in the Spirit, **let us also** walk in the Spirit.” Further, Peter’s greeting, along with a multitude of Scriptures, refutes this idea. If you have the full measure of every Spirit-given quality immediately at regeneration, how can these qualities grow or increase—or decrease?

1. How can a born again person be “weak in the faith”? (Romans 14:1 KJV)
2. How can your faith “Increase”? (2 Corinthians 10:15 KJV)
3. How can your faith grow “Exceedingly”? (2 Thessalonians 1:3 KJV)
4. And how can you grow in grace? (2 Peter 3:18 KJV)

The Scriptures that teach this dynamic growth of spiritual qualities, named by Paul in the Galatians passage, is quite long and extensive. According to Biblical teaching, immediately at new birth, we are given the **potential** to grow in every quality named in Paul’s “Fruit of the Spirit” list. Think of these potentials like your human body’s DNA. You are born with all the DNA that you’ll have for the rest of your life. However, much of your DNA code gives you the potential to develop certain qualities, but you must work to develop and cultivate them. For example, your body type is set by your DNA (Height, body build, etc.) You may possess the DNA code to be six feet tall and have the body build of a skilled athlete. However, you are not born with the strength and skill of the athlete. You must work long

and hard to develop that potential. Much of Scripture provides us with the knowledge to understand how we may “Work out” and grow our spiritual potential into strong, mature, and God-glorifying believers in Him. We each need that grace and peace to grow our spiritual character into mature faithful believers in the family of God.

Please pray for the Lord’s guidance and blessing as we walk through this treasure of spiritual wisdom and instruction that we call First Peter. Pray for the Lord to give each of us the conviction and insight into His Word to grow our spiritual potential more like Jesus. “Let us also walk...”

Elder Joe Holder