



## Presenting Peter

### Who is this man called Peter? WEEK 9: The Royal Priesthood

Wednesday Night Crew Summer Series Presenting PETER: A study in Mark and the Letters of Peter

Come Join Pastor Orleen and the Wednesday Night Crew this Summer beginning 6/9<sup>th</sup>

**Who is this man whom Jesus Loved&Corrected&Taught&Trusted & Rebuked & Gave the Leadership of His Church to?**

**WEEK #1:** Power in a name: Simon Peter. Social, Economic, Family Culture. What was it like to live life in Peter's neighborhood? What did this Family Culture ADD to the nascent, embryonic, incipient Church?

**WEEK #2:** Peter in the Gospels – The Confession "LORD, I am a sinful man!" & Walking with Jesus – Confessing Him as Messiah

**WEEK #3:** The Passover, The Prophecy & The Reinstatement

**WEEK #4:** Matthais, Pentecost, Abuse: Ananias&Sapphira

**WEEK #5:** PETER IN LEADERSHIP – Samaritan Pentecost, Gentile Pentecost (Cornelius), The Council of Jerusalem

**WEEK #6:** Pastor Peter #1 – An EYE witness to the GRACE of God. Expect trials. How to live the Gospel.

**Week #7:** The Discipline of Suffering

8/11, 8/18, **8/25(gone)**, **9/1(gone)**, 9/8, 9/15(Kick off: Testimonies of Warfare)

~~Who does Peter say Jesus Christ is?~~

**False Prophets/Teachers (13)**

**Peter and the HS**

Traditions (rest of the story)

Husband/Wife

Legends (15) & Legacy

2 Peter?

### WEEK #9

#### Pastor Peter – The Royal Priesthood

#### Matthew 16:19

*"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth is already bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth is already loosed in heaven."*

- Written to the house churches in the 5 Roman provinces of Asia Minor (Turkey)
- From Rome at the end of his life after Paul had left (Released from his first imprisonment in AD 62).

#### Purpose of the letter:

- Peter already 'wrote' his witness of the life of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Mark through John Mark.
- In the epistle (letter), knowledge of the story of Jesus is assumed – It is NOT the Gospel of Mark rewritten.
- Instruct the church in the **apostolic interpretation of the gospel**. (Like Paul)
- **What we seen. What we heard. What we knew. What we did.**

This is how Peter "Fed the Sheep"

1. Shared his testimony. (**Peter's testimony** against the background of his own experience as Christ's disciple.)
2. Connected the **Old Testament promises** to Christ. (with which the letter is saturated.)
3. Outlined the apostolic **faith (Faith in action is trusting God's word)** like Paul and other authors of the New Testament.
4. Outlined application into The Hellenistic world in which his hearers lived. (**Understood the culture**)

Our job is to take these timeless truths and apply to our world.

**Peter eye witnesses to the Grace of God**

**Peter is moving US with the Five House Churches and infusing OUR mindset of WHO WE are as a Believer in Christ Jesus with:**

**What we've seen.**

**What we've heard.**

**What we've known.**

**What we've done.**

**OPENING:** Church (ekklesia) – all over in Acts (Paul), nowhere in 1 Peter – **WHY?**

#### 1 Peter 1:1

*To the temporary **residents** dispersed [residents of....what?]*

*in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **chosen** [elect]*

*[The Jewish people scattered throughout Gentile lands]*



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**Israelites KNOW being a foreigner:**

- **Genesis 23:4; Psalm 39:12; Hebrews 11:13**  
These all died in faith without having received the promises, but they saw them from a distance, greeted them, and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth.

**Israel to be a witness to the Gentiles**

**Isaiah 44:8** *Do not be startled or afraid. Have I not told you and declared it long ago? **You are my witnesses!** Is there any God but Me? There is no other Rock; I do not know any.*

**Isaiah 49:6** [Isaiah 2:6] *He says, "It is not enough for you to be My Servant raising up the tribes of Jacob and restoring the protected ones of Israel. **I will also make you a light for the nations,** to be My salvation to the ends of the earth."*

**Why does Peter call them RESIDENTS?**

**Residents of:**

**1 Peter 1:17-21**

*<sup>17</sup> And if you address as Father the One who judges impartially based on each one's work, you are to conduct yourselves in fear during the time of **your temporary residence**. <sup>18</sup> For you know that **you were redeemed** from your empty way of life inherited from the fathers, not with perishable things like silver or gold, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. <sup>20</sup> He was chosen before the foundation of the world but was revealed at the end of the times **for you** <sup>21</sup> **who through Him are believers in God**, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.*

**Petrine concept:**

**Assumes ALL who respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ are now part of the Israel of God**  
**We are NOW Residents of: The Family of God**

**What does it mean to be a Resident in the Family of God?**

- Resident: A person who lives somewhere permanently ~~or on a long-term basis~~.  
An inhabitant; A local; A citizen; A denizen (Latin: from within)

**I. HIS PEOPLE – FAMILY OF GOD** (Next week: His PEOPLE – The Royal Priesthood)

Using PETER to help define The FAMILY OF GOD:

**1 Peter 1**

**FAMILY OF GOD:** Shared Inheritance with Jesus Christ

**1 Peter 2:12**

**FAMILY OF GOD:** LIVE HONORABLY

**1 Peter 3:16**

**FAMILY OF GOD:** DEEPLY COMMITTED TO WHAT IS GOOD. DO NOT FEAR. SHARE OUR FAITH.

Shame flung on you will bounce back and stick to the flinger.

**1 Peter 4:4**

**FAMILY OF GOD:** LIVES FOR GOD'S WILL

**1 Peter 1:22-23**

**FAMILY OF GOD:** Sincere, intense Love of fellow Christians.

**1 Peter 4:7-11** **End Time Ethic**

**FAMILY OF GOD:** Serious, disciplined prayer. Intense love for one another. Hospitable. No complaining. **Serve one another with your giftings: Speaking. Serving. Signs.**



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## GIFTINGS

Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). [The Woman's Study Bible](#). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

### **Prophecy** – Proclamation in order to edify

Foretelling – A Prediction of future

Forthtelling – Speaking God's Word

**Luke 2:36-38** - Anna

Empowered to speak to others with Foretelling/Forthtelling.

**Serving** – Doing, Helps

**Luke 4:38-39** Simon's mother-in-law

**Teaching** – Ability to deliver instruction effectively

**Acts 18:24-28** Priscilla and Aquila

**Exhortation** – Persuasion and Encouragement – Ability to inspire and persuade

**John 4:28-30** Samaritan Woman

Believes Jesus is the Messiah and introduces Him to others.

**Giving** – Undergirding and Supporting

**Acts 4:35-37** (also Luke 21:2-4 Widow with 2 Mites) Barnabas

Gives with pure Joy, expecting nothing in return

**Leading** – Administration

**Judges 4:4-14** Deborah

**Mercy** – Compassion, True Concern for those who are hurting

**Acts 9:36-42** Dorcas

**Wisdom** – The Application of Truth

**Luke 1:46-56** Mary (Jesus' Mom)

**Knowledge** – Insight and Perception

**1 Samuel 2:1-10** Hannah

**Faith** – Trust

**Matthew 15:21-28** A Gentile Mother's Faith – The Syro-Phoenician Woman

**Discernment** – Ability to Make Judgments

**1 Samuel 25:2-42** Abigail

**Evangelism** – Ability to witness in any situation

**Acts 21:1 – 9** Philip

**Hospitality** – Love through welcoming

**John 12:1 – 2** Martha



**II. HIS PEOPLE - A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD**

**Petrine: Assumes all who respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ are now part of the Priesthood of God**

**1 Peter 2:9-10**

*But you are a chosen race,<sup>[a][b]</sup> a royal priesthood,<sup>[c]</sup> a holy nation,<sup>[d]</sup> a people for His possession,<sup>[e]</sup> so that you may proclaim the praises<sup>[f][g]</sup> of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.  
10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

- a. [1 Peter 2:9](#) Or generation, or nation
- b. [1 Peter 2:9](#) [Dt 7:6](#); [10:15](#); [Is 43:20](#) LXX
- c. [1 Peter 2:9](#) [Ex 19:6](#); [23:22](#) LXX; [Is 61:6](#)
- d. [1 Peter 2:9](#) [Ex 19:6](#); [23:22](#) LXX
- e. [1 Peter 2:9](#) [Ex 19:5](#); [23:22](#) LXX; [Dt 4:20](#); [7:6](#); [Is 43:21](#) LXX
- f. [1 Peter 2:9](#) Or the mighty deeds
- g. [1 Peter 2:9](#) [Is 42:12](#); [43:21](#)

**Hosea 2:23 (1 Peter 2:10)**

I will sow her (Israel) in the land for Myself, and I will have compassion on No Compassion; I will say to Not My People: You are My people, and he will say, “You are My God.”

**Exodus 19:5-6**

*5 Now if you will listen to Me and carefully keep My covenant, you will be My own possession out of all the peoples, although all the earth is Mine, 6 and you will be My kingdom of priests and My holy nation.’ These are the words that you are to say to the Israelites.”*

**Old Testament Priestly Duties:**

What they were and What did they mean?

Three Orders: High priest, Priest, and Levite.

**High Priest**

The high priest was the spiritual head of Israel and he had special functions, for example, entering the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement (Lv 16). Line of Aaron.

**Exodus 40:13**

*Clothe Aaron with the holy garments, anoint him, and consecrate him, so that he can serve Me as a priest.*

**Priests** were male descendants of Aaron (Nm 3:10)

The chief functions of the priesthood were in the temple. They looked after the ceremonial vessels and performed the sacrifices. In doing their duties they dressed in special, symbolic vestments. They were also teachers, passing on the sacred traditions of the nation. This included such matters as medical information (Lv 13–15).

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**Levites** were male members of the tribe of Levi.

The Levites assisted the priests and served the congregation in the temple. They sang the psalms, kept the temple courts clean, helped to prepare certain sacrifices and offerings, and also had a teaching function.

**Numbers 1:47-54 Duties of the Levites**

<sup>47</sup> But the Levites were not registered with them by their ancestral tribe. <sup>48</sup> For the Lord had told Moses: <sup>49</sup> “Do not register or take a census of the tribe of Levi with the other Israelites. <sup>50</sup> Appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the testimony, all its furnishings, and everything in it. They are to transport the tabernacle and all its articles, take care of it, and camp around it. <sup>51</sup> Whenever the tabernacle is to move, the Levites are to take it down, and whenever it is to stop at a campsite, the Levites are to set it up. Any unauthorized person who comes near it must be put to death.

<sup>52</sup> “The Israelites are to camp by their military divisions, each man with his encampment and under his banner. <sup>53</sup> The Levites are to camp around the tabernacle of the testimony and watch over it, so that no wrath will fall on the Israelite community.” <sup>54</sup> The Israelites did everything just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

**By it the people:**

1. offered worship to God,
2. made intercessions and petitions,
3. and learned of God’s will.

Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). [Priesthood](#). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, pp. 1753–1754). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

This was to be a reinforcement of the worship life in the home. The father of the home was to guide the family in the 3 steps so when they went to the temple, they understood the seamlessness of God’s process.

**Exodus 23:22** People of His possession

<sup>22</sup> But if you will carefully obey him and do everything I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes.

**Dt 4:20**

<sup>20</sup> But the Lord selected you and brought you out of Egypt’s iron furnace to be a people for His inheritance, as you are today.

**Dt 7:6**

<sup>6</sup> For you are a holy people belonging to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be His own possession out of all the peoples on the face of the earth.

**Dt 10:15**

<sup>15</sup> Yet the Lord was devoted to your fathers and loved them. He chose their descendants after them—He chose you out of all the peoples, as it is today.

**Is 42:12**

Let them give glory to the Lord and declare His praise in the islands.

**Is 43:20-21**

The animals of the field will honor Me, jackals and ostriches, because I provide water in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My chosen people. <sup>21</sup> The people I formed for Myself will declare My praise.

**Is 61:6a**

But you will be called the Lord’s priests; they will speak of you as ministers of our God;

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## TEMPLE VEIL

THE illustration of the O.T. completing and then opening up to the N.T.

### What was the significance of the temple veil being torn in two when Jesus died?

- The holy temple in Jerusalem was the center of Jewish religious life.
- The place where animal sacrifices were carried out and worship according to the Law of Moses was followed faithfully.
- Hebrews 9:1–9 tells us that in the temple a veil separated the Holy of Holies—the earthly dwelling place of God’s presence—from the rest of the temple where men dwelt.
- This signified that man was separated from God by sin (Isaiah 59:1–2).
- Only the high priest was permitted to pass beyond this veil once each year (Exodus 30:10; Hebrews 9:7) to enter into God’s presence for all of Israel and make atonement for their sins (Leviticus 16).
- Solomon’s temple was 30 cubits high (1 Kings 6:2)/but Herod had increased the height to 40 cubits, it is safe to assume **that this veil was somewhere near 60 feet high.**
- Josephus also tells us that the veil was four inches thick and that horses tied to each side could not pull the veil apart.
- The book of Exodus teaches that this thick veil was fashioned from blue, purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen.

The size and thickness of the veil makes the events occurring at the moment of Jesus’ death on the cross so much more momentous. “And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (**Matthew 27:50–51a**).

### **Above all, the tearing of the veil at the moment of Jesus’ death dramatically symbolized that His sacrifice, the shedding of His own blood, was a sufficient atonement for sins.**

- It signified that now the way into the Holy of Holies was open for all people, for all time, both Jew and Gentile.
- When Jesus died, the veil was torn, and God moved out of that place never again to dwell in a temple made with hands (Acts 17:24).
- God was through with that temple and its religious system, and the temple and Jerusalem were left “desolate” (destroyed by the Romans) in A.D. 70, just as Jesus prophesied in Luke 13:35. As long as the temple stood, it signified the continuation of the Old Covenant.

Hebrews 9:8–9 refers to the age that was passing away as the new covenant was being established (Hebrews 8:13).

In a sense, the veil was symbolic of Christ Himself as the only way to the Father (John 14:6). This is indicated by the fact that the high priest had to enter the Holy of Holies through the veil. Now Christ is our superior High Priest, and as believers in His finished work, we partake of His better priesthood. We can now enter the Holy of Holies through Him. Hebrews 10:19–20 says that the faithful enter into the sanctuary by the “blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the veil, that is, through his flesh.” Here we see the image of Jesus’ flesh being torn for us just as He was tearing the veil for us.

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The veil being torn from top to bottom is a fact of history. The profound significance of this event is explained in glorious detail in Hebrews. The things of the temple were shadows of things to come, and they all ultimately point us to Jesus Christ. **He was the veil to the Holy of Holies, and through His death the faithful now have free access to God.**

Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). [Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered](#). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

### **Jesus' Role in fulfilling the O.T. Roles:**

[To accept the Priesthood, we have to accept the entire process of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.]

#### **He is Prophet**

Gospels: **Mt 16:14; 21:10, 11; Mk 6:14, 15; 8:28; Lk 7:16, 39; 9:8, 19; Jn 6:14; 7:40, 52**

Though Jesus nowhere claimed prophetic status directly, that claim is implicit in

**Mark 6:4** (Mt 13:57; Lk 4:24): *"A prophet is not without honor except in his own country,"*

**Luke 13:33:** *"Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem."*

#### **Deuteronomy 18:18 [Moses predicts Jesus]**

*I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put My words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.*

#### **Acts 3:22 (Acts 7:37)**

*Moses said: The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your brothers. You must listen to Him in everything He will say to you.*

#### **13 reasons for regarding Jesus as a prophet in the OT tradition:**

- 1) The sovereign authority of Jesus' teaching (Mk 1:27), a feature underlined by his use of the introductory formula "(Amen) I say to you," is reminiscent of that claimed by OT prophets with their use of such formulas as "thus says the Lord."
- (2) The poetic character of many of Jesus' sayings is unlike contemporary rabbinic teaching, but similar to the poetic rhetoric of the OT prophets.
- (3) Jesus experienced visions (Lk 10:18) like the ancient prophets.
- (4) Jesus, like the prophets, made many predictions (Mt 23:38; Mk 13:2; 14:58; Lk 13:35; etc.).
- (5) Like the OT prophets, Jesus performed symbolic acts (such as the cleansing of the temple, the entry into Jerusalem, and the Last Supper).
- (6) Jesus, like the prophets, when necessary rejected the formal observance of religious ritual and emphasized the moral and spiritual dimensions of obedience to God.
- (7) Jesus announced the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God, an eschatological proclamation similar to those made by the prophets.
- (8) Like the OT prophets, Jesus functioned as a preacher of repentance.
- (9) Jesus, like many of the prophets, was conscious of a special calling of God (Mt 15:24; Mk 8:31; 9:37; 14:36; Lk 4:18–26).
- (10) Jesus, like the prophets, received divine revelation through intimate communion with God (Mt 11:27; Lk 10:22).



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(11) Like the prophets, Jesus represented God; to obey him was to obey God, to reject him was to reject God (Mk 9:37; cf. 2 Sm 7:7; Ez 33:30–33).

(12) Like the prophets, Jesus was conscious of a mission to all Israel (Mt 15:24; 19:28; Lk 22:30).

(13) Like many of the prophets, Jesus not only announced the Word of God, he also participated in its fulfillment.

Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). [Prophecy](#). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, pp. 1777–1778). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

Like John the Baptist, but unlike the OT prophets, Jesus never used the prophetic messenger formula “thus says the Lord.” However, Jesus’ distinctive use of the solemn formula “(Amen) I say unto you,” to introduce many of his sayings does underline the authority of the speaker. Jesus did, however, use a number of forms of speech reminiscent of prophetism. One distinctive expression is “who among you,” or “which man among you” (Mt 7:9, 10/Lk 11:11, 12; Mt 12:11/Lk 14:5; Lk 17:7–10; 11:5–8; 15:4–7, 8–10; 14:28–30, 31–32; Mt 6:27/Lk 12:25). While there are no rabbinic parallels to this expression used by Jesus, it was used by several OT prophets (Is 42:23; 50:10; Hg 2:3).

Again, Jesus frequently used a form of speech which has been labeled the “eschatological correlative.” An example is Luke 11:30: “For *as* Jonah became a sign to the men of Nineveh, *so* will the Son of man be to this generation.” The first line relates to an event of the past or present, while the second, in the future tense, compares it to an eschatological event, hence the designation “eschatological correlative.” This pattern occurs with such frequency in OT prophecy that it must be considered the source of Jesus’ own use of this form of speech (Is 10:11; 24:13; 41:25; 66:13; Jer 31:28; 32:42; 42:18; Ez 20:36; 22:20; 34:12; 3:12; Ob 15).

Another characteristic form of speech used by Jesus, and which can be considered prophetic, is the two-part structure of many of his sayings. The first line concerns the present situation, while the second line relates to the future eschatological activity of God. A typical example of this form of speech, which is closely related to the eschatological correlative, is found in Matthew 5:7: “Blessed are the merciful/ for they shall obtain mercy.” A more complex example is found in Mark 8:38: “For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation,/ of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his father with the holy angels.”

Among the many prophetic predictions of Jesus are the following: **(1) Predictions of the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God** (Mk 1:15/Mt 10:7, 8; Mt 10:23; 23:39; Mk 9:1; 13:28–29). **(2) Predictions of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple** (Mk 14:58/Mt 26:61; Mk 15:29/Mt 27:40; Jn 2:19–21; Mk 13:2/Mt 24:2/Lk 21:6; Lk 13:34, 35/Mt 23:37–39). One of the more striking of these predictions is that found in Luke 19:41–44:

This prediction was literally fulfilled when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70. **(3) Predictions of the coming of the Son of man** (Mk 8:38/Mt 16:27/Lk 9:26; Mt 10:32–33/Lk 12:8–9; Mk 13:26, 27; 14:62; Lk 11:30/Mt 12:40; Lk 17:24/Mt 24:27; Lk 17:26/Mt 24:37–39; Mt 13:40, 41; 10:23). **(4) The longest prophetic section in the Gospels is the eschatological discourse of Jesus in Mark 13:1–32** (Mt 24:1–36; Lk 21:5–33), in which a number of predictions concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and end of the age are woven into a lengthy discourse to the disciples.

Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). [Prophecy](#). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, pp. 1777–1778). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

## He is Priest

### Hebrews 5:1-6

*For every high priest taken from men is appointed in service<sup>[a]</sup> to God for the people, to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. <sup>2</sup> He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he is also subject to weakness. <sup>3</sup> Because of this, he must make a sin offering for himself as well as for the people. <sup>4</sup> No one takes this honor on himself; instead, a person is called by God, just as Aaron was. <sup>5</sup> In the same way, the Messiah did not exalt Himself to become a high priest, but the One who said to Him, You are My Son; today I have become Your Father,<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>6</sup> also said in another passage, You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.<sup>[c]</sup>*

### Hebrews 9:11-12

*<sup>11</sup> But the Messiah has appeared, high priest of the good things that have come.<sup>[a]</sup> In the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands (that is, not of this creation), <sup>12</sup> He entered the*



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*most holy place once for all, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.*

**Hebrews 4:14–16**

*<sup>14</sup> Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens—Jesus the Son of God—let us hold fast to the confession. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tested in every way as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Therefore let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us at the proper time.*

**He is King**

- As a descendant of David, Jesus was qualified to take the throne of Israel. Meeting this requirement was a primary qualification of the promised Old Testament Messiah (Matt. 1:1–2:6).
- In the Gospels, the title of “King” is most often applied to Jesus at the end of His earthly life. It was Pilate, a Roman and an unbeliever, who insisted that a sign be posted above Jesus as He hung on the cross to proclaim Him “KING OF THE JEWS” (Matt. 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19).
- When Jesus returns, He is to be acknowledged by all as the ultimate Ruler, **the “Lord of lords and King of kings” (Rev. 17:14)**.

**The meaning of kingdom:**

- Today we think of a kingdom as a geographical district with national borders. A “king” is a person who rules a kingdom. **But in biblical times, a kingdom was not so much a land as it was the sphere of authority enjoyed by a ruler. And this authority need not have geographical boundaries.**
- In the New Testament, too, a kingdom is a realm in which a king exerts control and authority. Thus, the “kingdom of God” is not necessarily a place, and it need not have geographical borders. The kingdom of God is any realm over which God exercises control.

**Kingdom in the Old Testament:**

- In the Old Testament, two concepts of kingdom are developed. The first one is that God is King over the entire universe, for ultimately He is in control of everything. Regardless of whether that control is acknowledged by human beings, God’s controlling influence over the course of events and in human lives nevertheless exists (Dan. 4:34, 35).
- Old Testament prophets look forward to a future kingdom, a descendant of David is to rule the earth, and all nations everywhere will submit to God’s Anointed One (Ps. 2). In fact the Old Testament uniformly and consistently envisions a day when earth will be ruled by the Messiah, and “the kingdom shall be the LORD’S” (Obad. 21). It is over this kingdom that Jesus will rule as King of kings and Lord of lords at history’s end (Rev. 19:16).

**Kingdom in the New Testament:**

- The New Testament assumes both aspects of God’s kingdom expressed in the Old Testament.

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- Physical Kingdom: Indeed, after His resurrection, Jesus' disciples asked Him whether this was the time when He would "restore the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6). Jesus responded, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (v. 7).
- Heavenly Kingdom: The kingdom the prophets foresaw will be established when Christ returns.
- The Kingdom of God:  
Matthew 5-7 = Sermon on the Mount (Kingdom Principles)  
Matthew 13 = Parables that define the context of the Kingdom  
Epistles =

**Col. 1:13:** Paul tells us that through Christ believers have been delivered from "the power of darkness and conveyed... into the kingdom of the Son of His love"

As citizens of Jesus' present kingdom

**1 Cor. 15:50** Brothers, I tell you this: Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and corruption cannot inherit incorruption.

**Gal. 5:21** envy,<sup>a</sup> drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I tell you about these things in advance—as I told you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**Eph. 5:5.** For know and recognize this: Every sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, who is an idolater, does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of the Messiah and of God.

**James 2:5** Listen, my dear brothers: Didn't God choose the poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that He has promised to those who love Him?

Richards, L. (2001). *Every name of God in the Bible* (pp. 151–154). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

## **He is Mediator**

### **1 Timothy 2:5-6**

*For there is one God and one mediator between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, Himself human, <sup>6</sup> who gave Himself—a ransom for all, a testimony at the proper time.*

[The Letter to the Hebrews presents the OT priesthood as fulfilled in Jesus Christ. First of all, he has been appointed high priest by God himself (5:4–6). Yet it is a superior priesthood to that of Aaron (7:1–28). Second, being totally sympathetic to the needs of sinful people and tempted in all points like them, he was without sin (4:15; 7:26). Third, instead of offering animal sacrifices to take away sin, he offered himself, as the sinless lamb, to take away sin. This was a perfect atonement (7:27; 9:24–28; 10:10–19).]

[Not only was the OT sacrificial system fulfilled, it was also finished by the unique, unrepeatable, and unlimited sacrifice of Christ. Having risen from the dead he is a priest forever (7:17) and he remains the same "yesterday and today and for ever" (13:8). Part of his high priesthood is to offer intercession for his people (7:25). He is the mediator of a new and better covenant (7:22; 8:6; 9:15). Only through him are sinful human beings able to enter the holy presence of God and be accepted as children of God (Jn 14:6; 2 Cor 5:18–20; 1 Tm 2:5). Therefore, whatever priesthood Christians have they have only in and through Christ, their High Priest and Mediator.]

Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). *Priesthood*. In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, pp. 1753–1754). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

Presenting Peter  
Who is this man called Peter? WEEK 9: The Royal Priesthood

**Peter's use of the O.T.**

- 1 Pet 2:6: “Behold I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame”—Isaiah 28:16
- 1 Pet 2:7: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”—Psalm 118:22 (LXX Ps 117:22)
- 1 Pet 2:8: “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense”—Isaiah 8:14
- 1 Pet 2:9: “a chosen race”—Isaiah 43:20
- 1 Pet 2:9: “a royal priesthood”—Exodus 19:6 and/or Exodus 23:22
- 1 Pet 2:9: “a holy nation”—Exodus 19:6 and/or Exodus 23:22
- 1 Pet 2:9: “a people for his own possession”—*various possibilities*
- 1 Pet 2:9: “proclaim the excellencies”—Isaiah 43:21
- 1 Pet 2:10a: “not a people.... God's people”—combines Hosea 1:9–10 and 2:23 (LXX Hos 2:25)
- 1 Pet 2:10b: “not received mercy ... have received mercy”—Hosea 1:6

Himes, P. A. (2017). *1 Peter*. (D. Mangum, E. Vince, & A. Salinger, Eds.) (1 Pe 2:5–10). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

- Could have Peter gotten to this Holy Priesthood without Cornelius?

Confronting his/our human bias and history.

**New Testament Priestly Duties;**

Concept was pronounced anew by Martin Luther (Not just the Catholic priest!).

What they are and How do we do them?

**1 Corinthians 3:6**

*<sup>6</sup>He has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit produces life.*

The Actions of Priest

**Hebrews 13:15-18 [We sacrifice our Praise] [We sacrifice our Good Works]**

*<sup>15</sup>Therefore, through Him let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of our lips that confess His name. <sup>16</sup>Don't neglect to do what is good and to share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices. <sup>17</sup>Obey your leaders<sup>[b]</sup> and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. <sup>18</sup>Pray for us; for we are convinced that we have a clear conscience, wanting to conduct ourselves honorably in everything.*

- **What did the Philippians send Paul?**

**Phil 4:18** <sup>18</sup>But I have received everything in full, and I have an abundance. I am fully supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you provided—a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Presenting Peter  
Who is this man called Peter? WEEK 9: The Royal Priesthood

**Romans 12:1-2** [We sacrifice our Bodies. We present our bodies as worship.]

*Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual worship.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.*

**Philippians 2:17** – Lights in the World

*<sup>12</sup> So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. <sup>13</sup> For it is God who is working in you, enabling you both to desire and to work out His good purpose. <sup>14</sup> Do everything without grumbling and arguing,<sup>15</sup> so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world. <sup>16</sup> Hold firmly to<sup>[c]</sup> the message of life. Then I can boast in the day of Christ that I didn't run or labor for nothing. <sup>17</sup> But even if I am poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. <sup>18</sup> In the same way you should also be glad and rejoice with me.*

**Ephesians 2:11-22** Unity in Christ

*<sup>11</sup> So then, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh—called “the uncircumcised” by those called “the circumcised,” which is done in the flesh by human hands. <sup>12</sup> At that time you were without the Messiah, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah. <sup>14</sup> For He is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In His flesh, <sup>15</sup> He made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that He might create in Himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace. <sup>16</sup> He did this so that He might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross and put the hostility to death by it.<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>17</sup> When the Messiah came, He proclaimed the good news of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. <sup>18</sup> For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. <sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone. <sup>21</sup> The whole building, being put together by Him, grows into a holy sanctuary in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> You also are being built together for God's dwelling in the Spirit.*

**Revelation 1:6** (Priesthood is in plural here)

<sup>6</sup> and made us a kingdom,<sup>[a]</sup> priests<sup>[b]</sup> to His God and Father—the glory and dominion are His forever and ever. Amen.

**5:10**

You made them a kingdom<sup>[a]</sup> and priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth.

**20:6**

<sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! The second death has no power<sup>[a]</sup> over them, but they will be priests of God and of the Messiah, and they will reign with Him for 1,000 years.

Presenting Peter  
Who is this man called Peter? WEEK 9: The Royal Priesthood

**1 Peter 2:9-10**

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

*<sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

1. Pray for One another
2. Encourage one another to Good Works
3. Call one another to holiness
4. BE God's people – Community (ekklesia – the church, a group of citizens assembled together for a specific purpose) (kuriakos – a group which belongs to the Lord) (residents- citizens from within = PRIEST)

**1 Peter 2:1-25**

**The Living Stone and a Holy People** (Priesthood is in the singular here. Becomes community in verse 10)

*2 So rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander. <sup>2</sup> Like newborn infants, desire the pure spiritual milk, so that you may grow by it for your salvation,<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>3</sup> since you have tasted that the Lord is good.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>4</sup> Coming to Him, a living stone—rejected by men but chosen and valuable to God— <sup>5</sup> you yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup> For it is contained in Scripture:*

*Look! I lay a stone in Zion,  
a chosen and honored<sup>[c]</sup> cornerstone,<sup>[d]</sup>  
and the one who believes in Him  
will never be put to shame!<sup>[e][f]</sup>*

*<sup>7</sup> So honor will come to you who believe, but for the unbelieving,  
The stone that the builders rejected—  
this One has become the cornerstone,<sup>[g]</sup>*

*<sup>8</sup> and*

*A stone to stumble over,<sup>[h]</sup>  
and a rock to trip over.<sup>[i][j]</sup>*

*They stumble because they disobey the message; they were destined for this.*

*<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen race,<sup>[k][l]</sup> a royal priesthood,<sup>[m]</sup>  
a holy nation,<sup>[n]</sup> a people for His possession,<sup>[o]</sup>  
so that you may proclaim the praises<sup>[p][q]</sup>  
of the One who called you out of darkness  
into His marvelous light.*

*<sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people,  
but now you are God's people;  
you had not received mercy,  
but now you have received mercy.*

## Presenting Peter

### Who is this man called Peter? WEEK 8: The Family of God / The Royal Priesthood

#### ***A Call to Good Works***

*<sup>11</sup> Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and temporary residents to abstain from fleshly desires that war against you.<sup>[i]</sup> <sup>12</sup> Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles,<sup>[s]</sup> so that in a case where they speak against you as those who do what is evil, they will, by observing your good works, glorify God on the day of visitation.<sup>[j]</sup>*

*<sup>13</sup> Submit to every human authority<sup>[u]</sup> because of the Lord, whether to the Emperor<sup>[v]</sup> as the supreme authority <sup>14</sup> or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good. <sup>15</sup> For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good. <sup>16</sup> As God's slaves, live as free people, but don't use your freedom as a way to conceal evil. <sup>17</sup> Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the Emperor.<sup>[w]</sup>*

#### ***Submission of Slaves to Masters***

*<sup>18</sup> Household slaves, submit with all fear to your masters, not only to the good and gentle but also to the cruel.<sup>[x]</sup> <sup>19</sup> For it brings favor<sup>[y]</sup> if, mindful of God's will,<sup>[z][aa]</sup> someone endures grief from suffering unjustly. <sup>20</sup> For what credit is there if you sin and are punished, and you endure it? But when you do what is good and suffer, if you endure it, this brings favor with God.*

*<sup>21</sup> For you were called to this,  
because Christ also suffered for you,  
leaving you an example,  
so that you should follow in His steps.*

*<sup>22</sup> He did not commit sin,  
and no deceit was found in His mouth;<sup>[ab]</sup>*

*<sup>23</sup> when He was reviled,  
He did not revile in return;  
when He was suffering,  
He did not threaten  
but entrusted Himself to the One who judges justly.*

*<sup>24</sup> He Himself bore our sins  
in His body on the tree,  
so that, having died to sins,  
we might live for righteousness;  
you have been healed by His wounds.<sup>[ac]</sup>*

*<sup>25</sup> For you were like sheep going astray,<sup>[ad]</sup>  
but you have now returned  
to the Shepherd and Guardian<sup>[ae]</sup> of your souls.*

**NT. It is remarkable that the term "priest" is never used in the NT of a minister or order in the church.**

(Acts 4:1 Now as they were speaking to the people, the priests, the commander of the temple police, and the Sadducees confronted them,(Peter and John arrested)

6; <sup>6</sup> with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John and Alexander, and all the members of the high-priestly family.

14:13 <sup>13</sup> Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the town, brought oxen and garlands to the gates. He, with the crowds, intended to offer sacrifice.)



## Presenting Peter

Who is this man called Peter? WEEK 8: The Family of God / The Royal Priesthood

### *The Nature of Priesthood.*

The concrete content of priesthood may be put in the following way:

**1.** Direct access to God. By faith all Christians approach God directly and personally (Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18) through Christ.

**2.** Offering spiritual sacrifices to God. The whole life of the Christian is to be a service of love—“a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God” (Phil 4:18). All work, activity, prayer, and praise is to be offered to God.

**3.** Declaring the gospel. By word and deed Christians are to reveal the love of God in Christ. They are to “declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pt 2:9), and they are to make sure that even pagans can recognize their behavior as good (1 Pt 2:12).

**4.** Worshiping as a local church. “Supplications, prayer, intercessions, and thanksgivings” are to be made for all persons (1 Tm 2:1). The sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are to be administered on behalf of the whole church as the community serves God and extends his kingdom.

In summary, it may be said that priesthood is an activity and function which is best viewed in a collective sense as belonging to the whole body of Christians, though including of necessity the individual Christian life of service. Its full meaning is negated if it is seen only in individualist terms—*my* access to God, *my* right to interpret the Bible, and *my* ability to discern God’s will.

Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). [Priesthood](#). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, pp. 1753–1754). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

What, then, does the priesthood of all believers mean in the NT? The high priesthood of Christ may be defined as his complete dedication and obedience to God, his Father, and unlimited compassion for his fellow human beings. Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). [Priesthood](#). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, pp. 1753–1754). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

**The Priority of Worship:** “As a ‘royal’ priesthood, the kingly nature of the redeemed worshiper is noted. This passage is rooted in God’s call to ancient Israel (see Ex. 19:5–7). Peter and John (Rev. 1:5, 6) draw this truth to full application and prophetic fulfillment in the NT believer. As with Israel, deliverance through the blood of the Lamb is but the beginning. As promised, dominion and destiny will unfold as their priestly duty is fulfilled. **True authority is always related to a walk in purity and a constancy in worship.** The spirit of worship is essential to all advance of the kingdom. Just as ancient Israel will only take the Promised Land while doing battle from a foundation of righteous worship before the Lord, so with the contemporary church. We will only experience promised power for evangelism and spiritual victories as we prioritize and grow in our worship of the living God. **Kingdom power is kept from pollution this way,** as kingdom people keep humbly praiseful before the King—and witness His works of power with joy” (see Rev. 1:5, 6; Dan. 7:21, 22). Hayford, J. W., & Hagan, K. A. (1997). [Passing Faith’s Tests with Love and Joy: A study of James, 1&2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude](#). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



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*The ministry of the interior*

*But ye are ... a royal priesthood.* 1 Peter 2:9.

By what right do we become “a royal priesthood”? By the right of the Atonement. Are we prepared to leave ourselves resolutely alone and to launch out into the priestly work of prayer? The continual grubbing on the inside to see whether we are what we ought to be, generates a self-centred, morbid type of Christianity, not the robust, simple life of the child of God. Until we get into a right relationship to God, it is a case of hanging on by the skin of our teeth, and we say—‘What a wonderful victory I have got!’ There is nothing indicative of the miracle of Redemption in that. Launch out in reckless belief that the Redemption is complete, and then bother no more about yourself, but begin to do as Jesus Christ said—pray for the friend who comes to you at midnight, pray for the saints, pray for all men. Pray on the realization that you are only perfect in Christ Jesus, not on this plea—‘O Lord, I have done my best, please hear me.’

How long is it going to take God to free us from the morbid habit of thinking about ourselves? We must get sick unto death of ourselves, until there is no longer any surprise at anything God can tell us about ourselves. We cannot touch the depths of meanness in ourselves. There is only one place where we are right, and that is in Christ Jesus. When we are there, we have to pour out for all we are worth in the ministry of the interior.<sup>1</sup>

20. Worshipful Walk with God (1 Pet. 2:9). This text not only appoints praise, but represents *a basic revelation of the Bible*: God wants a people who will walk with Him in prayer, march with Him in praise, and thank and worship Him. Note the progression in Peter’s description of the people of the New Covenant: (1) *We are a chosen generation*—a people begun with Jesus’ choice of the Twelve, who became 120, to whom were added thousands at Pentecost. We are a part of this continually expanding generation, “chosen” when we receive Christ. (2) *We are a royal priesthood*. Under the Old Covenant the priesthood and royalty were separated. We are now—in the Person of our Lord—all “kings and priests to His God” (Rev. 1:6), a worshipping host and a kingly band, prepared for walking with Him in the light or warring beside Him against the hosts of darkness. (3) *We are a holy nation*, composed of Jews and Gentiles—of one blood, from every nation under heaven. (4) *We are His own special people*. God’s intention from the time of Abraham has been to call forth a people with a special mission—to proclaim His praise and to propagate His blessing throughout the earth. C.G.<sup>2</sup>

**“You are a \*chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”**

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<sup>1</sup> Chambers, O. (1986). *My utmost for his highest: Selections for the year*. Grand Rapids, MI: Oswald Chambers Publications; Marshall Pickering.

<sup>2</sup> Hayford, J. W., Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). *Hayford’s Bible handbook*. Nashville, TN; Atlanta, GA; London; Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

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(2:9).As those who have been “called out of darkness,” our praises declare that we have been translated into another kingdom (Col 1:13; see Kingdom of God).Jesus Christ is our King, and He has made us a royal priesthood, with His authority and His Spirit to serve the world around us.Our \*praise focuses on His throne and dominion, from which we derive all our benefits as subjects of His kingdom.

3

## hierateuma

<i>Greek pronunciation</i>	[hee eh RAH tyoo mah]
<i>CSB translation</i>	<i>priesthood</i>
<i>Uses in 1 Peter</i>	2
<i>Uses in the NT</i>	2
<i>Focus passage</i>	1 Peter 2:5, 9

**Hierateuma** (*priesthood*) first appears in written literature in the Greek OT (Ex 19:6; 23:22). If Israel obeyed God, she would be his treasured possession (Ex 23:22) and would function as a royal *priesthood* through which God would dispense his blessing to the whole earth (Ex 19:5–6; 23:22). In the NT, Peter makes direct reference to Ex 19:6 and 23:22 and applies the fulfillment of this OT concept of *royal priesthood* to the church (1Pt 2:9), which now exists to serve God by worshiping him through her words and deeds. She is being built into a spiritual temple where believers perform the role of a holy *priesthood* by offering “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1Pt 2:5). The church also serves God through the proclamation of the praises that belong to Him (1Pt 2:9).

**2:4–10** Jesus is called the **living stone** and the **cornerstone**, but also the **rejected** stone and the **stone to stumble over**. Peter assured his readers that they are God’s valuable possession—**living stones** built into a **spiritual house**. They are part of a living temple that is the corporate people of God, his unique possession. A **chosen race** (v. 9; cp. vv. 4, 6; Is 43:20) seems to refer to the corporate unity of believers. In Christ, believers of all races are unified. They are also a **royal priesthood**—a collective company of priests—who offer up **spiritual sacrifices** to God (v. 5). Believers have been called **out of darkness** and **into his marvelous light**. The transfer from darkness to light is a common NT description of conversion (Ac 26:18; 2Co 4:6; Eph 5:8).<sup>4</sup>

### KINGDOM OF PRIESTS

Although some expositions consider the meaning of “kingdom of priests” and “holy nation” separately, in a real sense they should be taken together. The text clearly divides the goal of the covenant relationship into two statements. The first is supported by an explanation or reason. A second statement combines the phrases “kingdom of priests” and “holy nation” either as a hendiadys or at least as an expression similar to Hebrew poetry, where a pair of parallel lines

<sup>3</sup> Hayford, J. W., Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). *Hayford's Bible handbook*. Nashville, TN; Atlanta, GA; London; Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

<sup>4</sup> Wilder, T. L. (2017). *1 Peter*. In E. A. Blum & T. Wax (Eds.), *CSB Study Bible: Notes* (pp. 1977–1978). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

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allows one to consider a topic from two slightly variant but similar viewpoints to create a full-orbed perspective on some proposition. These phrases will be explained here, each in turn, but with the meaning of the other phrase kept in mind. At the same time, we should also keep in mind that both phrases together are unpacking the full meaning of “personal treasure.”

First consider the phrase “kingdom of priests” found in this text. The full sentence is, “You will belong to me as a kingdom of priests” (*tihyû lî mamleket kōhanîm*). The *lamed* preposition in the phrase *lî* clearly indicates possession. The Hebrew word “kingdom” may refer to the domain or realm that is ruled, or to the exercise of kingly rule and sovereignty.<sup>37</sup> According to the main options, then, the phrase “kingdom of priests” could mean a domain of priests whom God rules or, alternatively, the exercise of royal office by those who are in fact priests—that is, a royal priesthood. It is difficult to decide between the two main options since the *lamed* preposition suggests the former reading while the term “priests” modifying “kingdom” suggests the latter. Yet in the latter option, understanding *kōhanîm* as a genitive of apposition after the collective *mamleket* (“royalty, royal body, royal house”) would be a more natural reading than to construe it as an attributive genitive. Thus we may view in “priests” a collective reference to all Israel as being in some sense “priests” rather than as being a “priestly kingship” or “priestly royalty.” Perhaps *both meanings* are intended, so that both the relationship between God and Israel and the relationship between Israel and the world are indicated. This ambiguity would serve well the theme *kingdom through covenant*.

What is the function of a priest? This question is also important in the interpretation. Some readings focus on the priest as an intermediary, so that the function of a priest is to bring others into the presence of God by offering sacrifices on their behalf. Dumbrell, who follows this track, sees the intermediary role as passive rather than active and missionary. Davies comments,

Dumbrell is on surer ground, then, with a moderate “service to the nations” position, seeing the service as somewhat passive in character. That is, it is by being who they are in relation to God that Israel serves the nations. Dumbrell ties this notion to the role of Abraham as the one through whom the nations would find blessing (Gen. 12:2–3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4). Dumbrell, however, regards any notion of status in v. 6 as being anticlimactic because status has already been dealt with in the word סגלה. Yet if my understanding of the syntax is correct, the expressions ממלכת כהנים and גוי שן are exegetical of סגלה, and spell out further dimensions for the reader’s understanding of the extent of the privilege it is to be Yhwh’s “special treasure.”

Alternatively, Davies’s reading focuses on priesthood as access to the divine presence. He argues that Exodus 19 itself provides an all-important clue to the significance of priesthood in verse 22:

Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them. (ESV)

This passage offers a virtual definition of what it is to be a priest: priests are those who approach or come near to Yahweh and who are consecrated and devoted to him. Davies notes further,

Central to any understanding of what a priest is, is the notion of his fitness to approach the deity and “minister” in his presence like an attendant in the court of a king. The tabernacle cult depicted in Exodus 25–31 and 35–40 is a stylized replica of what, in the widespread ideology of the ancient world, took place within the divine realm of the heavenly temple.

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Another argument supporting the emphasis Davies sees is found in the verb “consecrate” in Exodus 19:22, from the root **קדש**. Indeed, this verb and the related adjective **קדוש** is employed frequently in all things dealing with the activity of priests. Moreover, we should note that here in Exodus 19:5–6 the parallel term to the expression **ממלכת כהנים** is **גוי קדוש**. If “kingdom” is parallel to “nation,” then “holy” is parallel to “priests” in these two expressions. Although the common understanding of “holy” in North America has to do with separation, as we will see shortly, Davies rightly asserts that the primary meaning has rather to do with the divine sphere to which the person or object relates, not the sphere from which he, she, or it has thereby been separated:

Persons or objects are holy to Yhwh, or in one case to Baal (2 Kgs 10:20). They are fit to be associated with the one who is inherently **קדוש**, particularly when he is pictured as enthroned in his sanctuary (Isa. 6:3; Ps. 99:5, 9). It is no light matter to stand in the presence of Yhwh, the holy God, as the men of Beth Shemesh were aware (1 Sam 6:20). The “entrance liturgies” of Psalms 15 and 24 reinforce this demand for holiness on the part of the one who would approach God’s dwelling place.

If we regard **קדוש** as being a guide to the understanding of **כהנים**, the character of Israel as **כהנים** will relate to their consecration or readiness to encounter Yhwh. This is the point of the preparations outlined in Exod. 19:14–15, including the washing of clothes, and the abstinence from sexual relations.

Finally, Davies notes that the Sinai pericope simply contains no direct reference to Israel’s responsibilities toward the nations, and he believes we ought to be looking not for a *functional* definition of priesthood but for an *ontological* one. What priests *are* in their relation to God and in the eyes of the community is the issue.

The emphasis and focus for which Davies argues is correct because the arguments are based solidly on the text. Nonetheless, the focus on Israel’s priesthood as access to the divine presence and on a priority in the worship of Yahweh alone as God does not exclude the perspective of Dumbrell, who has rightly kept his eye on the metanarrative as the context for Exodus 19:5–6. Just as God, in Genesis 1–2, establishes his rule through a covenant relationship between himself and man and between man and the creation (wherein Adam’s priority according to Genesis 2 is to spend time in the divine presence to order his perspectives and role in the world), so God is extending his rule through the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12–22), promising blessing to the nations in relationship to Abraham, and through the covenant with his family Israel (Exodus 19–24) as a royal priesthood (with a priority on worship that results in being a light to the nations). Since Israel is settled at the navel of the world, the nations of the world will see displayed a right relationship to God, social justice in human interaction, and good stewardship of the earth’s resources. Apparently, it is appropriate and convenient for Davies to expound the duties of priests at a later point in his exposition, and he demonstrates from the biblical text that this includes the function of the priest as intermediary between God and people, so why exclude it from purview here?

We see, then, that Israel, the last Adam, will belong to God as a people under his rule and will exercise royal rule by spending time in the worship of God so necessary for display of the divine rule in one’s thoughts, words, and ways. Davies notes that the tabernacle, the construction of which is the topic of the literary unit following Exodus 19–24, is in form a miniaturized and portable reproduction of God’s heavenly sanctuary, of which Israel has caught a glimpse in the covenant

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ratification ceremony in Exodus 24:9–11. The cloud denoting the divine presence on Mount Sinai settles on the tabernacle in Exodus 40. Thus Israel carries the divine presence with her. Moreover, the tabernacle is also a replica of the garden in Eden and a representation of the universe; thus, just as Adam was to fulfill his mandate by devoting himself to worship as a priest in the garden sanctuary, so Israel as a new Adam is to fulfill her mandate by devoting herself to worship as a priest in the tabernacle and later the temple. Since in the Bible and the ancient Near East, kings are the ones who build temples, Israel as a nation building the tabernacle in Exodus 25–40 also depicts her royal status. She is a king-priest. And as we noted earlier, this is the point in Hosea 6:7: “But they [i.e., Israel], like Adam, have transgressed the covenant.” Israel’s covenant violation was in her role as king-priest.

Israel is also a vehicle for bringing the nations to the divine presence and rule. Israel would be a people completely devoted to the service of God. The rite of circumcision as practiced in Israel is an excellent illustration of this role. Probably the background for understanding circumcision is Egypt, where only the aristocracy, the highest order of priests, and the noblest elite warriors along with the Pharaoh and his family were circumcised, because only they were completely devoted to the service of the gods. In Deuteronomy 10:16, the command to Israel “Circumcise your hearts” is an exposition of the earlier command “to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good” (Deut. 10:12–13 NIV). Thus circumcision is an apt expression for the idea: be completely devoted to Yahweh.

Again, the summary provided by Davies is apt and deserves a hearing:

Israel’s cult shares some common features with the sanctuary ideology of the ancient world. The tabernacle is a representation of an ideal or restored cosmos, where God and man meet in an environment which transcends the limitations of the mundane world. The priest, granted access to the sacred space, is a model of the ideal held out to Israel of the meaning of its collective priesthood and the access to the presence of God of which it speaks. The priests are the chosen and privileged ones who are granted a royal dignity and the right of access to this realm, even, in the case of the high priest, to that sacred space which is regarded as the throne-room of heaven, the innermost sanctum of an ideal cosmos.

Priests share characteristics of royalty in the prevailing ideology of priesthood in the ancient Near East. Israel had a collective memory of ancient priest-kings, and the descriptions of the garb of the Israelite priests preserve something of these royal associations. In their priests, the Israelites had a perpetual reminder of their own royal-priestly standing and privilege. The detailed literary portrayal of the priesthood of Aaron and his sons serves to flesh out for the reader something of what is meant by the image of Israel’s corporate royal priesthood.

In keeping with the expectation that sanctuary-building is the work of a chosen king, acting on instructions of a god and according to a divinely revealed pattern, it is suggested that Israel corporately functions as the royal sanctuary builder, according to Exodus, in keeping with the designation of Israel as a “royal priesthood.”

In a work on biblical theology entitled *Dominion and Dynasty*, Stephen Dempster analyzes the phrase “kingdom of priests” in a way similar to the exposition given here:

The final phrase designates Israel as a particular type of kingdom. Instead of being a kingdom of a particular king, it will be a kingdom marked by priesthood; that is, service of God on behalf of people and *vice versa*. It will be “a kingdom run not by politicians depending upon strength and connivance but by priests depending upon faith in Yahweh, a servant nation instead of a ruling

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nation” (Durham 263). Israel will thus redefine the meaning of dominion—service. This will be its distinctive task, its distinguishing characteristic among the world of nations.

In sum, the call of Israel to be a royal priesthood connects the Israelite covenant to the Abrahamic. Psalm 67 draws this out very well:

May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face to shine upon us, Selah  
that your way may be known on earth,  
your saving power among all nations.  
Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you! (Ps. 67:1–3 ESV)

In verse 1, we see Israel praying as a priest, since the nation as a whole is invoking the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6. The goal or purpose of invoking this blessing is so that salvation may come to the nations. This is none other than the goal of the Abrahamic covenant.<sup>5</sup>

#### NOTES:

## KING

As a descendant of David, Jesus was qualified to take the throne of Israel. Meeting this requirement was a primary qualification of the promised Old Testament Messiah (Matt. 1:1–2:6). In the Gospels, the title of “King” is most often applied to Jesus at the end of His earthly life. It was Pilate, a Roman and an unbeliever, who insisted that a sign be posted above Jesus as He hung on the cross to proclaim Him “KING OF THE JEWS” (Matt. 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19).

When Jesus returns, He is to be acknowledged by all as the ultimate Ruler, the “Lord of lords and King of kings” (Rev. 17:14). Yet to grasp what it means today to acknowledge Jesus as our king, we need to understand more of what the term meant in the first century A.D.

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Augustus’s “kingdom” was the Roman world wherever his authority was acknowledged.



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<sup>5</sup> Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2018). *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Second Edition, pp. 356–362). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

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**The meaning of kingdom.** Today we think of a kingdom as a geographical district with national borders. A “king” is a person who rules a kingdom. But in biblical times, a kingdom was not so much a land as it was the sphere of authority enjoyed by a ruler. And this authority need not have geographical boundaries.

While the kingdom of the Roman emperor Augustus extended throughout the empire, the authority of, say, a King of Phrygia, was recognized even by Phrygians who lived in the Roman Empire. Similarly today we acknowledge the authority of the government of the country where we live. But as citizens of Jesus’ kingdom, we acknowledge Christ’s authority as being supreme.

In the New Testament, too, a kingdom is a realm in which a king exerts control and authority. Thus, the “kingdom of God” is not necessarily a place, and it need not have geographical borders. The kingdom of God is any realm over which God exercises control.

**Kingdom in the Old Testament.** In the Old Testament, two concepts of kingdom are developed. The first one is that God is King over the entire universe, for ultimately He is in control of everything. Regardless of whether that control is acknowledged by human beings, God’s controlling influence over the course of events and in human lives nevertheless exists (Dan. 4:34, 35).

Of course, the Old Testament prophets look forward to a future expression of God’s rule that will be visible and unmistakable. In that future kingdom, a descendant of David is to rule the earth, and all nations everywhere will submit to God’s Anointed One (Ps. 2). In fact the Old Testament uniformly and consistently envisions a day when earth will be ruled by the Messiah, and “the kingdom shall be the LORD’S” (Obad. 21). It is over this kingdom that Jesus will rule as King of kings and Lord of lords at history’s end (Rev. 19:16).

**Kingdom in the New Testament.** The New Testament assumes both aspects of God’s kingdom expressed in the Old Testament. Indeed, after His resurrection, Jesus’ disciples asked Him whether this was the time when He would “restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6). Jesus responded, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (v. 7). The kingdom the prophets foresaw will be established when Christ returns. But until then God will exercise His rule in a totally unexpected way. In other words, a form of His kingdom not revealed in the Old Testament will emerge!

That form of God’s kingdom is a hidden one in which believers acknowledge Christ as King and submit to His will. Meanwhile unbelievers all around us are blind to the reality of this kingdom. The framework of Christ’s hidden kingdom is revealed in the Gospels, and how we are to live as citizens of Jesus’ kingdom is developed in the Epistles.

**Jesus’ present kingdom in the Gospels.** The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) is best understood as Jesus’ statement of how people of any age live when they acknowledge God’s sovereignty and abandon themselves to His will. The *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words* offers the following summary:

The Beatitudes describe the values of a person living a kingdom lifestyle (Mt 5:3–12). Jesus then gives a series of illustrations, showing how inner values find expression in lifestyle (5:17–



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42). As king, Jesus acts to transform the character of his subjects. Jesus in the present kingdom is working in our inner selves to change our outward behavior. Jesus goes on to show how we can experience this transforming power. We focus on our “in secret” relationship with the Lord, not on visible piety (6:1–18). We give priority to seeking God’s kingdom and righteousness, and we trust our Father to supply our material needs (6:19–33). We relate to other kingdom citizens as brothers and sisters and reject every claim of a right to judge or control them (Mt 7:1–14). Instead of relying on human leaders, we rely on the simple words of Jesus and commit ourselves to obey them (p. 380).

The kingdom as described in the Gospels is a hidden one, whose existence is not visible to those who refuse to believe. But to those who commit themselves to Jesus as King and gladly obey Him, God’s present kingdom is indeed real.

Matthew 13 develops a series of parables about the kingdom. These parables contrast the present form of Jesus’ rule with the form of His rule described in the Old Testament and expected by first-century Jews.

**Jesus’ present kingdom in the Epistles.** Paul tells us that through Christ believers have been delivered from “the power of darkness and conveyed... into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Col. 1:13). As citizens of Jesus’ present kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; James 2:5), we acknowledge Jesus as our Ruler. In doing His will here on earth, we not only are becoming living expressions of the present kingdom of God, but also we are placing ourselves under the sovereign rule of King Jesus, who controls every circumstance of our lives. And because King Jesus is present within His own, the unmatched power of God can find supernatural expression through our live<sup>6</sup>

## What was the significance of the temple veil being torn in two when Jesus died?

During the lifetime of Jesus, the holy temple in Jerusalem was the center of Jewish religious life. The temple was the place where animal sacrifices were carried out and worship according to the Law of Moses was followed faithfully.

Hebrews 9:1–9 tells us that in the temple a veil separated the Holy of Holies—the earthly dwelling place of God’s presence—from the rest of the temple where men dwelt.

This signified that man was separated from God by sin (Isaiah 59:1–2).

Only the high priest was permitted to pass beyond this veil once each year (Exodus 30:10; Hebrews 9:7) to enter into God’s presence for all of Israel and make atonement for their sins (Leviticus 16). Solomon’s temple was 30 cubits high (1 Kings 6:2), but Herod had increased the height to 40 cubits, according to the writings of Josephus, a first century Jewish historian. There is uncertainty as to the exact measurement of a cubit, but it is safe to assume that this veil was somewhere near 60 feet high. Josephus also tells us that the veil was four inches thick and that horses tied to each

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<sup>6</sup> Richards, L. (2001). *Every name of God in the Bible* (pp. 151–154). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

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side could not pull the veil apart. The book of Exodus teaches that this thick veil was fashioned from blue, purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen.

The size and thickness of the veil makes the events occurring at the moment of Jesus' death on the cross so much more momentous. "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (**Matthew 27:50–51a**).

So, what do we make of this? What significance does this torn veil have for us today? Above all, the tearing of the veil at the moment of Jesus' death dramatically symbolized that His sacrifice, the shedding of His own blood, was a sufficient atonement for sins. It signified that now the way into the Holy of Holies was open for all people, for all time, both Jew and Gentile.

When Jesus died, the veil was torn, and God moved out of that place never again to dwell in a temple made with hands (Acts 17:24). God was through with that temple and its religious system, and the temple and Jerusalem were left "desolate" (destroyed by the Romans) in A.D. 70, just as Jesus prophesied in Luke 13:35. As long as the temple stood, it signified the continuation of the Old Covenant. Hebrews 9:8–9 refers to the age that was passing away as the new covenant was being established (Hebrews 8:13).

In a sense, the veil was symbolic of Christ Himself as the only way to the Father (John 14:6). This is indicated by the fact that the high priest had to enter the Holy of Holies through the veil. Now Christ is our superior High Priest, and as believers in His finished work, we partake of His better priesthood. We can now enter the Holy of Holies through Him. Hebrews 10:19–20 says that the faithful enter into the sanctuary by the "blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the veil, that is, through his flesh." Here we see the image of Jesus' flesh being torn for us just as He was tearing the veil for us.

The veil being torn from top to bottom is a fact of history. The profound significance of this event is explained in glorious detail in Hebrews. The things of the temple were shadows of things to come, and they all ultimately point us to Jesus Christ. He was the veil to the Holy of Holies, and through His death the faithful now have free access to God.

The veil in the temple was a constant reminder that sin renders humanity unfit for the presence of God. The fact that the sin offering was offered annually and countless other sacrifices repeated daily showed graphically that sin could not truly be atoned for or erased by mere animal sacrifices. Jesus Christ, through His death, has removed the barriers between God and man, and now we may approach Him with confidence and boldness (Hebrews 4:14–16).<sup>7</sup>

*The Priesthood of Believers.* This (royal) high priesthood of Jesus Christ connects to the "royal priesthood" of believers: "you are ... a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9a). The obvious reference to Exodus 19:6 suggests that the church functions in this present age as God's New Testament kingdom of priests much like the nation of Israel did in the Old Testament. As such we are responsible to carry out the ministry of proclaiming to the world "the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9b).

A closely related idea (but without the "royal" connections) is Peter's earlier description of the church as a group of believers who are being (NIV), or should allow themselves to be (NRSV), "built into a spiritual house [Jesus himself being the living and choice cornerstone, 1 Peter 2:4, 6–8] to

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<sup>7</sup> Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). [\*Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered\*](#). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

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be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). ~~Thus, as fellow priests with Jesus we offer up to God our sacrifices of praise (Heb. 13:15), our doing good and sharing (Heb. 13:16), and ultimately our present physical bodies in the interest of conforming to his standards (Rom. 12:1–2). It is important to observe that here the corporate priesthood of the church shades into the priesthood of the individual believer. Moreover, our ministry in the gospel can be described as an offering of our very life in priestly service to the church (Phil. 2:17), by which we can produce a harvest of sanctified people whom we present to God as an acceptable offering.~~

Finally, corporate Israel in the Old Testament functioned as a kingdom of priests in both its mediation between God and the other nations and in its service of worship to the Lord in the sanctuary (Exod. 19:5–6). Similarly, the priesthood of the church has mediatorial features as well as aspects that correspond to the sanctuary worship of the Old Testament, sometimes expressed separately and sometimes jointly in the various New Testament passages related to the priesthood of believers.<sup>8</sup>

**PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS** Christian belief that every believer has direct access to God through Jesus Christ and that the church is a fellowship of priests serving together under the lordship of Christ.

The concept of priesthood is integral to both the OT and the NT and is fulfilled in Christ as Mediator and great high priest. The foundation of the priestly ministry is found in the OT where the priestly ministry is assigned to the Aaronic line of descent and the tribe of Levi (Exod. 40:13, Num. 1:47–54). According to the OT model, the priest fulfilled a representative function—entering the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement and making a sacrificial offering on behalf of the people.

This representational role was fulfilled by Christ, whose offices as Prophet, Priest, and King describe His accomplished and continuing work. As mediator, Christ fulfilled the representational role to which the Aaronic priesthood pointed. The letter to the Hebrews explains this fulfillment by describing Jesus Christ as the “great high priest” who, having accomplished His mediatorial work of substitutionary atonement, has now passed through the heavens (Heb. 4:14).

Christ’s death on the cross is described as a priestly act that once for all paid the penalty for our sin. As priest, Christ did not take the blood of a representative animal into the Holy of Holies but instead entered “the greater and more perfect tabernacle” and shed His own blood to obtain “eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:11–12 HCSB).

Now that Christ has fulfilled the representational role of the priesthood, and since He is the one mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5), there is no continuing need or role for a human priest. No longer does a human priest stand to represent other humans before God.

As the people of God, the church is now a “royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9), ministering together in the name of Christ. Though we do not represent one another before the Father, believers are called to pray for one another, to encourage each other to good works, and to call one another to holiness.

Central to the doctrine of the priesthood of believers is the concept of the gathered church, or congregationalism. Each church is comprised of believers who have been redeemed by Jesus

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<sup>8</sup> Averbeck, R. E. (1996). [Priest, Priesthood](#). In *Evangelical dictionary of biblical theology* (electronic ed., p. 637). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

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Christ and now serve as priests together. In its purest sense this doctrine refers to believers gathered together under the lordship of Christ, not to individual believers standing alone. The doctrine does, however, rightly affirm that we need no human priest to stand between the individual believer and God. As mediator, Jesus Christ alone fulfills that role.

A graphic illustration of this was provided when the great veil in the temple separating the holy of holies from the larger temple was torn from top to bottom. Similarly, the Apostle Paul described Christ's atonement as breaking down the barriers that had separated and segregated persons by race and gender in the temple (Eph. 2:14–16).

As priests together, Christians are to offer “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5). These spiritual sacrifices replace any notion of representational or sacramental ministrations. The doctrine of the priesthood of believers thus affirms the right of every believer to fellowship with God through Christ, and the obligation of every believer to be a fully functioning member of a congregation, exercising Christian discipleship among the fellowship of other believer-priests.

R. Albert Mohler, Jr.<sup>9</sup>

## THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

### BIBLICAL TERMS APPLIED TO THE CHURCH

The Church has previously been defined by examining primary biblical terms, such as *ekklesia* (a group of citizens assembled together for a specific purpose) and *kuriakos* (a group which belongs to the Lord). The nature of the Church, however, is far too extensive to be encompassed in a few simple definitions. The Bible uses numerous metaphorical descriptions for the Church, each of which portrays a different aspect of what the Church is and what it is called to do. Paul Minear indicates that as many as eighty New Testament terms delineate the meaning and purpose of the Church. An exploration of each of them would make a fascinating study, but for the present chapter several of the more significant designations will be examined.

*People of God.* The apostle Paul borrowed from the Old Testament description of Israel and applied it to the New Testament Church when he declared, “As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people’ ” (2 Cor. 6:16; cf. Lev. 26:12). Throughout the Scriptures, the Church is depicted as God’s people. Just as in the Old Testament God created Israel to be a people for himself, so the New Testament Church is God’s creation, “a people belonging to God” (1 Pet. 2:9–10; cf. Deut. 10:15; Hosea 1:10). From the Church’s beginning and throughout its history, it is clear the Church’s destiny is founded upon the divine initiative and calling of God. As Robert L. Saucy notes, the Church is “a people called forth by God, incorporated into Christ, and indwelt by the Spirit.”

As the people of God, the Church is described by many very meaningful terms. The Church is an “elect” body. This does not mean that God has arbitrarily selected some for salvation and others for eternal condemnation. The people of God are called “elect” in the New Testament because God has “chosen” that the Church should do His work in this age by the Holy Spirit, who is actively at work to sanctify and conform believers to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:28–29).

Over one hundred times in the New Testament, the people of God are referred to as the “saints,” or “holy ones,” (Gk. *hagiois*) of God. This does not imply that those so designated have achieved a superior spiritual status or that their behavior could be depicted as perfect or “saintly.” (The many references to the Church in Corinth as “saints of God” should serve as a sufficient indication of this.) Rather, this again draws attention to the fact that the Church is God’s creation and that by His divine initiative believers are “called to be holy” (1 Cor. 1:2). The people of God are frequently designated as those who are “in Christ,” which suggests that they are the recipients of Christ’s atoning work, and they share corporately in the privileges and responsibilities of being called Christians (Gk. *Christianous*).

The people of God are referred to in other ways. Three are worthy of brief mention: “believers,” “brethren,” and “disciples.” “Believers” is from the Greek term *pistoi*, “the faithful ones.” This term intimates that the people of God have not simply believed, that is, given mental assent at some point in the past to the saving work of Christ, but rather that they live continuously in the attitude of faith, obedient trust, and commitment to their Savior. (This is further highlighted by the fact that *pistoi* is normally found in the present tense in the New Testament, denoting ongoing action.) “Brethren” (Gk. *adelphoi*) is a generic term, referring to both men and women, frequently used by the New Testament writers to express the fact that Christians are called to love not only the Lord, but also one another (1 John 3:16). Such a mutual love and fellowship are inherent among the people of God and help to remind them that regardless of individual callings or offices of ministry, all the brethren have equal standing in the presence of the Lord (Matt. 23:8).

The word “disciples” (Gk. *mathētai*) means “learners” or “pupils.” Being such a student in biblical times meant more than listening to and mentally assimilating information given by a teacher. It also denoted that one would emulate the teacher’s character and conduct. The people of God are indeed

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<sup>9</sup> Mohler, R. A., Jr. (2003). [Priesthood of Believers](#). In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (pp. 1327–1328). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

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called to be such disciples of their Teacher, Christ. As Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching [literally, “if you remain or continue in my word”], you are really my disciples” (John 8:31). Jesus did not falsely present the life of being His disciple as something easy or glamorous (see Luke 14:26–33), but He did indicate that it is no less than essential for those who desire to follow Him. The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer has aptly noted that true Christian discipleship requires a willingness to die to self and to give all to Christ. Such authentic discipleship is possible only through what Bonhoeffer termed “costly grace” as, “Such grace is *costly* because it calls us to follow, and it is *grace* because it calls us to follow *Jesus Christ*. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life.”

*Body of Christ.* A very meaningful biblical image for the Church is the “body of Christ.” This expression was a favorite of the apostle Paul, who often compared the parts of the human body to the interrelationships and functions of the members of the Church. Paul’s writing emphasizes the true unity that is essential in the Church. For example, “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts.... So it is with Christ” (1 Cor. 12:12). Just as the body of Christ is designed to function effectively as one, so the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to equip the body by “the same Spirit ... the same Lord ... the same God [who] works all of them in all men ... for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:4–7). Because of this, members of Christ’s body are to exercise great caution that “there should be no division [Gk. *schisma*] in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other” (1 Cor. 12:25; cf. Rom. 12:5). Christians can have this unity and mutual concern because they are “all baptized by one Spirit into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13). The Holy Spirit’s indwelling each member of the body of Christ allows for the legitimate manifestation of this unity. Gordon D. Fee correctly states, “Our desperate need is for a sovereign work of the Spirit to do among us what all our ‘programmed unity’ cannot.”

While there must be unity within the body of Christ, it is not antithetical to emphasize that there is a necessary diversity if the body of Christ is to function properly. In the same context in which Paul emphasizes unity, he states, “Now the body is not made up of one part, but of many” (1 Cor. 12:14). Referring to the same analogy in a different Epistle, Paul declares, “Each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function” (Rom. 12:4). Fee observes that unity “does not mean uniformity.... there is no such thing as true unity without diversity.”

The significant and beauty of this diversity are stressed throughout 1 Corinthians 12, especially in connection with the spiritual gifts that are so essential for the ministry of the Church (see 1 Cor. 12:7–11, 27–31; cf. Rom. 12:4–8). God has not cast each member of the Church in the same mold, and He does not call all the members to the same ministry or equip them with the same gift. Rather, just as with the human body, God has so composed the Church that it functions most effectively when each part (or member) is efficiently fulfilling the role (or calling) for which it was designed.

In this way, there is “unity in diversity” within the body of Christ. In other words, inherent in this metaphor is the idea of mutuality, of each believer working with and striving for the edification of other believers. For example, this may involve suffering with those in pain or rejoicing with those being honored (1 Cor. 12:26); bearing the burdens of a brother or sister in the Lord (Gal. 6:2) or helping to restore one who has fallen into sin (Gal. 6:1). There are countless other practical ways in which this mutuality is exemplified in Scripture. The main point here is that a member of the body of Christ cannot have an exclusive, individualistic relationship with the Lord—each “individual” is in fact a necessary component of the corporate structure of the Church. As Claude Welch asserts, “There is no purely private Christianity, for to be in Christ is to be in the church, and to be in the church is to be in Christ, and any attempt to separate relation to Christ in faith from membership in the Church is a perversion of the New Testament understanding.”

A final aspect that is integral to the image of the body of Christ is the Body’s relation to its Head, Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:22–23; 5:23). As the Head of the Body, Christ is both the source and the sustenance of life for the Church. As its members are arranged under Christ’s headship and function as He desires, the body of Christ will be nourished and sustained and will grow “as God causes it to grow” (Col. 2:19). The unity, diversity, and mutuality that are indispensable for the body of Christ are attainable as the Church “will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body ... grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Eph. 4:15–16).

*Temple of the Spirit.* Another very meaningful New Testament image for the Church is its depiction as the “temple of the Holy Spirit.” The biblical writers make use of several symbols for the building components of this Temple, which correspond to the materials necessary for the construction of an earthly structure. For instance, any building needs a solid foundation. Paul clearly indicates that the primary foundation of the Church is the historical person and work of Christ; “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). Yet in another letter Paul suggests that there is a sense in which the Church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph. 2:20). Perhaps this means that these early leaders were uniquely used by the Lord to establish and undergird the temple of the Spirit with the teachings and practices they had learned from Christ, which continue to be communicated to believers today through Scripture.

Another important component of this building imagery, closely associated with the foundation, is the cornerstone. In modern buildings a cornerstone is usually more symbolic than integral, perhaps giving the date of its being laid and the names of key benefactors. In the biblical era, however, the cornerstone was very significant: It was typically larger than the other stones and helped to control the proper design for the rest of the building, bringing symmetry to the remainder of the edifice. Christ is described as the “chief cornerstone” through whom “the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:20–21; cf. 1 Pet. 2:6–7).

Connected to the cornerstone were the normal stones necessary to complete the structure. The apostle Peter depicts believers in this role, describing them as “living stones, [who] are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:5). The term used here by Peter is *lithos*, a common Greek word for stone. However, unlike the more familiar synonyms *petros* (a loose stone or small pebble) and *petra* (a solid rock sufficient to build on), the “living

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stones” (Gk. *lithoi zōntes*) in this context suggest “worked stones,” that is, those that have been hewn and shaped by the master builder (i.e., Christ) for a proper fitting. In both Ephesians 2 and 1 Peter 2, the verbs which describe the building of this Temple are usually found in the present tense, conveying a sense of continuous action. Perhaps it could be inferred from this that Christians are, as the saying goes, “still under construction.” The purpose, of course, is to emphasize that the sanctifying work of the Spirit is a progressive, ongoing venture to accomplish God’s purposes within the lives of believers. They are being “joined together ... to become a holy temple in the Lord.... in him ... *being built* together *to become* a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Eph. 2:21–22).

The metaphor of the temple of the Holy Spirit adds further surety that the Church is indwelt by God’s Spirit, whether individually or collectively. For example, Paul queried the Corinthian believers, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?... God’s temple is sacred, and you are the temple” (1 Cor. 3:16–17). In this particular passage, Paul is addressing the Church corporately (“you” is plural in the Gk.). In 1 Corinthians 6:19, however, Paul poses a similar question to individual believers (“you” is singular): “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” In both 1 Corinthians 3 and 6, as well as in a similar passage in 2 Corinthians 6:16ff., the word used by Paul for “temple” is *naos*. Unlike the more general term *hieron*, which refers to the whole temple, including its courts, *naos* signifies the inner sanctuary, the Holy of Holies where the Lord manifests His presence in a special way. Paul is in effect saying that believers, as the temple of the Holy Spirit, are nothing less than the habitation of God.

The Spirit of God not only conveys power to the Church for service (Acts 1:8), but also by dwelling within He imparts His life to it. Consequently, there is a true sense in which those qualities that exemplify His nature (e.g. the “fruit of the Spirit,” Gal. 5:22–23) are to be found in the Church, evidencing the reality that the Church is “keep[ing] in step with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25).

*Other Images.* In addition to the somewhat Trinitarian pattern of images of the Church mentioned above (people of God, body of Christ, temple of the Holy Spirit), many other biblical metaphors help to broaden one’s perspective of the nature of the Church. Portrayals of the Church as the priesthood of believers (1 Pet. 2:5, 9), the Bride of Christ (Eph. 5:23–32), the flock of the Good Shepherd (John 10:1–18), and the branches of the True Vine (John 15:1–8) are a sampling of the diverse ways in which Scripture represents the makeup and distinct features of the one true Church, composed, as it is, of the redeemed. In different ways, these biblical images illustrates the Church’s identity and purpose, which Jesus expressed so beautifully in His High Priestly Prayer:

My prayer is ... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.... May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (John 17:21, 23).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Dusing, M. L. (2007). [The New Testament Church](#). In S. M. Horton (Ed.), *Systematic Theology: Revised Edition* (pp. 532–538). Springfield, MO: Logion Press.



## EARLY REFORMERS

Existing groups, such as the Waldenses in Italy, had continued underground resistance to the church authority and promoted popular support for Reformation views. John Wycliffe (c. 1330–1384) was perhaps the first reformer of this period. He studied and taught at Oxford. In 1376 he wrote *Of Civil Dominion*, in which he protested the church’s abuse of property ownership, advocating that the property be taken away from the church. In 1382 in his preaching and writing he developed the views of the priesthood of believers, that Christ—not the pope—is the head of the church, that the Bible is the final authority of all believers. He was the first to translate the New Testament into English (from the Latin text). His views caused his censure, and he was forced to retire to his rectory. He founded the Lollards, a group that continued his preaching and reforming work.

Wycliffe’s ideas reached Bohemia, and Jan Hus (c. 1372–1415), rector of the University of Prague, began preaching reform along similar lines. Hus was called to the Council of Constance, with the emperor’s guarantee of safety, in order to examine his views. He was condemned and burned at the stake. The Moravian church grew out of his following. Hus influenced both Martin Luther (who, when accused of being a follower of Hus, replied that Hus’s views were pretty good!) and John Wesley (through the Moravian brethren).<sup>11</sup>

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### PRIESTHOOD OF THE BELIEVER: *UNLIMITED ACCESS TO GOD*

According to the New Testament, all believers are “priests,” indicating not only a special privilege of unlimited access to God but also the opportunity for ministries in His name (1 Pet. 2:5–9). Believers are instructed to offer spiritual sacrifices and to declare the wonderful deeds of the Lord. *All* believers are to participate in the total mission of the church—both worship and service.

Within this broad context of ministry, some believers are called to designated ministry roles—for example, to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph. 4:11). Others are to serve in the midst of and on behalf of the entire people of God as “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor. 5:18–20). All believers are exhorted to meet the needs of those experiencing sickness, suffering, and trouble, as well as to build up one another in the body of Christ. The priesthood offered to believers is one not only of privilege in having immediate access to God through Jesus Christ but also of responsibility for intercession and for presenting Christ to the world through personal witness.

See also notes on Access to God (Rom. 10); Decision Making (1 Cor. 8); Evangelism (Matt. 28; John 6; Col. 4; 1 Pet. 3); God’s Will (Eph. 5)<sup>12</sup>

## PART TWO

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<sup>11</sup> McDowell, J. (1997). *Josh McDowell’s handbook on apologetics* (electronic ed.). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). *The Woman’s Study Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



## Interpreting Scripture

### Introduction

For sixteenth-century Protestants nothing shaped their personal devotion or spirituality more than the Bible, or so it is often said. In fact, that statement has to be qualified in two important ways. First, in the earliest decades of the Reformation, most people heard the Bible read and taught in church instead of studying their personal copy at home. It took time for vernacular translations from the Hebrew and Greek to be published. True, Martin Luther's German New Testament and William Tyndale's English translation appeared in the 1520s, but complete bibles in German, French, and English were not printed until the 1530s. Even then, the cost of a personal copy and the inability to read prevented many people from buying their own bibles. For the earliest Protestants, sermons and catechisms were more likely to serve as the sources of their religious formation than privately owned bibles.

Second, Protestant methods of teaching and interpreting the Bible varied widely from place to place. The Bible was the chief authority for Protestant doctrine, and in principle believers guided by the Holy Spirit could interpret the text for themselves without deferring to the official teaching of the clergy. In practice, however, Protestant ministers insisted that their training and their office qualified them to interpret the Bible for their flocks. It is well known that Protestant reformers disagreed among themselves over the meaning of important passages, and those disagreements led to the distinctive devotional and worship practices that characterized emerging Protestant churches. The Bible did indeed influence the spirituality of the laity, but less through the private study of scripture than through their participation in public rituals and instruction where the impact of the Bible was less direct and immediate.

For all Protestants the Bible was *scripture*, that is, not just a religious book but sacred text whose authority was to be honored and whose meaning for the community of believers was vital. Most reformers believed the meaning of scripture was clear but, as the texts below illustrate, sundry criteria were offered for establishing that clarity. In one of his earliest sermons Zwingli sought to prove from scripture itself that its meaning was clear to everyone who was enlightened by the Holy Spirit. His statement is a bold defense of the priesthood of believers, the principle stated by Luther in 1520 as he sought to refute the claim that the right to interpret scripture authoritatively belonged to the papacy. According to Zwingli, the Holy Spirit enabled believers to find the clear word of God in scripture, but that word of God might or might not be the most literal interpretation of the text. After he and Luther disagreed about the correct meaning of "this [bread] is my body," the clarity of scripture seemed less clear than before; which interpretation offered more clarity and therefore carried more weight, the literal or the spiritual?

One champion of the spiritual interpretation, the Silesian nobleman Caspar Schwenckfeld, defended his position in a crisp letter to the Lutheran pastor Cordatus. Schwenckfeld is often called a spiritualist because, like Zwingli, he clashed with Luther over the words of institution and because he made a more sweeping claim than did Zwingli for the superiority of spiritual interpretation. Although Luther defended the literal meaning of Jesus' words at the Last Supper, he could hardly be called a literalist, especially when it came to interpreting the Old Testament. Fully aware of the challenge that the Hebrew scripture presented to Christian interpreters and drawing on the venerable tradition of spiritual interpretation, Luther did not hesitate to find Christ and Christian teaching in the Hebrew scripture, as he does below in his favorite psalm. His

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colleague in Wittenberg, Philip Melancthon, unabashedly applied the prophecy of Jeremiah to the crisis faced by German Protestants after Luther's death, and indeed that is what it meant for the Hebrew scripture to become sacred text also for Christians. If it could not be applied to the churches of the sixteenth century, then why not leave it out of the Bible?

Unexpectedly, it is the English reformer and translator William Tyndale who offers a different proposal for determining the clear and useful meaning of scripture. "The knowledge of our baptism is the key and the light of the scripture," he wrote. If we would not merely claim to be enlightened by the Spirit but learn and take to heart what our baptism means before we set out to interpret the Bible, then the meaning of the text would become clear. His proposal, which Luther also could have made, applies scripture directly to personal devotion, because it requires interpreters to ponder their baptism and hence to ask how the text of scripture nurtures their Christian identity. Instead of presupposing a priesthood of believers, it emphasizes, as it were, a priesthood of the baptized as the community in which scripture can most effectively do its work of shaping spirituality.<sup>13</sup>

## PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS

The temple was staffed with priests, a select corps of men who represented the people before God. Much of their work involved the offering of sacrifices on behalf of the people.

"The universal priesthood of all believers" was a watchword of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Martin Luther taught, as the Scriptures teach, that every Christian has direct access to God. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5). Paul says that through Christ both Jews and Gentiles "have access to the Father by one Spirit" (Eph. 2:18). This verse is especially interesting because immediately after it, Paul talks about the spiritual temple. So the Spirit establishes direct contact between God and believers. And because this is a work of the Holy Spirit, Peter can refer to all believers as "a holy priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:5). He goes on in verse 9 to speak of Christians as "a royal priesthood"—a thought echoed in the Book of Revelation where the idea of priesthood is linked with that of reigning with Christ (1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

The spiritual priesthood of the spiritual temple must therefore offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God (1 Pet. 2:5). The New Testament clearly mentions three such sacrifices:

(1) Our Bodies. The one supreme Sacrifice was crucified on the cross, so that God no longer wishes dead sacrifices to be offered to him; he now seeks living sacrifices. Paul speaks of this when he says, "I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship" (Rom. 12:1).

(2) Our Praise. Animal sacrifices were made daily in the temple, so that there was a continual burning of their bodies with the resultant smoke and aroma ascending to God. Against this backdrop, Christians are told to "continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name" (Heb. 13:15).

(3) Our Good Works. "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Heb. 13:16). Paul commends the Philippians for sending him things that helped to ease the hardships of prison life, characterizing them as "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (Phil. 4:18).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Hendrix, S. H., & McGinn, B. (Eds.). (2009). *Early Protestant Spirituality*. (S. H. Hendrix, Trans.) (pp. 41–43). New York; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

<sup>14</sup> Palma, A. D. (2001). *The Holy Spirit: A Pentecostal Perspective* (pp. 59–60). Springfield, MO: Logion Press; Gospel Publishing House.

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**Priesthood.** Office or function of a priest; the condition of being a priest. The modern word “priest” (in French *prêtre* and in German *priester*) is used of a clergyman in Episcopalian churches (Roman, Orthodox, and Anglican). It is also used in the description of the whole church as “a royal priesthood” (1 Pt 2:9). To ascertain how this usage arose and to see what priesthood means it is necessary to look briefly at both biblical and theological developments.

**OT.** In the covenant made between God and Israel, the whole people is seen as a “kingdom of priests” and thus a holy people (Ex 19:6). Within this context, specific priestly activities belonged to three orders—high priest, priest, and Levite. Priests were male descendants of Aaron (Nm 3:10) and Levites were male members of the tribe of Levi. The chief functions of the priesthood were in the temple. They looked after the ceremonial vessels and performed the sacrifices. In doing their duties they dressed in special, symbolic vestments. They were also teachers, passing on the sacred traditions of the nation. This included such matters as medical information (Lv 13–15). The high priest was the spiritual head of Israel and he had special functions, for example, entering the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement (Lv 16). The Levites assisted the priests and served the congregation in the temple. They sang the psalms, kept the temple courts clean, helped to prepare certain sacrifices and offerings, and also had a teaching function.

Through this threefold order, the priesthood of the nation was exercised. By it the people offered worship to God, made intercessions and petitions, and learned of God’s will. Thus what occurred in the worship of every pious home as the head of the house guided his family occurred in a larger and ceremonial way in the temple.

**NT.** It is remarkable that the term “priest” is never used in the NT of a minister or order in the church. Certainly the usage with reference to Judaism and paganism continues (Acts 4:1, 6; 14:13) but it is never introduced into the church. The Letter to the Hebrews presents the OT priesthood as fulfilled in Jesus Christ. First of all, he has been appointed high priest by God himself (5:4–6). Yet it is a superior priesthood to that of Aaron (7:1–28). Second, being totally sympathetic to the needs of sinful people and tempted in all points like them, he was without sin (4:15; 7:26). Third, instead of offering animal sacrifices to take away sin, he offered himself, as the sinless lamb, to take away sin. This was a perfect atonement (7:27; 9:24–28; 10:10–19).

Not only was the OT sacrificial system fulfilled, it was also finished by the unique, unrepeatable, and unlimited sacrifice of Christ. Having risen from the dead he is a priest forever (7:17) and he remains the same “yesterday and today and for ever” (13:8). Part of his high priesthood is to offer intercession for his people (7:25). He is the mediator of a new and better covenant (7:22; 8:6; 9:15). Only through him are sinful human beings able to enter the holy presence of God and be accepted as children of God (Jn 14:6; 2 Cor 5:18–20; 1 Tm 2:5). Therefore, whatever priesthood Christians have they have only in and through Christ, their High Priest and Mediator.

The NT describes believers as “a royal priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pt 2:5); “priests to his God and Father” (Rv 1:6); “a kingdom and priests to our God” (Rv 5:10); “priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years” (Rv 20:6). Such statements as these are reflected in Exodus 19:6: “You shall be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation” (see also Ps 132:9, 16; Is 61:6). Obviously the idea has its roots in the OT and is given through Christ a new and larger content in the NT.

What, then, does the priesthood of all believers mean in the NT? The high priesthood of Christ may be defined as his complete dedication and obedience to God, his Father, and unlimited compassion for his fellow human beings. At the center is his sacrificial death on the cross. On this basis and in union with him, the priesthood of Christians is their sacrificial obedience to God; this involves spiritual worship and love of God and compassionate activity and prayer for their fellow human beings. Paul wrote: “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1). Each Christian offers his whole body to Christ and each local church offers itself wholly to Christ; and Christ offers his whole body (the church) to God the Father. Thus, in and by Christ, the priesthood of believers is exercised and made effectual. In the hearts of believers is the indwelling Spirit and it is in his power that acceptable service and worship is offered. Christ is the pattern of priesthood as well as being high priest.

***The Nature of Priesthood.*** The concrete content of priesthood may be put in the following way:

1. Direct access to God. By faith all Christians approach God directly and personally (Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18) through Christ.

2. Offering spiritual sacrifices to God. The whole life of the Christian is to be a service of love — “a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God” (Phil 4:18). All work, activity, prayer, and praise is to be offered to God.

3. Declaring the gospel. By word and deed Christians are to reveal the love of God in Christ. They are to “declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pt 2:9), and they are to make sure that even pagans can recognize their behavior as good (1 Pt 2:12).

4. Worshiping as a local church. “Supplications, prayer, intercessions, and thanksgivings” are to be made for all persons (1 Tm 2:1). The sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are to be administered on behalf of the whole church as the community serves God and extends his kingdom.

In summary, it may be said that priesthood is an activity and function which is best viewed in a collective sense as belonging to the whole body of Christians, though including of necessity the individual Christian life of service. Its full meaning is negated if it is seen only in individualist terms — *my* access to God, *my* right to interpret the Bible, and *my* ability to discern God’s will.<sup>15</sup>

## The Priesthood of the Believer (2:5, 9)

Does 1 Peter 2 teach “the priesthood of the believer”? First Peter 2:5 (“built up to a holy priesthood”) and 1 Peter 2:9 (“you are ... a royal priesthood”) are frequently cited as prooftexts for the idea that all Christians are, in a sense, “priests.” Among my own Baptist circles, this is referred to as the “priesthood of all believers.” On the one hand, Revelation 1:5–6 would indicate that this is true to some degree; yet the difference between Revelation 1:5–6 and our passage is that in Revelation, “priests” is in the plural, whereas 1 Peter focuses on a singular “priesthood” (*hierateuma*). What does it mean, then, that believers are transformed into a “royal priesthood”?

<sup>15</sup> Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). [Priesthood](#). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, pp. 1753–1754). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

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Elliott (2000, 420) pushes back against the expression “priesthood of all believers,” arguing that the word *hierateuma* “is a collective term analogous to other collective terms with the *-euma* suffix ... it denotes not individuals, not ‘priests’ (*hiereis*), not even an abstract ‘priesthood’ (*hierateia*), but a ‘body of priests,’ *a community of holy persons enjoying, like priests, direct access to God and functioning in this capacity*” (emphasis original). Thus, Elliott argues that the concept of “Christians as priests” (i.e., “a general priesthood of all believers,” contra Luther) is completely missing from this passage (for more extensive discussion on this topic, see Elliott 1966).

Elliott’s general point regarding *hierateuma* as a “collective term” is valid, as seen in the only three LXX occurrences (Exod 19:6; 23:22; 2 Macc 2:17). Yet his statement “*a community of holy persons enjoying, like priests, direct access to God and functioning in this capacity*” (420) is not too far from what many post-Reformation Christians—including my own Baptist persuasion—mean when they say “priesthood of all believers.”

The Baptist scholar Thomas Schreiner (2003, 106–7) both agrees and disagrees with Elliott. He acknowledges that “Peter was not thinking *mainly* of each individual functioning as a priest before God. The focus here is on the church corporate as God’s set-apart priesthood” (emphasis added). Schreiner is critical of how “Western believers tend to individualize the notion of priesthood rather than seeing the community emphasis.... Protestants are prone to individualize the text in a way that blunts or even denies its corporate emphasis.” Yet he also points out that “what Peter said applies by implication to individuals as well.” Indeed, 1 Peter 2:9 shows that when the church corporately declares the “virtues” (*aretas*) of God, it is individuals who are acting thus in unity with each other. Thus, “individuals functioning in corporate unity” would seem to be the appropriate point here. Similarly, Achtemeier (1996, 157) notes: “the corporate priesthood described in this verse points to the summons to every individual to share this common priestly vocation, to the end that the community so constituted orients its life and devotion to the God to whom it owes its constitution as elect and holy people.”

A few other points should be stressed. With Jobes (2005, 160), we may note that “the theme of obedience and holiness” is the focus of this passage, rather than “clerical authority” (whether for every individual or for a specific class). Secondly, we must highlight the evangelistic function of this passage: A “holy nation, royal priesthood” is to declare God’s praises. In other words, the function of this royal priesthood “includes a witness to all humanity” (Achtemeier 1996, 156). Finally, we should concede Senior’s (2003, 61) point that

In referring to a ‘priesthood’ exercised by all Christians 1 Peter is neither affirming nor denying the possibility of a specific liturgical role in the church, just as the author of Exodus 19 could speak of the entire Israelite community as ‘priestly’ without thereby passing judgment on the Levitical priesthood.

In other words, it is not exegetically sound to use 1 Peter 2:6, 9 as prooftexts against a modern “priesthood” *per se*. Having said that, I must add that the legitimacy of any modern “priesthood” as a formal office, however defined, would have to be established primarily from the New Testament texts and reconciled with the theology of Hebrews.

In summary, two extremes must be avoided. On the one hand, we must heed Schreiner’s caution against forcing an individualistic interpretation on this passage. The Apostle Peter would likely recoil in horror at the common attitude that declares, “I don’t need the church, I’m a priest all by myself.” Such a person has effectively spit in the face of Peter’s divinely-inspired ecclesiology.

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On the other hand, this passage must not be applied strictly to the “elite” Christians or clergy, as seen in some early church texts. For example, in Leo the Great’s *Sermons* 82.1 (NPNF2 12.195), he applies the passage directly to the apostles and Rome. Additionally, in Gregory the Great’s *Book of Pastoral Rule* 2.3 (NPNF2 12.11), the focus is on the priests as clergy. All Christians must realize that this passage applies to them specifically—albeit in unity with other believers. Thus, “priesthood Christianity” cannot be practiced in isolation, but neither can it be practiced as a caste system.

For more discussion on the concept of “the priesthood of believers” from a variety of perspectives, see the following:

The Priest As the Redeemed Man (Cheung 1986) | JETS 29

A Dangerous Idea? (Rogers 2010) | WTJ 72.1

The Priesthood of All Believers (Kendall 1996, 232–40) | Understanding Theology, Volume One

1 Peter 2:4–12 (Harink 2009, 69) | BTCB: 1 & 2 Peter

1 Peter 2:4–8 (González 2010, 53) | Belief: 1 & 2 Peter and Jude

1 Peter 2:5 (Grudem 107) | TNTC: 1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary

### The Old Testament Background for 1 Peter 2:6–10

First Peter 2:6–10 uses quotations and allusions to the Old Testament to illustrate the spiritual relationship between Christ and his church described in 2:4–5. The imagery introduced in 2:4 about the living stone is developed in 2:6–8 with OT quotations, while the subject of believers as the people of God is developed in 2:9–10 with several OT allusions (Watson 2012, 46; compare Goppelt 1993, 134–36). The following list presents the key phrases from 1 Pet 2:6–10 alongside their likely (or possible) Old Testament source (Scripture quotations in the list are from ESV):

- 1 Pet 2:6: “Behold I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame”—Isaiah 28:16
- 1 Pet 2:7: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”—Psalm 118:22 (LXX Ps 117:22)
- 1 Pet 2:8: “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense”—Isaiah 8:14
- 1 Pet 2:9: “a chosen race”—Isaiah 43:20
- 1 Pet 2:9: “a royal priesthood”—Exodus 19:6 and/or Exodus 23:22
- 1 Pet 2:9: “a holy nation”—Exodus 19:6 and/or Exodus 23:22
- 1 Pet 2:9: “a people for his own possession”—*various possibilities*
- 1 Pet 2:9: “proclaim the excellencies”—Isaiah 43:21
- 1 Pet 2:10a: “not a people.... God’s people”—combines Hosea 1:9–10 and 2:23 (LXX Hos 2:25)
- 1 Pet 2:10b: “not received mercy ... have received mercy”—Hosea 1:6<sup>16</sup>

### Lesson 4—Test: Maintaining a Living Hope in Times of Suffering

#### (1 Pet. 1:1–2:10)

The ragtag band of prisoners, exiled hundreds of miles from their homeland, worked as slaves for their captors. Day and night, they carried out their menial and grueling tasks—scrubbing wooden floors, carrying heavy loads of water and wood, digging the clay pits, chopping weeds, and harvesting the crops

<sup>16</sup> Himes, P. A. (2017). *1 Peter*. (D. Mangum, E. Vince, & A. Salinger, Eds.) (1 Pe 2:5–10). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

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they set on their masters' tables. As months became years, their heads and hearts and demeanors lowered until they walked bowed at the shoulders, eyes to the ground.

All, that is, except one young girl, barely fourteen years of age. Each week her shoulders grew straighter. Each year she held herself with new dignity and grace. She fulfilled her duties with graciousness, poise, and skill despite the lowly tasks which occupied her day or the slave uniform which she wore. When asked why she was so pleasant to her hateful captors and why she acted as though she were not a slave at all, she replied: "I am the daughter of the great King Tigius. Since the day I was born, I have been betrothed to Prince Biaigus who ascends the throne. Though I wear the clothes of the lowest slave, I know who I am and I know the destiny to which I was born. Dear Biaigus will soon come, and King Tigius shall stand on the hill as the Prince takes all these under his domain. I have pledged myself to always be what I am. Any day now I shall return home, and I will do so with the nobility and honor of my father's name."

Similarly, in the first chapters of his first epistle, the apostle Peter points us toward home, focusing our attention not on the hardships we may encounter but the great destiny and hope to which we have been born. He encourages us to live above present circumstances and maintain a living hope in times of suffering, for our salvation is about to be revealed.

### OVERVIEW OF 1 PETER

Before you begin the first lesson in 1 Peter, do a quick reading of the entire epistle. Notice the tone or mood of the book. Jot down frequently repeated words and phrases and any pressing questions you would like to answer during your study. When you have finished, answer the questions below, and study the information in the chart.

James and Peter both speak to Christians going through adversity, yet the tone of the two letters is decidedly different. How do you account for the mood of 1 Peter in terms of the book's main message and its particular readers?

The epistle clearly states that the apostle Peter is its author and that Silvanus (Silas) likely acted as secretary in its composition (1:1; 5:12). We learn from the Gospels that Peter was a strong, assertive leader with a dominant personality. Read the passages listed below which offer a few vignettes of Peter's early days with Jesus. Then, tell how the fact of Peter's authorship of a book about humble submission and joy in times of suffering is both a testimony and an encouragement to you. (Jesus rebukes Peter: Matt. 16:21–23; the transfiguration account: Matt. 17:1–4; cutting off the priest's ear: Luke 22:47–51 and John 18:10, 11)

### AT A GLANCE

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## THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PETER

### Date and Place of Writing

First Peter was most likely written in Rome during the early A.D. 60s just before A.D. 64/65 when Nero began severely persecuting the Christians in Rome. Ancient tradition holds that the apostle Peter was martyred during Nero's purge.

### The Letter's Recipients

**The Pilgrims of the Dispersion** residing in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1:1) were mostly Gentile converts to Christianity whom Peter addresses as Jews in light of their status

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as “chosen people” and “sojourners” in this world. It is likely they became Christians following the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost or during a non-Pauline evangelism campaign.

#### **REJOICE! YOU HAVE BEEN BORN INTO A GREAT AND LIVING HOPE! (1 PET. 1:1–12)**

With the exuberant joy of one whose eyes have seen beyond the finish line, Peter describes the salvation about to be revealed. He recounts the election (1:1, 2), the great present hope (1:3–9), and the high privilege (1:10–12) into which the saints of Asia Minor and we ourselves have entered.

How does Peter describe the work of each Person of the Trinity in our salvation? What is the human part in the work of salvation? (1:2; see Ex. 24:4–8)

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#### **AT A GLANCE**

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#### **THE TRINITY AT WORK IN SALVATION**

Elected by foreknowledge:

Just as the nation Israel was selected in eternity past, God the Father chose the church and us individually as His own people.

Sanctified:

In time, we were set apart to God by the work of the Holy Spirit, who led us to repentance, so that we believed the truth of the gospel and yielded our obedience to God.

Sprinkled with Jesus' blood:

By the work of Jesus, we were brought into covenant relationship with God and received the benefits of the blood of Christ in forgiveness, justification, redemption, and salvation.

What Person of the Trinity is emphasized in verses 3–5? Based on these verses, what praise will you offer Him for who He is and what He has done? (1:3)

How would you define the present “living hope” into which Christians have been born? What is the basis and power of this “living hope”? (1:3)

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#### **WORD WEALTH**

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**Hope** (1 Pet. 1:3): *elpis* (Strong's #1680), is not an optimistic outlook or wishful thinking which has no foundation. It is a “confident expectation based on solid certainty. Biblical hope rests on God's promises, particularly those pertaining to Christ's return. So certain is the future of the redeemed that the NT sometimes speaks of future events in the past tense, as though they were already accomplished. Hope is never inferior to faith, but it is an extension of faith. Faith is the present possession of grace; hope is confidence in grace's future accomplishment.”

What, in our salvation, is yet to come? (1:4; Rev. 21:1–22:17)



## Presenting Peter

### Who is this man called Peter? WEEK 8: The Family of God / The Royal Priesthood

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#### BIBLE EXTRA

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**An Inheritance in Heaven** (1 Pet. 1:4): Scripture shows that those who belong to Christ are made joint heirs together with Him (Rom. 8:15–17). This privilege means that believers become not only partakers of Jesus' resurrection life, but also participants in His rule and citizens of the New Jerusalem and the heavens and earth which are to come (Rom. 8:19, 21; Heb. 11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21 and 22). This high honor, however, requires sincere and living faith. Scripture clearly shows that those who suffer with Christ will partake in His glory and His reign and that reward and inheritance are related to faithfulness and Christlikeness (Matt. 25:34; Rom. 8:17b; Phil. 3:10; 2 Tim. 2:12).

In this present world, everything is vulnerable to death, loss, and deterioration. What guarantees assure that we will indeed receive our heavenly inheritance?

Guarantee #1 (1:4)

Guarantee #2 (1:4)

Guarantee #3 (1:5)

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#### WORD WEALTH

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**Kept by the power of God** (1 Pet. 1:5): *Phroureō* (Strong's #5432), meaning "shielded," "protected" or "kept," is a military term which pictures "a sentry standing guard as protection against the enemy." As Christians, we know that we are in continual spiritual combat in this world. But we can proceed with confidence since it is not our strength but God's power (1:5) and God's peace (Phil. 4:7) which shield and keep us.

James and Peter both urge believers to rejoice in adversity. They both see trials as necessary. How do their reasons differ? How are they similar? Which offers you the most motivation? Why? (James 1:2–4; 1 Pet. 1:6, 7)

How is it possible that a person can be both distressed and rejoicing? What biblical character or personal acquaintance best exemplifies this hope-filled life to you? (1:6, 7)

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#### PROBING THE DEPTHS

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**The One-Hundred-Year Test:** If Peter were alive in modern times, he might put his stamp of approval on "the one-hundred-year test." When immersed in the depths of adversity which threatens to overwhelm you with anxiety or distress, ask yourself: What significance will this situation bear one hundred years from now? What significance will my response to it have in one hundred years? This simple test has a way of quickly putting everything in the correct perspective!

What three actions or qualities characterize the present life of genuine faith? How descriptive are these of your life? (1:8, 9)

The salvation made available to us through Christ has little appeal for many today. Even Christians are sometimes lax in searching the Scriptures to know the wonders and benefits which are freely ours in Christ. Why would the disclosures of verses 10–12 help encourage sufferers in the pursuit of God? How do they encourage you?

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#### FAITH ALIVE

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Peter emphasizes the wonder and glory of a salvation to be received in the future. How is the "living hope" and the "inheritance ... reserved in heaven for you" affecting your attachments, goals, priorities, and values in this world today? What, if anything, needs to change?

## Presenting Peter

Who is this man called Peter? WEEK 8: The Family of God / The Royal Priesthood

What idea or understanding from 1 Peter 1:1–12 will be the most helpful to you when you enter a trial which tests your faith? Select a verse to memorize which will become part of your “arsenal” against the accusations and temptations of Satan.

### OFFER THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE OF A LIFE OF HOLINESS AND LOVE (1 PET. 1:13–2:3)

If you’ve ever moved away from a permanent residence to a short-term location, you know that you live in a temporary residence in a different way. You don’t join the community groups or get too deeply involved in local issues. You don’t change wallpaper, invest in the picture that is “just right” for the living room, or purchase the small but expensive knickknacks which add the finishing touches to your home. Every purchase, every investment of money, time, or energy is weighed in light of whether it will benefit the place of your permanent residence. Your heart and focus is somewhere else.

In 1 Peter 1:1–12, the apostle made it clear that the fulfillment of our great hope resides “ahead of us” and that our attachment to this present life is tentative. Now, Peter shows that when our heart and focus is on our heavenly inheritance, the appropriate lifestyle is one of holiness and full separation unto God.

List the six commands Peter issues in verses 13 through 17. Then, using your own words, tell what each means.

1. (1:13a)
2. (1:13b)
3. (1:13c)
4. (1:14; see Rom. 12:2)
5. (1:15)
6. (1:17b)

### BEHIND THE SCENES

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**Gird up:** During the Old Testament and early New Testament eras, to “gird up” had special meaning based on the culture and dress of the time. Since all wore long robe-like clothing, it was very difficult to move freely when special exertion, speed, or agility was called for, as when one must run or fight. Thus, one would pull up his robe and belt it. The resulting short tunic would facilitate the accomplishment of the task at hand.

“Gird up the loins of your mind” is a call to alertness and readiness of will, spiritual attitude, and mental faculties. In a sense, Peter says: “Get ready to run with all that is in you!”

What is the first reason offered by Peter for commanding these actions? (1:16)

### WORD WEALTH

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**Holy** (1 Pet. 1:15, 16), *hagios* (Strong’s #40), means “consecrated to God,” “pure” or “blameless,” “separated” or “marked out for God.” It describes God in that He is separate from the created order and the world system in person and character. The command “become holy” calls us to display the family likeness and prepare ourselves for heaven, in which is no unholiness. This work of “holiness” or “sanctification” is performed by the Holy Spirit as one yields to Him in His personal dealings and in the diligent study of Scripture. (See: 1 Pet. 1:2; 1:22–2:3; John 17:16–19.)

What is the second reason for Peter’s commands? (1:17a)

## Presenting Peter

### Who is this man called Peter? WEEK 8: The Family of God / The Royal Priesthood

How would you bring together the two diverse images of “Father” and “Judge” to describe the relationship and action suggested in verse 17?

What is the third reason for Peter’s six commands? (1:18–21)

From what “aimless conduct” have you been redeemed? In other words, what is your testimony of the transforming action of Christ in your life which has separated you from your old ways and former heritage? (1:18)

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#### BEHIND THE SCENES

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**Redemption:** Redemption is an Old Testament concept seen in the role of the kinsman-redeemer who would recover for a close relative the property, family inheritance, and status which had been lost through poverty, helplessness, or violence. This redeemer paid a price which was so far beyond the reach of the kinsman as to be utterly impossible for him to pay.

In the same sense, Jesus has redeemed us from sin and death and recovered our lost inheritance. The price was the blood of His sinless life of full obedience which was offered on our behalf. The great love of God and the high value He places on human life is clearly seen in His willingness to surrender His Son, who was the only adequate substitutionary sacrifice.

Peter states that the high price of our salvation is not a thing to be taken lightly. Rather, the awareness of it should affect every dimension of our lives. (See Lev. 25:23–25, 47–49; Ruth 2–4; Ps. 72:14; Isa. 52:9; Jer. 32:6–11; Rom. 8:20–23.)

How is God’s love seen in the fact that Jesus’ redeeming work was “foreordained before the foundation of the world”? Take time to thank God for His boundless love. (1:20, 21)

What human act begins the process of holiness in the Christian’s life? Through what two divine agents is it begun and carried out? (1:22–25)

How is the human will involved in the ongoing process? What two opposite actions are required? (2:1, 2)

How does the willful “laying aside” of evil and taking in God’s Word prove one’s initial salvation and the fact of one’s eternal inheritance? (2:3)

What is the supreme manifestation of holiness and the denial of “all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking”? (1:22; 2:1)

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#### WORD WEALTH

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**Sincere love of the brethren** (1:22): “Sincere,” *anupokritos* (Strong’s #505) means “without hypocrisy” or “devoid of any pretension.” Peter shows that such sincere love is “fervent” (done with a zeal which pushes one to the highest level of performance) and “pure” (unpolluted, clean, and fully ethical).

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#### FAITH ALIVE

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Are you living the Christian life as a “world citizen,” an “alien without a green card,” or a “big-time landlord”? How can you prove this?

How would you honestly assess your “love-level” and your “milk-hunger”? Growing? Satisfied? Not even on the scale? What do you need to ask God to help you do? What is your part?

Do you most need to “gird up your mind,” “set your hope fully on heaven,” “be self-controlled,” “stop conforming to the old life,” or “become holy”? What steps will you take to do this?

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For what fellow believer do you need to develop a sincere love? Ask God for the help of the Holy Spirit. Then begin to pray for that person's blessing, growth, and prosperity. Look for ways to demonstrate love.

#### **RECOGNIZE YOUR GLORIOUS NEW IDENTITY AND STATUS IN CHRIST (1 PET. 2:4-10)**

Having pointed suffering Christians toward their soon-coming inheritance, and having urged them to live with new determination a life of holiness and love, Peter returns to an opening topic. He discusses just what election by God means in this life. Peter challenges us to recognize the glorious new identity and status we have in Christ today.

Read verses 4-10. What seems to be the key word of the entire section? How was this word/idea used in the opening of chapter 1? (1:2; 2:4-10)

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#### **WORD WEALTH**

**“Chosen,”** *eklektos* (Strong's #1588) is used in one of its forms in 1 Peter 1:1; 2:4, 6, 9. It comes from *ek*, “out of” and *lego*, “to select, to gather” and indicates “one picked out or gathered from among the larger group for special service or privilege.” It is used in Luke to describe Jesus as Messiah (23:35) and elsewhere to describe Christians as recipients of the special favor of God (Matt. 24:22; Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12). In 1 Peter 2:4-10, the term is used in close conjunction with “precious.” The high value affixed to the “elected” is derived from their attachment to Jesus, the Chosen and the Precious of the Father (1 Pet. 2:4).

Peter identifies Jesus as “the living stone” and further as the cornerstone or capstone—a massive, foundational stone around which the walls of a building are joined or the center stone which gives an arch its stability. How can this metaphor be related to Jesus and the church? (2:2-7)

To God and believers the cornerstone is precious (2:4, 7). How do unbelievers respond to Jesus? (2:4, 7, 8)

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#### **WORD WEALTH**

**“Rejected”** (1 Pet. 2:4, 7), from *apodokimazō* (Strong's #593), means “to refuse after examination” or “to examine and reckon of little value.” These rejecters are disobedient to the truth concerning Jesus (1 Pet. 2:7, 8). Having refused to believe, they have no spiritual eyes to see the things of the kingdom (John 3:3). Thus, they continue on their path of destruction and fulfill their unchanged destiny (2:8). In contrast to believers who will “by no means be put to shame,” their rejection of Christ will cause their fall, for their house will utterly crumble (2:5, 6, 8).

What does being “as living stones” mean in the Christian's relationship to God? to other believers? to unbelievers? (2:4-10)

List the identity and status given to believers in Christ. Think about what each means to you. (2:5, 9, 10)

What two services are believers to perform in light of this wonderful status and identity? (2:5b, 9b, 10)

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#### **BIBLE EXTRA**

**The Priority of Worship:** “As a ‘royal’ priesthood, the kingly nature of the redeemed worshiper is noted. This passage is rooted in God's call to ancient Israel (see Ex. 19:5-7). Peter and John (Rev. 1:5, 6) draw this truth to full application and prophetic fulfillment in the NT believer. As with Israel, deliverance through the blood of the Lamb is but the beginning. As promised, dominion and destiny will unfold as their priestly duty is fulfilled. True authority is

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~~always related to a walk in purity and a constancy in worship. The spirit of worship is essential to all advance of the kingdom. Just as ancient Israel will only take the Promised Land while doing battle from a foundation of righteous worship before the Lord, so with the contemporary church. We will only experience promised power for evangelism and spiritual victories as we prioritize and grow in our worship of the living God. Kingdom power is kept from pollution this way, as kingdom people keep humbly praiseful before the King—and witness His works of power with joy” (see Rev. 1:5, 6; Dan. 7:21, 22).~~

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#### FAITH ALIVE

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How do you feel about being “chosen,” “holy,” and “a special people” of God? When is it the most difficult for you to remember these truths about your identity and status? You may want to memorize 1 Peter 2:9, 10.

Where has your “darkness” been turned to “light,” and how has God’s mercy been especially extended to you? Take time to thank and praise God.

First Peter 1:1–2:10 shows that “the chosen” also choose God and the true life of worship. Where would you say you are today in offering the spiritual sacrifices of thanksgiving, praise, and adoration as a way of life? What will you do?

#### ***Lesson 5—Test: Leading an Exemplary Life in Difficult Times and Trying Relationships (1 Pet. 2:11–5:14)***

It has been many years now, but his memories are clear. A third imprisonment for preaching the good news. A transfer from crowded cell to labor camp. An assignment which amounted to a signed death warrant.

In the beginning, the stench of the cesspool had left him reeling with nausea, weak, and trembling. But as Pastor Chen stood alone raking the human waste which swirled around him and calling upon the name of his Jesus, the answer came. Even more tangibly than during the proclamation of the gospel, he could sense the Lord saying: “You are My own.”

The affliction prescribed by his enemies to break his body and his faith became the place of Pastor Chen’s breakthrough into the heavenlies—his private garden. The sweet fragrance of his praise was echoed by the sweet presence of his Lord, and all was well. To this day, the testimony of George Chen’s faith and his Lord’s faithfulness remains a witness to all who hear.

Even though statistics show that persecution and violence against Christians is at an all-time high worldwide, few who read this account will suffer similar adversity. Yet, in many ways, we all must be ready and able to present a godly witness during difficult times and in trying relationships. In the context of persecution and suffering, Isaiah declared, “Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me! We are for signs and wonders in Israel.” (Is. 8:18). In 2:11–5:14, Peter affirms the powerful potential of an exemplary life and gives practical advice to help us: (1) live in harmony and submission to all earthly authorities (2:11–3:7), (2) follow Christ’s example when suffering because of good works or our Christian faith (3:8–4:19), and (3) serve in the church with humility and wisdom (5:1–14).

#### **LIVE IN HARMONY AND SUBMISSION TO ALL EARTHLY AUTHORITIES (1 PET. 2:11–3:7)**

Before talking to specific groups of Christians (citizens, servants, wives, and husbands), Peter offers an introduction to his topic of submission (2:11, 12). He draws his readers’ attention back to the fact that they are “sojourners” and “pilgrims” in this world (1:1). It is as if he were saying, “Don’t give undue weight to your present, temporary circumstances.” He challenges Christians to move

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their focus away from their particular situation (with its questions of justice, rights, and freedoms) and center it upon the Christian response which will bear eternal significance.

Read 1 Peter 2:11–3:7. What one verse seems to encapsulate the directives for all relationships?

How likely is it that Christians will be criticized by non-Christians? What present and final witnesses will determine the truth concerning your life? (2:12, 15)

Where is the real site of the battle for submission and a godly witness? (2:11)

What is Peter's command and the motivation behind it concerning civil authorities? What groups today might be included in Peter's list? (2:13–16; also see Rom. 13:1–10)

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#### WORD WEALTH

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**Free ... but as bondservants** (2:16): Peter's whole idea of submission may be summed up here. As individuals, we are free (*eleutheros*, Strong's #1658), "not under legal obligation, freeborn, able to move on our own and come and go as we please." But as Christians, we willfully exchange our independence for servanthood (*doulos*, "slavery" Strong's #1401) under God and the authorities He sets (2:14, 16). By doing so, we become "free to serve the Lord in all the ways that are consistent with His word, will, nature, and holiness."

Peter shows that a "master's" or employer's actions are not the determining factor for our responses and actions. What two measures may be used to determine what is commendable on our part? (2:18–20)

Read verses 21–25. Who is the prototype of suffering and righteousness?

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#### WORD WEALTH

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**Christ, our Example** (2:21): "Example," *hupogrammos* (Strong's #5261) derives from *hupo*, "under," and *grapho*, "to write" and originally referred to tracing the letters or copying the handwriting of one's teacher.

Study Jesus' example and list actions restrained and undertaken. (2:22, 23)

#### Actions Restrained

#### The Action Undertaken

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#### BIBLE EXTRA

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**The Suffering Servant** (2:22–25): Peter quotes a familiar Old Testament passage which would cause his first readers to recall Isaiah's "Suffering Servant" motif with its list of the benefits of salvation. Read Isaiah 53 which lies behind this text. Peter emphasizes Christian conversion as enablement to endure suffering righteously. Not only are Christians dead to sin and alive to righteousness, healing and health has been provided for mind, body, soul, and spirit. (Is. 53; 1 Pet. 2:22–25)

Read 3:1–7. By use of the term "likewise" or "in the same manner," Peter connects the directives to wives and husbands to the servanthood and submission described earlier (2:11–25; 3:1, 7). When talking to wives, how does Peter describe the way in which they should relate to their husbands in:

attitude? (3:2)

action? (3:1, 2, 6)

manner? (3:3–5)

Peter commands "fear" (respect) but warns against being "afraid with any terror" because fear can cause one to act/ react in a nonconstructive or even destructive manner. How could a wife retain her personhood and even disagree with her husband without giving up Peter's directives concerning attitude, action, and manner? (3:6)

## Presenting Peter

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### BIBLE EXTRA

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**Bible Wisdom Concerning Wives and Women:** “The spirit of submission, whereby a woman voluntarily acknowledges her husband’s leadership responsibility under God, is an act of faith. The Bible nowhere ‘submits’ or subordinates women to men, generically. But this text calls a woman to submit herself to her husband (Eph. 5:22), and the husband is charged to lovingly give himself to caring for his wife—never exploiting the trust of her submission (v. 7; Eph. 5:25–29). This divinely ordered arrangement is never shown, nor was it ever given, to reduce the potential, purpose, or fulfillment of the woman. Only fallen nature or persistent church traditionalism, finding occasion through ‘proof-texts’ separated from their full biblical context, can make a case for the social exploitation of women or the restriction of women from church ministry.

“First Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35, which disallow a woman’s teaching (in an unwelcomed manner), usurping authority, or creating a nuisance by public argument, all relate to the woman’s relationship with her husband.

“The Bible’s word of wisdom to women seems to be summarized in Peter’s word here: counsel given to a woman whose husband is an unbeliever. She is told that her ‘words’ are not her key to success in winning her husband to Christ; but her Christlike, loving spirit is. Similarly, this wisdom would apply to any woman with the potential for a public ministry of leadership in the church. Her place will most likely be given when she is not argumentatively insistent upon it, so much as given to ‘winning’ it by a gracious, loving, servantlike spirit—the same spirit that ought to be evident in the life of a man who would lead.”

What two understandings or “honorings” are foundational to a husband’s right relationship with his wife? (3:7)

Understanding that his wife is physically weaker calls a husband to a protective role—an honoring of the way God created women. List practical ways a husband could show consideration for his wife based on this knowledge.

How would a husband honor a wife’s spiritual status?

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### WORD WEALTH

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**Heirs together of the grace of life** (3:7): Here, “fellow heirs of eternal life” is the primary meaning and indicates the full status and inheritance of each spouse in Christ. Yet Peter also may be suggesting that husbands understand that Christian marriage itself is a gracious gift intended to bring a special abundance to this life.

What powerful personal and joint ministry is thwarted when husbands do not dwell with their wives with understanding?

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### BIBLE EXTRA

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**Submission and Ethics** (2:11–3:7): Peter calls us to obey and respect all authorities. However, not all authorities are godly or ethical. Read Psalm 1:1, 2 and Matthew 22:37–40. How do these laws of relationship and blessing help to weigh the authority of Scripture and conscience against the authority of a supervisor, civil official, or spouse when an ethical issue is at stake?

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### FAITH ALIVE

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What is the context of your greatest battle in regard to submission to authority? What does biblical submission call you to change? How will you go about this?



## Presenting Peter

Who is this man called Peter? WEEK 8: The Family of God / The Royal Priesthood

Describe a marriage of mutual respect in which both partners are fully submitted to God. What qualities from this ideal would you like to see worked into your marriage or dating relationship?

### **FOLLOW CHRIST’S EXAMPLE WHEN SUFFERING BECAUSE OF GOOD WORKS OR THE CHRISTIAN FAITH (1 PET. 3:8–4:19)**

Having addressed specific relational situations affecting individual lives, Peter now broadens his focus and discusses what it means to be a member of the community of faith in times of persecution. Peter talks to the church as a whole as he addresses the topic of suffering which occurs because one lives in this world as a Christian. Read 3:8–4:19.

Why is unity especially important among Christians during times of persecution? What other attitudes should characterize both our life with other Christians and our response when persecuted by unbelievers? (3:8)

How and why should we bless those who insult and persecute us for our faith? (3:9–14a)

What fears probably motivate the persecutors’ insults? (3:14b)

What three actions are an antidote for our fear when suffering for doing good? Explain, in practical terms, what each of these means. (3:15–17)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What encouragement is offered sufferers by the story of Noah and the Flood? (3:18–22)

### **PROBING THE DEPTHS**

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**He preached to spirits in prison** (3:18–20): This passage, although probably easily understood by its first readers, is difficult to interpret. It likely refers to the event of Christ’s resurrection which openly proclaimed His victory to “spirits in prison”—the demonic spirits behind the corruption of Noah’s day (v. 19; see Gen. 6:1–8; 2 Pet. 2:4, 5; Jude 6). Such proclamation may have been an integral part of subjecting “angels and authorities and powers” to Christ’s rule (v. 22). A second chance for salvation after this life is not in keeping with Jesus’ or apostolic teaching and should not be inferred here.

What is the great benefit of following Christ’s example when enduring persecution? (4:1, 2)

For what do unbelievers often ridicule Christians? Why? (4:3, 4)

Read and compare 4:5, 6 with 3:12. Peter says that everyone will be judged according to what they did with the gospel in this flesh-life. What does he show to be the potential of the gospel which is preached by a Christian’s life?

What three things does Peter call us to do in light of the times? (4:7)

What is Peter saying about the generosity, character, and power with which we are to minister our gifts—especially love—to the body of Christ? How would you evaluate your service using these three criteria? (4:8–11)

What is the likelihood of “fiery trials”? What double reason for rejoicing does Peter see in them? (4:12, 13)

How can you know that you are suffering “as a Christian”? (4:14–16)

## Presenting Peter

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Why is it a gracious act of God for judgment to begin with the family of God? (4:17–19; also 4:1, 2)

### PROBING THE DEPTHS

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**Christian Persecution and the Great Judgment:** Today we are experiencing a worldwide increase in Christian persecutions, especially in the East. Yet even in nations where open, violent persecution is not prevalent, it seems the holy lifestyle and the precepts of Christianity are being publicly ridiculed and politically maligned. According to Peter, we should see these facts as an indication that the appointed time for judgment has begun. Instead of complaining or rebelling against God, we should commit ourselves to God and allow suffering to have its full purifying effect on us individually and as a corporate church.

The judgment which begins with the church will culminate in the great outpouring of God's wrath upon unbelievers. For us, judgment brings hope and preparation for Christ's return. For unbelievers, it brings utter hopelessness. (See: Joel 3:9–17; Mal. 3:1–3; 4:1–6; 1 Pet. 4:1, 2, 16–19.)

### SERVE IN THE CHURCH WITH HUMILITY AND WISDOM (1 PET. 5:1–14)

Peter pens his exhortations to leaders and members of the church on the heels of his declaration that judgment has begun in the house of God. This context gives added weight to his specific instructions as he urges elders (5:1–4) and all members (5:5–11) to indeed commit their souls to Him in doing good. Read 5:1–14.

Why are wise leadership, humility, and spiritual warfare especially important during times of persecution? (5:1–10)

What attitude and example is Peter trying to communicate by identifying himself as “fellow elder” and “fellow witness”? (5:1; see John 21:15–17)

Contrast each wrong motive/action with the right motive/action for leadership. (5:2, 3)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How/why might leaders be vulnerable to sin in the areas of: satisfaction with their role, money, control, being an example to the flock? How can members help leaders keep right motives in these areas?

### BIBLE EXTRA

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**Shepherd Leaders** (optional): Read the following passages which depict leaders as shepherds and the Lord as the Great Shepherd. Jot down the characteristics of a true shepherd and the tasks a shepherd performs. Decide what each means in practical terms. (Ps. 23; Jer. 3:15; 10:21; Ezek. 34:2–16)

What actions does Peter call for among the membership of the local assemblies? What would obedience to his commands look like in the church's daily life? (5:5, 6)

Compare James's “Submit ... resist” passage on spiritual warfare with Peter's instruction here. How is submission defined differently in 1 Peter? Is this a contradiction? Why/why not? (5:5–10; James 4:6–10, Lesson 2)

What particular cares or anxieties might plague Peter's first readers or any under the threat of severe persecution? What is the cure? (5:6, 7)

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### WORD WEALTH

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**Casting all your care** (5:7): The phrase follows “humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God” and is very closely connected to it. Humble submission brings one under God’s protection and grace in a special way. Here, “care,” *merimna* (Strong’s #3308, from *merizō*: “to divide” and *nous*: “the mind”) denotes distracting “anxieties,” “burdens,” or “worries,” over daily matters or needs before they arise. We are called “to throw” cares onto God’s broad shoulders because His protective and attentive love is well able to secure all our needed provisions.

What personal traits and understandings might be needed to successfully stand against the devil as he is described here? (5:8, 9)

How does the fact of other Christians’ suffering serve to encourage faith and perseverance? (5:9)

List the four things God will accomplish in you through suffering. Then tell what each means to you. (5:10)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Note the terms “our faithful brother,” “Mark my son,” “greet . . . with a kiss of love,” and “elect together with you,” which are part of the close of Peter’s letter. Add the fact that Mark and Silvanus ministered at different times with both Paul and Peter. What observations might be made about life in the early church? (5:12–14)

### BEHIND THE SCENES

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It seems that Silvanus (Silas) and Mark both began their ministries from the Jerusalem church where Peter was one of the early leaders. Both served under Peter at some point. Church tradition holds that Mark ministered in Rome with the apostle Peter during Peter’s last years of ministry and that Mark’s Gospel is largely based on Peter’s preaching. Trace Mark and Silvanus’s ministry through the Scripture.

#### **Silvanus (Silas)**

Acts 15:22, 32, 40

2 Cor. 1:19

1 Thess. 1:1

2 Thess. 1:1, 2

#### **(John) Mark**

Acts 12:12–18, 25; 13:13; 15:36–39

Col. 4:10

Phil. 2:4; 2 Tim. 4:11

Read the Gospel of Mark

### FAITH ALIVE

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What area of your life needs to be repaired, established, strengthened, or made steadfast? Surrender that area to God. Ask Him to begin working there. Search the Scripture for wisdom in that area.

What is your “humility level” in relation to the local church? Identify one situation in which it is difficult for you to “bend low.” Prepare yourself with prayer, and then purposely serve in that situation, asking God to create a servant’s heart in you.

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Satan hunts for Christians who are weak, only partially committed to God, afraid, unprepared, or not closely connected to the flock. Scripture shows us how to avoid becoming Satan's victim. Study the resources 1 Peter has provided. Then create a "battle plan" for future attacks. At the top of a sheet of paper, write the headings: *Area of Attack*, *Right Response*, *Right Motive*. Then, in your own words, complete your chart for each reference listed below.

- |                    |                   |                                  |
|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. 1 Peter 2:12    | 2. 1 Peter 3:9    | 3. 1 Peter 3:16                  |
| 4. 1 Peter 3:18–20 | 5. 1 Peter 4:2, 4 | 6. 1 Peter 4:14–16 <sup>17</sup> |

### *The ministry of the interior*

*But ye are ... a royal priesthood.* 1 Peter 2:9.

By what right do we become "a royal priesthood"? By the right of the Atonement. Are we prepared to leave ourselves resolutely alone and to launch out into the priestly work of prayer? The continual grubbing on the inside to see whether we are what we ought to be, generates a self-centred, morbid type of Christianity, not the robust, simple life of the child of God. Until we get into a right relationship to God, it is a case of hanging on by the skin of our teeth, and we say—'What a wonderful victory I have got!' There is nothing indicative of the miracle of Redemption in that. Launch out in reckless belief that the Redemption is complete, and then bother no more about yourself, but begin to do as Jesus Christ said—pray for the friend who comes to you at midnight, pray for the saints, pray for all men. Pray on the realization that you are only perfect in Christ Jesus, not on this plea—'O Lord, I have done my best, please hear me.'

How long is it going to take God to free us from the morbid habit of thinking about ourselves? We must get sick unto death of ourselves, until there is no longer any surprise at anything God can tell us about ourselves. We cannot touch the depths of meanness in ourselves. There is only one place where we are right, and that is in Christ Jesus. When we are there, we have to pour out for all we are worth in the ministry of the interior.<sup>18</sup>

20. Worshipful Walk with God (1 Pet. 2:9). This text not only appoints praise, but represents *a basic revelation of the Bible*: God wants a people who will walk with Him in prayer, march with Him in praise, and thank and worship Him. Note the progression in Peter's description of the people of the New Covenant: (1) *We are a chosen generation*—a people begun with Jesus' choice of the Twelve, who became 120, to whom were added thousands at Pentecost. We are a part of this continually expanding generation, "chosen" when we receive Christ. (2) *We are a royal priesthood*. Under the Old Covenant the priesthood and royalty were separated. We are now—in the Person of our Lord—all "kings and priests to His God" (Rev. 1:6), a worshipping host and a kingly band, prepared for walking with Him in the light or warring beside Him against the hosts of darkness. (3) *We are a holy nation*, composed of Jews and Gentiles—of one blood, from every nation under heaven. (4) *We are His own special people*. God's intention from the

<sup>17</sup> Hayford, J. W., & Hagan, K. A. (1997). *Passing Faith's Tests with Love and Joy: A study of James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>18</sup> Chambers, O. (1986). *My utmost for his highest: Selections for the year*. Grand Rapids, MI: Oswald Chambers Publications; Marshall Pickering.

time of Abraham has been to call forth a people with a special mission—to proclaim His praise and to propagate His blessing throughout the earth. C.G.<sup>19</sup>

**“You are a \*chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”**

(2:9). As those who have been “called out of darkness,” our praises declare that we have been translated into another kingdom (Col 1:13; see Kingdom of God). Jesus Christ is our King, and He has made us a royal priesthood, with His authority and His Spirit to serve the world around us. Our \*praise focuses on His throne and dominion, from which we derive all our benefits as subjects of His kingdom.

20

## Introducing Ezra

**Author.** The Book of Ezra, whose name likely means “The Lord Has Helped,” derives its title from the chief character of chapters 7–10. We cannot be totally sure whether Ezra himself compiled the book or it was compiled by an unknown editor. The generally accepted conservative view is that Ezra compiled or wrote this book, along with 1 and 2 Chronicles and Nehemiah. The Hebrew Bible recognized Ezra-Nehemiah as a single book.

Ezra himself was a “priest, [a] scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the Lord” (7:11). He led the second of three groups returning to Jerusalem from Babylon. A devout man, he firmly established the Law (the Pentateuch) as the basis of faith (7:10).

**Occasion and Date.** The events in Ezra cover slightly more than eighty years and fall into two distinct segments. The first segment (chs. 1–6) covers some twenty-three years, dealing with the first postexilic return under Zerubbabel and the reconstruction of the temple.

Following over sixty years in Babylonian captivity, God moves the heart of the ruler of Babylon, King Cyrus of Persia, to issue an edict stating that willing Jews can return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and city. A faithful group responds and departs in 538 B.C. under Zerubbabel. Temple construction is begun, but opposition from the non-Jewish inhabitants discourages the people and they cease their work. God then raises up the prophetic ministries of Haggai and Zechariah who call the people to complete the task. Though far less splendid than the previous temple of Solomon, the new temple is completed and dedicated in 515 B.C.

Nearly sixty years later (458 B.C.), another group of exiles returns to Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra (chs. 7–10). They are sent by the then reigning Persian king, Artaxerxes, with additional monies and valuables to enhance the temple worship. Ezra is also commissioned to appoint leaders in Jerusalem to oversee the people. (*see map on page 116.*)

Once in Jerusalem, Ezra assumes the ministry of spiritual reformer for what was probably only one year. After that he likely lived as an influential private citizen into the time of

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<sup>19</sup> Hayford, J. W., Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). *Hayford's Bible handbook*. Nashville, TN; Atlanta, GA; London; Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

<sup>20</sup> Hayford, J. W., Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). *Hayford's Bible handbook*. Nashville, TN; Atlanta, GA; London; Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

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Nehemiah. (*see* timeline on page 127 relating the events of Ezra, Esther, and Nehemiah.) A devout priest, he finds an Israel which has adopted many of the pagan inhabitants' practices; he calls Israel to repentance and to a renewed submission to the Law, even to the point of divorcing their pagan wives.

**Content.** Two major messages emerge from Ezra: God's *faithfulness* and man's *unfaithfulness*.

God had promised through Jeremiah (25:12) that the Babylonian captivity would be limited in duration. In His ordained time, He faithfully keeps this promise and stirs the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia to issue an edict for the exiles to return (1:1–4). He then faithfully provides leadership (Zerubbabel and Ezra), and the exiles are sent off with booty, including items that had been taken from Solomon's temple (1:5–10).

When the people become discouraged because of the enemies' mockings, God faithfully raises up Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the people to complete the task. Their encouragement proves successful (5:1–2).

Finally, when the people stray from the truths of God's word, He faithfully sends a devout priest who artfully instructs the people in the truth, calling them to confession of sin and repentance from their evil ways (chs. 9; 10).

God's faithfulness is contrasted with the people's unfaithfulness. In spite of their return and divine promises, they allow their enemies to discourage them and they temporarily give up (4:24). Then, having completed their task so they can worship in their own temple (6:16–18), the people become faithless to the commandments of God; an entire generation is raised up whose "iniquities have risen higher than our heads" (9:6). However, as noted above, God's faithfulness triumphs in each situation.

**Personal Application.** The messages of Ezra are a constant reminder of how easily God's people can lose heart and their distinctives. God is fulfilling His promises. In spite of this, covenant people easily forget His promises and the moral distinctives that are to characterize "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people" (1 Pet. 2:9). When this happens God's plans are delayed. Erring saints cannot totally thwart God's sovereign plans, but they can delay or frustrate them. God is greater than we, and He does have ways of transcending our shortcomings. However, He wants us to walk in obedience so that His plans can be fulfilled as originally revealed.<sup>21</sup>

## A Comparison of 1 and 2 Peter

1 Peter	2 Peter
Emphasis: Hope in the midst of suffering	Emphasis: The danger of false teaching and practices
Christology: The sufferings of Christ for our salvation and example at His incarnation	Christology: The glory of Christ and the consummation of history at His return
The day of salvation when Christ suffered, died, and rose from the dead	The day of the Lord when Christ returns in judgment

<sup>21</sup> Hayford, J. W., Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). *Hayford's Bible handbook*. Nashville, TN; Atlanta, GA; London; Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

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Redemptive title: Christ

Title of dominion: Lord

Be encouraged in your present trials

Be warned of eschatological judgment

We need hope to face our trials

We need full knowledge to face error

Numerous similarities to Paul (especially Ephesians and Colossians)

Almost identical similarities to Jude (compare 2 Peter 2 with Jude 4–18)<sup>22</sup>

## hierateuma

<i>Greek pronunciation</i>	[hee eh RAH tyoo mah]
<i>CSB translation</i>	<i>priesthood</i>
<i>Uses in 1 Peter</i>	2
<i>Uses in the NT</i>	2
<i>Focus passage</i>	1 Peter 2:5, 9

**Hierateuma** (*priesthood*) first appears in written literature in the Greek OT (Ex 19:6; 23:22). If Israel obeyed God, she would be his treasured possession (Ex 23:22) and would function as a royal *priesthood* through which God would dispense his blessing to the whole earth (Ex 19:5–6; 23:22). In the NT, Peter makes direct reference to Ex 19:6 and 23:22 and applies the fulfillment of this OT concept of *royal priesthood* to the church (1Pt 2:9), which now exists to serve God by worshiping him through her words and deeds. She is being built into a spiritual temple where believers perform the role of a holy *priesthood* by offering “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1Pt 2:5). The church also serves God through the proclamation of the praises that belong to Him (1Pt 2:9).

**2:4–10** Jesus is called the **living stone** and the **cornerstone**, but also the **rejected stone** and the **stone to stumble over**. Peter assured his readers that they are God’s valuable possession—**living stones** built into a **spiritual house**. They are part of a living temple that is the corporate people of God, his unique possession. A **chosen race** (v. 9; cp. vv. 4, 6; Is 43:20) seems to refer to the corporate unity of believers. In Christ, believers of all races are unified. They are also a **royal priesthood**—a collective company of priests—who offer up **spiritual sacrifices** to God (v. 5). Believers have been called **out of darkness** and **into his marvelous light**. The transfer from darkness to light is a common NT description of conversion (Ac 26:18; 2Co 4:6; Eph 5:8).<sup>23</sup>

**Church.** A group or assembly of persons called together for a particular purpose. The term appears only twice in the Gospels (Mt 16:18; 18:17) but frequently in the Book of Acts, most of the letters of Paul, as well as most of the remaining NT writings, especially the Revelation of John.

The use of this word in the NT is somewhat dependent upon the OT and the Greek world. In the former, the word designated the *congregation* of the Israelites, especially when they are

<sup>22</sup> Hayford, J. W., Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). *Hayford’s Bible handbook*. Nashville, TN; Atlanta, GA; London; Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

<sup>23</sup> Wilder, T. L. (2017). [1 Peter](#). In E. A. Blum & T. Wax (Eds.), *CSB Study Bible: Notes* (pp. 1977–1978). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.



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gathered for religious purposes and specifically for the purpose of hearing the Law (Dt 4:10; 9:10; 18:16; 31:30; Jgs 20:2; Acts 7:38). In the Greek world the word “church” designated an *assembly* of people, a meeting, such as a regularly summoned political body, or simply a *gathering* of people. The word is used in such a secular way in Acts 19:32, 39, 41.

The specifically Christian usages of this concept vary considerably in the NT. (1) In analogy to the OT, it sometimes refers to a church meeting, as when Paul says to the Christians in Corinth: “... when you assemble as a [in] church” (1 Cor 11:18). This means that Christians are the people of God especially when they are gathered for worship. (2) In texts such as Matthew 18:17; Acts 5:11; 1 Corinthians 4:17; and Philippians 4:15, “church” refers to the entire group of Christians living in one place. Often the local character of a Christian congregation is emphasized, as in the phrases, “the church in Jerusalem” (Acts 8:1), “in Corinth” (1 Cor 1:2), “in Thessalonica” (1 Thes 1:1). (3) In other texts, house assemblies of Christians are called churches, such as those who met in the house of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 16:19). (4) Throughout the NT, “the church” designates the universal church, to which all believers belong (see Acts 9:31; 1 Cor 6:4; Eph 1:22; Col 1:18). Jesus’ first word about the founding of the Christian movement in Matthew 16:18 has this larger meaning: “I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it.”

The church, both as a universal reality and in its local, concrete expression, is more specifically designated in Paul’s writings as “the church of God” (e.g., 1 Cor 1:2; 10:32) or “the church of Christ” (Rom 16:16). In this way a common, secular Greek term receives its distinctive Christian meaning, and sets the Christian assembly/gathering/community apart from all other secular or religious groups.

It is clear from the NT as a whole that the Christian community understood itself as the community of the end time, as the community called into being by God’s end-time act of revelation and divine presence in Jesus of Nazareth. So Paul tells the Christians in Corinth that they are those “upon whom the end of the ages has come” (1 Cor 10:11). That is, God had visited his creation, had called out of both Judaism and the gentile world a new people, empowered by his Spirit to be present in the world, sharing the good news (gospel) of his radical, unconditional love for his creation (Eph 2:11–22). The Gospels tell us that Jesus chose 12 disciples who became the foundation of this new people. The correspondence to the 12 tribes of Israel is clear, and shows that the church was understood both as grounded in Judaism and as the fulfillment of God’s intention in calling Israel to become “a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Is 49:6; Rom 11:1–5). It is this recognition that allows Paul to call this new gentile-Jewish community, this new creation, “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:15, 16). In this new community the traditional barriers of race, social standing, and sex—barriers that divided people from one another and categorized them into inferior and superior classes—are seen to be shattered: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28 NIV).

This broad understanding of the church is furthered and amplified throughout the NT through a variety of concepts and images, each revealing a particular facet within the early church’s understanding of itself, its nature and mission.

***Community of the Spirit.*** The two-volume work of Luke the Evangelist, Luke-Acts, presents the church as that community of people in which and through which the Spirit of God is working. Insofar as the church is that, it is an extension of a reality already begun in Jesus of Nazareth. In the Gospel, John the Baptizer announces the coming of one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Lk 3:16). In Acts, this promise is seen fulfilled in the outpouring of the Spirit (1:5; 2). As Jesus

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is empowered for his mission by the Spirit (Lk 3:21, 22), so the early Christian community is empowered for its witness in the world (Acts 1:8). As Jesus, the Man of the Spirit, is confronted at the outset of his ministry with great obstacles (the temptation, Lk 4:1–13, 28–30), so the church, as the community of the Spirit, faces the temptation to yield to pressures that would compromise its mission (Acts 2:12, 13; 4:1–22; 5:27–42). As Jesus, empowered by the Spirit, proclaims the good news and touches the lives of people with reconciliation, release, and restoration (Lk 4:18, 19), so the church is empowered by the Spirit to become a community of caring and sharing (Acts 2:43–47; 4:31–37). As Jesus, the Man of the Spirit, reaches out to the weak, poor, and rejects of the Palestinian society (this is a special emphasis throughout Luke’s Gospel), so the community of the Spirit is concerned with concrete human need (Acts 4:34, 35; 6:1–6). These parallels could be multiplied; they illustrate Luke’s understanding of the oneness of Jesus’ ministry with that of the church. The latter is the extension of the former, yet is impossible without that foundation provided in Jesus’ own ministry.

***Body of Christ.*** Paul is alone among NT writers in speaking of the church as “the body of Christ” (1 Cor 12:27; Rom 12:5; Eph 1:22, 23; 4:12; see also 1 Cor 10:16, 17; 12:12, 13), or as “the body” of which Christ is the “head” (Eph 4:15; Col 1:18). The origin of this way of speaking about the church is not clear. Among a number of suggestions, two are particularly revealing about Paul’s thought: (1) The Damascus Road experience. According to the account in Acts (9:3–7; 22:6–11; 26:12–18), Jesus identifies himself with his persecuted disciples. By persecuting these early Christians, Paul was actually fighting against Christ himself. It is possible that later reflection on this experience led Paul to the conviction that the living Christ was so identified with his community that it could be spoken of as “his body,” that is, the concrete expression of his real presence. (2) The Hebrew concept of corporate solidarity. Paul was a Hebrew of the Hebrews (Phil 3:5), and his thinking was thoroughly Jewish. In that context the individual is largely thought of as intimately tied into the nation as a whole; the individual does not have real existence apart from the whole people. At the same time, the entire people can be seen as represented by one individual. Thus, “Israel” is both the name of one individual and the name of a whole people. The “servant” of Isaiah 42–53 can be both an individual (Is 42; 53) and the nation of Israel (Isa 49:1–6). This idea of corporate solidarity (or personality) is the background for the intimate connection Paul makes between “the first Adam” and sinful humanity as well as between “the last Adam” (Christ) and renewed humanity (1 Cor 15:45–49; see also Rom 5:12–21).

The reality of the intimate relation between Christ and his church is thus expressed by Paul as the organic unity and integration of the physical body (Rom 12:4–8; 1 Cor 12:12–27). For Paul, the Lord’s Supper is a specific manifestation of this reality: “The bread which we break, is it not participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:16b–17). Since this is the case, Paul goes on to argue, all the functions of the body have their legitimate and rightful place. Division within the body (i.e., the church) reveals that there is something unhealthy within. It is this image of the church as the “body of Christ” which lies behind Paul’s repeated call for and insistence upon unity within the Christian community.

The equation of Christ and the church in this image of “body” leads to a very particular understanding of the nature of Christian existence. Paul speaks of the life of faith as life “in Christ.” To be “in Christ” is to be a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17). But for Paul, this is not just an individual experience, a kind of mystical union between the believer and Christ. For in a real sense, to be “in Christ” is at the same time to be in the church. To be “baptized into Christ” (Gal 3:27) is to become

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one with a community where the traditional barriers of human society are overcome—“for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). Again, to be “in Christ” is to be “baptized into one body” (1 Cor 12:12, 13), for “you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor 12:27). There is then for Paul no such thing as a Christian in isolation, nurturing an individual relationship with Christ. To be a Christian is to be incorporated in a community of persons that is growing toward expressing, in its “body life,” the reality of Christ, fleshing out this reality in its common life and work.

**Temple of God.** In his attempt to overcome the divisions within the church at Corinth, Paul pictures the church not only as the body of Christ, but also as God’s temple, as the dwelling place of God’s Spirit (1 Cor 3:16, 17). Contrary to much interpretation, this passage is not concerned so much with individual Christians as “temples” of God but with the Christian community, in its common life and work, as God’s temple. For Paul the church at Corinth, and the Christian community everywhere, is God’s option, God’s alternative to the brokenness and fragmentation of human society. Therefore, to be involved in destroying that temple—by disunity, lack of concern and love, etc.—is to invalidate the potential of the church as God’s option and to bring upon oneself the judgment of God (1 Cor 3:17). The community of believers is “God’s building” (1 Cor 3:9), and Christians are responsible to be involved in its construction with “materials” that endure (1 Cor 3:10–13). Indeed, Christians themselves are seen as the building blocks which form the structure of “a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph 2:20–22).

The roots of the idea that a community of people can be the dwelling place of God’s presence go back into the pages of the OT, and are mediated to Paul through Jesus’ own understanding and that of the earliest Christian community. In the faith of ancient Israel the tabernacle/temple was considered the visible sign of God’s presence among his people (Ex 25:8; 29:42–46; Lv 26:11, 12; Ez 37:27). That is why there was such despair among the exiles in Babylon. The temple had been destroyed; how could the people still come into the presence of God? Yet, side by side with this exclusive location of the presence of God in the temple, there is the frequent recognition that God’s presence with his people could not be localized (Is 66:1, 2). The Law would no longer be engraved on stone, signifying God’s presence upon the ark of the covenant in the inner sanctuary of the temple; rather, God says, “I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer 31:33). Jesus pushes this concept further. In his discussion with the Samaritan woman he rejects the idea that proper worship of God is tied to a particular sanctuary and affirms that God is present wherever people respond to him in authenticity and integrity (Jn 4:20–24). Jesus also envisioned the final dissolution of the temple in Jerusalem (Mt 24:1, 2; Mk 13:2; Lk 21:5, 6). Stephen, in his defense before the Sanhedrin (the Jewish council), takes a similar critical attitude toward the temple (Acts 7:48, “The Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands”), and cites Isaiah 66:1, 2 for support. John interprets Jesus’ word about the destruction and subsequent raising of the temple (Jn 2:19) as referring to Jesus’ own body and his resurrection. Since the church came into being as a result of the resurrection, the identification of Jesus’ resurrection body as “temple” and its correspondence to the new community established through that event lie close at hand.

Whether Paul was directly dependent upon these ideas is difficult to determine. What is clear is that he is part of a tradition that increasingly understood God to be present among his creatures in and through a living community of people, consecrated for a particular purpose, like the temple of old.

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***Minor Images of the Church.*** There are several images and metaphors for the church that are not as prominent as those discussed above. Nonetheless, they convey perspectives which add to the total NT understanding. Two may be briefly discussed here.

***Bride of Christ.*** Several times the church is pictured as the bride and Christ as the groom/husband (2 Cor 11:2, 3; Eph 5:22–31; Rv 19:7, 8; 21:2–14). This picture of intimacy is based on the common OT image of Israel as God’s bride (Jer 2:2; Hos 2; 3). The common element in these concepts is the call to faithfulness and love.

***People of God.*** It is a common strand of Israel’s faith that it became the people of God because he chose it to be his own possession (Ex 6:6, 7; 19:5; Dt 7:6; 14:2; 26:18). The idea of the covenant is linked to this (Lv 26:9–12). In the preaching of the prophets, where the judgment of God is often seen as leading to complete destruction, there is also the vision of the reestablishment and re-creation of the people of God (Jer 32:37, 38; Hos 2:1, 23; Ez 11:20; 36:28). In the development of Judaism after the exile, the idea emerges that it is only the Israel of the future, the final messianic community, which will be “people of God” in the full sense of that term.

It is evident from a number of passages in the NT that the church knew itself to be this future people of God. The clearest passage is 1 Peter 2:9: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.” The expressions “royal priesthood” and “holy nation” are taken from Exodus 19:6, which so powerfully expresses both the participation in God’s reign and the priestly service of the people of God in the world. Just as the original people of God were called to proclaim God’s mighty acts of deliverance (Is 43:20, 21, Greek OT), so the new people of God are called to “declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pt 2:9). Hosea 2:1, 23 is cited as support for the contention that the Christian community is the new people of God (Rom 9:25, 26; 1 Pt 2:10).<sup>24</sup>

### *KINGDOM OF PRIESTS*

Although some expositions consider the meaning of “kingdom of priests” and “holy nation” separately, in a real sense they should be taken together. The text clearly divides the goal of the covenant relationship into two statements. The first is supported by an explanation or reason. A second statement combines the phrases “kingdom of priests” and “holy nation” either as a hendiadys or at least as an expression similar to Hebrew poetry, where a pair of parallel lines allows one to consider a topic from two slightly variant but similar viewpoints to create a full-orbed perspective on some proposition. These phrases will be explained here, each in turn, but with the meaning of the other phrase kept in mind. At the same time, we should also keep in mind that both phrases together are unpacking the full meaning of “personal treasure.”

First consider the phrase “kingdom of priests” found in this text. The full sentence is, “You will belong to me as a kingdom of priests” (*tihyû lî mamleket kōhanîm*). The *lamed* preposition in the phrase *lî* clearly indicates possession. The Hebrew word “kingdom” may refer to the domain or realm that is ruled, or to the exercise of kingly rule and sovereignty.<sup>37</sup> According to the main options, then, the phrase “kingdom of priests” could mean a domain of priests whom God rules or, alternatively, the exercise of royal office by those who are in fact priests—that is, a royal priesthood. It is difficult to decide between the two main options since the *lamed* preposition

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<sup>24</sup> Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). [Church](#). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 1, pp. 458–461). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

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suggests the former reading while the term “priests” modifying “kingdom” suggests the latter. Yet in the latter option, understanding *kōhanîm* as a genitive of apposition after the collective *mamleket* (“royalty, royal body, royal house”) would be a more natural reading than to construe it as an attributive genitive. Thus we may view in “priests” a collective reference to all Israel as being in some sense “priests” rather than as being a “priestly kingship” or “priestly royalty.” Perhaps *both meanings* are intended, so that both the relationship between God and Israel and the relationship between Israel and the world are indicated. This ambiguity would serve well the theme *kingdom through covenant*.

What is the function of a priest? This question is also important in the interpretation. Some readings focus on the priest as an intermediary, so that the function of a priest is to bring others into the presence of God by offering sacrifices on their behalf. Dumbrell, who follows this track, sees the intermediary role as passive rather than active and missionary. Davies comments,

Dumbrell is on surer ground, then, with a moderate “service to the nations” position, seeing the service as somewhat passive in character. That is, it is by being who they are in relation to God that Israel serves the nations. Dumbrell ties this notion to the role of Abraham as the one through whom the nations would find blessing (Gen. 12:2–3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4). Dumbrell, however, regards any notion of status in v. 6 as being anticlimactic because status has already been dealt with in the word סגלה. Yet if my understanding of the syntax is correct, the expressions ממלכת כהנים and גוי קדוש are exegetical of סגלה, and spell out further dimensions for the reader’s understanding of the extent of the privilege it is to be Yhwh’s “special treasure.”

Alternatively, Davies’s reading focuses on priesthood as access to the divine presence. He argues that Exodus 19 itself provides an all-important clue to the significance of priesthood in verse 22:

Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them. (ESV)

This passage offers a virtual definition of what it is to be a priest: priests are those who approach or come near to Yahweh and who are consecrated and devoted to him. Davies notes further,

Central to any understanding of what a priest is, is the notion of his fitness to approach the deity and “minister” in his presence like an attendant in the court of a king. The tabernacle cult depicted in Exodus 25–31 and 35–40 is a stylized replica of what, in the widespread ideology of the ancient world, took place within the divine realm of the heavenly temple.

Another argument supporting the emphasis Davies sees is found in the verb “consecrate” in Exodus 19:22, from the root קדש. Indeed, this verb and the related adjective קדוש is employed frequently in all things dealing with the activity of priests. Moreover, we should note that here in Exodus 19:5–6 the parallel term to the expression ממלכת כהנים is גוי קדוש. If “kingdom” is parallel to “nation,” then “holy” is parallel to “priests” in these two expressions. Although the common understanding of “holy” in North America has to do with separation, as we will see shortly, Davies rightly asserts that the primary meaning has rather to do with the divine sphere to which the person or object relates, not the sphere from which he, she, or it has thereby been separated:

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Persons or objects are holy to Yhwh, or in one case to Baal (2 Kgs 10:20). They are fit to be associated with the one who is inherently **קדוש**, particularly when he is pictured as enthroned in his sanctuary (Isa. 6:3; Ps. 99:5, 9). It is no light matter to stand in the presence of Yhwh, the holy God, as the men of Beth Shemesh were aware (1 Sam 6:20). The “entrance liturgies” of Psalms 15 and 24 reinforce this demand for holiness on the part of the one who would approach God’s dwelling place.

If we regard **קדוש** as being a guide to the understanding of **כהנים**, the character of Israel as **כהנים** will relate to their consecration or readiness to encounter Yhwh. This is the point of the preparations outlined in Exod. 19:14–15, including the washing of clothes, and the abstinence from sexual relations.

Finally, Davies notes that the Sinai pericope simply contains no direct reference to Israel’s responsibilities toward the nations, and he believes we ought to be looking not for a *functional* definition of priesthood but for an *ontological* one. What priests *are* in their relation to God and in the eyes of the community is the issue.

The emphasis and focus for which Davies argues is correct because the arguments are based solidly on the text. Nonetheless, the focus on Israel’s priesthood as access to the divine presence and on a priority in the worship of Yahweh alone as God does not exclude the perspective of Dumbrell, who has rightly kept his eye on the metanarrative as the context for Exodus 19:5–6. Just as God, in Genesis 1–2, establishes his rule through a covenant relationship between himself and man and between man and the creation (wherein Adam’s priority according to Genesis 2 is to spend time in the divine presence to order his perspectives and role in the world), so God is extending his rule through the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12–22), promising blessing to the nations in relationship to Abraham, and through the covenant with his family Israel (Exodus 19–24) as a royal priesthood (with a priority on worship that results in being a light to the nations). Since Israel is settled at the navel of the world, the nations of the world will see displayed a right relationship to God, social justice in human interaction, and good stewardship of the earth’s resources. Apparently, it is appropriate and convenient for Davies to expound the duties of priests at a later point in his exposition, and he demonstrates from the biblical text that this includes the function of the priest as intermediary between God and people, so why exclude it from purview here?

We see, then, that Israel, the last Adam, will belong to God as a people under his rule and will exercise royal rule by spending time in the worship of God so necessary for display of the divine rule in one’s thoughts, words, and ways. Davies notes that the tabernacle, the construction of which is the topic of the literary unit following Exodus 19–24, is in form a miniaturized and portable reproduction of God’s heavenly sanctuary, of which Israel has caught a glimpse in the covenant ratification ceremony in Exodus 24:9–11. The cloud denoting the divine presence on Mount Sinai settles on the tabernacle in Exodus 40. Thus Israel carries the divine presence with her. Moreover, the tabernacle is also a replica of the garden in Eden and a representation of the universe; thus, just as Adam was to fulfill his mandate by devoting himself to worship as a priest in the garden sanctuary, so Israel as a new Adam is to fulfill her mandate by devoting herself to worship as a priest in the tabernacle and later the temple. Since in the Bible and the ancient Near East, kings are the ones who build temples, Israel as a nation building the tabernacle in Exodus 25–40 also depicts her royal status. She is a king-priest. And as we noted earlier, this is the point in Hosea 6:7: “But they [i.e., Israel], like Adam, have transgressed the covenant.” Israel’s covenant violation was in her role as king-priest.

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Israel is also a vehicle for bringing the nations to the divine presence and rule. Israel would be a people completely devoted to the service of God. The rite of circumcision as practiced in Israel is an excellent illustration of this role. Probably the background for understanding circumcision is Egypt, where only the aristocracy, the highest order of priests, and the noblest elite warriors along with the Pharaoh and his family were circumcised, because only they were completely devoted to the service of the gods. In Deuteronomy 10:16, the command to Israel “Circumcise your hearts” is an exposition of the earlier command “to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good” (Deut. 10:12–13 NIV). Thus circumcision is an apt expression for the idea: be completely devoted to Yahweh.

Again, the summary provided by Davies is apt and deserves a hearing:

Israel’s cult shares some common features with the sanctuary ideology of the ancient world. The tabernacle is a representation of an ideal or restored cosmos, where God and man meet in an environment which transcends the limitations of the mundane world. The priest, granted access to the sacred space, is a model of the ideal held out to Israel of the meaning of its collective priesthood and the access to the presence of God of which it speaks. The priests are the chosen and privileged ones who are granted a royal dignity and the right of access to this realm, even, in the case of the high priest, to that sacred space which is regarded as the throne-room of heaven, the innermost sanctum of an ideal cosmos.

Priests share characteristics of royalty in the prevailing ideology of priesthood in the ancient Near East. Israel had a collective memory of ancient priest-kings, and the descriptions of the garb of the Israelite priests preserve something of these royal associations. In their priests, the Israelites had a perpetual reminder of their own royal-priestly standing and privilege. The detailed literary portrayal of the priesthood of Aaron and his sons serves to flesh out for the reader something of what is meant by the image of Israel’s corporate royal priesthood.

In keeping with the expectation that sanctuary-building is the work of a chosen king, acting on instructions of a god and according to a divinely revealed pattern, it is suggested that Israel corporately functions as the royal sanctuary builder, according to Exodus, in keeping with the designation of Israel as a “royal priesthood.”

In a work on biblical theology entitled *Dominion and Dynasty*, Stephen Dempster analyzes the phrase “kingdom of priests” in a way similar to the exposition given here:

The final phrase designates Israel as a particular type of kingdom. Instead of being a kingdom of a particular king, it will be a kingdom marked by priesthood; that is, service of God on behalf of people and *vice versa*. It will be “a kingdom run not by politicians depending upon strength and connivance but by priests depending upon faith in Yahweh, a servant nation instead of a ruling nation” (Durham 263). Israel will thus redefine the meaning of dominion—service. This will be its distinctive task, its distinguishing characteristic among the world of nations.

In sum, the call of Israel to be a royal priesthood connects the Israelite covenant to the Abrahamic. Psalm 67 draws this out very well:

May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face to shine upon us, Selah  
that your way may be known on earth,  
your saving power among all nations.  
Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you! (Ps. 67:1–3 ESV)



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In verse 1, we see Israel praying as a priest, since the nation as a whole is invoking the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6. The goal or purpose of invoking this blessing is so that salvation may come to the nations. This is none other than the goal of the Abrahamic covenant.<sup>25</sup>

#### *HOLY NATION*

The parallel phrase to “kingdom of priests” is “holy nation” (Heb. *gôy qādôš*). As already mentioned, this phrase is not necessarily identical in meaning to “kingdom of priests,” but both phrases function as a pair, like parallel lines in Hebrew poetry, to paint a three-dimensional picture in one’s mind.

The term *gôy* (“nation”) is the parallel term to kingdom. It is an economic, political, and social structure in which a final governmental headship operates. It therefore clearly reminds us of Genesis 12:2, as explained earlier. This is the city of God, the kingdom of God. In fulfillment of the promises to Abraham, Israel, by virtue of the Mosaic covenant, will provide under the direct rule of God a model of God’s rule over human life, which is the divine aim for the entire world.

“Nation” is modified by the adjective “holy.” What is a “holy” nation? Unfortunately, the term “holy” is not very well understood by the church today. Definitions commonly given are “pure” or “set apart.” Such definitions are erroneous because the meaning is being determined by etymology rather than usage, and the etymology is completely speculative. The idea that “holy” means “set apart” can be traced to the influence of W. W. Baudissin, who proposed in 1878 that the root of “holy” in Hebrew (*qđš*) is derived from *qd-*, “to cut.” Exhaustive research by a French evangelical scholar, Claude-Bernard Costecalde, has cast better light on the meaning of this term since his analysis is based on the way the word is used rather than on hypothetical origins. Costecalde’s study examines all occurrences in the Old Testament and in ancient Near Eastern literature of the same time (e.g., Akkadian and Ugaritic). Not surprisingly, he discovered that the biblical meaning is similar to that in the languages of the cultures surrounding Israel. The basic meaning is not “separated” but rather “consecrated to” or “devoted to.” This is also the basic meaning of ἅγιος, the counterpart in Greek.

Noteworthy is the passage in Exodus 3, where Moses encounters Yahweh in the burning bush and is asked to remove his sandals because he is standing on “holy ground.” This is the first instance in the Old Testament of the root *qđš* in either an adjectival or a nominal form. In the narrative, Moses is commanded to stay away from the bush, that is, from the place from which God speaks, but he is not commanded to stay away from the holy ground. There is nothing inaccessible or set apart about the holy ground. Moreover, his fright and shock come from a revelation of God, not from the holiness of the place. The “holy ground” (Ex. 3:5) encompasses a larger space than just the bush from which God speaks and is equivalent to “the mountain of God” in 3:1. The act of removing one’s sandals, like the act of the nearest relative in Ruth 4:7, is a ceremony or rite of deposal well known in the culture of that time. Moses must acknowledge that this ground belongs to God and must enter into an attitude of consecration. Thus, rather than marking an item as set apart, “holy” ground is ground prepared, consecrated, or devoted to the meeting of God and man.

A holy nation, then, is one prepared and consecrated for fellowship with God and one completely devoted to him. Instructions in the Pentateuch are often supported by the statement from Yahweh, “For I am holy.” Such statements show that complete devotion to God on the part

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<sup>25</sup> Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2018). *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Second Edition, pp. 356–362). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

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of Israel would manifest itself in two ways: (1) identifying with his ethics and morality and (2) sharing his concern for the broken in the community. The commands and instructions in Leviticus 19 and 20 are bounded by the claim that Yahweh is holy (19:2; 20:26) and include concern against mistreating the alien and the poor, the blind and the deaf. In the “Judgments” of the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 19–24), some instructions relate to the oppression of orphans and widows (22:23). God was concerned about the rights of the slave (e.g., 21:2–11) and the disenfranchised in society. Over the past thirty years we have heard the strident voices of the feminist, of the antinuclear protest, and of the gay rights movement. But God hears the voice of those who are broken in body, in economy, and in spirit. If we are in covenant relationship with him, we must, like him, hear the voice that is too weak to cry out.

God also jealously protects what is devoted to him. His anger flares when his holiness is violated, as in the case of Uzzah (2 Sam. 6:7), who extended his hand to touch the ark of the covenant. Also, in Psalm 2, when the kings and princes of the earth gather to touch the Anointed of the Lord, he flares out in anger to protect his King. Also, in the case of Paul in the New Testament, who in persecuting the church was reaching up to heaven, as it were, to shake his rebellious fist at Jesus, the Anointed One (i.e., the Christ), and slap him in the face, it resulted in his calling himself the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15).

This explanation of the terms “personal treasure,” “kingdom of priests,” and “holy nation,” then, shows the goal and purpose of the Sinai covenant for Israel. Although the language is different from that of Genesis 1:26–28 and 12:1–3, we can clearly see that the covenant at Sinai achieves and administers in the Iron Age, through the nation as a whole, the purposes of the promises given to Abraham. God is establishing his kingdom through covenant. The covenant entails relationship with God on the one hand and relationship with the world on the other. Israel will model to the world what it means to have a relationship with God, what it means to treat each other in a genuinely human way, and what it means to be good stewards of the earth’s resources. As priests, they will mediate the blessings of God to the world and will be used to bring the rest of the world to know God.

Christopher J. H. Wright observes that Exodus 19:5–6 has a chiasmic structure as follows:

Now then, if you really obey my voice and keep my covenant,

- a** you will be for me a special personal possession
- b** among all the peoples;
- b’** for indeed to me belongs the whole earth
- a’** but you, you will be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.

Wright says,

After the initial conditional clause (the first line), there is a chiasmic structure of four phrases, in which the two central lines portray God’s universal ownership of the world and its nations, while the two outer lines express his particular role for Israel. This structure also makes clear that the double phrase “priestly kingdom and holy nation” stands in apposition to “personal possession.” ... The *status* is to be a special treasured possession. The *role* is to be a priestly and holy community in the midst of the nations.

The literary structure as explained by Wright reinforces the exposition here of Israel’s covenant relationship with God and with the world that takes up the sonship and kingship of the divine image in Genesis 1.

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The new covenant succeeds where the old covenant failed. The purposes of the Mosaic covenant are now being fulfilled in the church. The apostle Peter calls the church God's special treasure, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9–10). And God has forged both Jews and non-Jews into his new humanity [or Man, i.e., Adam], according to Ephesians 2:15.<sup>26</sup>

### ***JESUS CHRIST ORDAINED AS PRIEST***

The ordination of the priests is important because it reveals deep spiritual truths about Christ and Christian service. In one way or another, everything at the tabernacle was connected to Christ. The tabernacle itself pointed to Christ's dwelling with his people. It was symbolic of his incarnation, in which the Word became flesh and "tabernacled" among us (John 1:14, literal translation). The golden lampstand symbolized Jesus as the light of the world. The bread of the presence symbolized him as the bread of life. Even the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place symbolized how his bodily death opened the way to God. The tabernacle in the wilderness was a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Christ was also revealed in the ordination of the priests. The sacrifices that consecrated them to God pointed to the sacrifice he made for us on the cross. Jesus Christ is the sin offering that atoned for our sins. When we lay our hands on him by faith, he becomes our substitute, dying in our place. As the Scripture says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). By his blood we are also purified for the holy service of God. In the words of Bede, the venerable theologian from the early Middle Ages: "Who does not know that the sacrifice of those animals and their blood designate the death of our Lord and the sprinkling of his blood, through which we are set free from sins and strengthened for good works?"

There is a special connection between the sufferings of Christ and the sacrifice of a bull as a sin offering for the priests. As we have seen, the skin and offal of the bull were carried off and burned outside the camp. This was symbolic of the death of Christ, who was crucified "outside the camp." That is, he was crucified outside the holy city of Jerusalem. The Scripture says, "The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood" (Heb. 13:11, 12). To make atonement, Jesus was taken out to the place of disease and death, there to suffer God's curse against our sin.

Jesus is not simply the sacrifice, however; he is also the priest. This is another way the tabernacle points us to Christ. Jesus Christ is the priest who enters God's presence on our behalf. The book of Hebrews calls him "a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God" (2:17); "the high priest whom we confess" (3:1); "a great high priest" (4:14); "a high priest forever" (6:20); the "high priest of the good things that are already here" (9:11); "a great priest over the house of God" (10:21). As our great High Priest, Jesus presents our prayers to God, interceding on our behalf. He also stands before God in perfect righteousness, so that we can be accepted in God's sight.

If Jesus is our priest, then presumably he must have been ordained to the priesthood. And so he was. This is part of the meaning of his baptism. Jesus' public ministry began when he entered the Jordan River to be baptized. Remember, washing with water was the first step in the

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<sup>26</sup> Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2018). *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Second Edition, pp. 362–365). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

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ordination of a priest. So Jesus was washed not because he was unclean, but so he could be set apart as a priest for sinners. His baptism was part of his ordination to priestly ministry.

His baptism was also an anointing. God sent Jesus to be the Messiah, which means “the Anointed One.” The actual anointing took place at his baptism. The Bible says that when Jesus was baptized, “heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove” (Luke 3:21b, 22a). In the Old Testament priests were anointed with oil. This was symbolic of the Spirit setting them apart for God’s service. But Jesus was anointed with the Spirit himself. Later, when the Apostle Peter wanted to explain who Jesus was, he said, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power” (Acts 10:38a). Jesus was ordained for his ministry as our priest by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, who came upon him in all the fullness of his divine power.

This explains why Jesus is such a wonderful priest. He has been anointed with the third person of the Trinity! It was by the Spirit that Jesus performed miracles, by the Spirit that he taught God’s Word, by the Spirit that he offered his life for our sins, and by the Spirit that he was raised from the dead. Now it is by the Spirit that he works in our lives and hears our prayers. Whatever we need from God—protection, provision, peace, healing, comfort, guidance, forgiveness, victory over sin, or any other form of divine assistance—we are invited to ask for it in the name of Jesus Christ. He is our priest, the priest so perfect that we will never need any other. Jesus has made the only sacrifice we need by dying on the cross for our sins. And now he intercedes for us in Heaven, giving us direct access to God’s grace.

## ***THE CONSECRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN***

The ordination of the Old Testament priests points us to Christ and to his perfect priesthood. It also shows what it means to be consecrated by Christ. It does this by telling the story of our salvation. There were four main stages in the ordination of a priest. Aaron and his sons were washed with water, robed in righteousness, anointed with oil, and sprinkled with blood. Each part of their ordination service relates to a different aspect of our salvation in Christ.

First there is the washing with water. Naturally this reminds us of Christian baptism, which signifies the washing away of our sins. Sin makes us dirty. Our angry thoughts, our profane language, our sexual immorality, our selfish ambitions, our greedy strategies—these things make us unclean. If we are to have any kind of relationship with God at all, something has to be done about the filthiness of our sin.

We can only be clean if God makes us clean. This is symbolized in Christian baptism, the sacrament in which we were sprinkled with water. But the real cleansing is what God does on the inside to wash away our sin—what the New Testament calls “the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:5; cf. 1 Cor. 6:11). God makes us clean when we are born again by his Spirit. Then the Spirit continues to cleanse us, as often as we are stained by sin. Our sins make us feel dirty (or at least they ought to), but God can make us clean. He has promised that “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Therefore, “let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:22).

Next comes our robing in righteousness. God does something more than simply wash away our sin; he also clothes us with the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. The Bible says, “All of

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you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal. 3:27). The Old Testament priests were dressed in sacred garments symbolizing their holiness before God. It takes holiness to stand before God, and the priests could not enter his holy sanctuary unless they were suitably dressed. But we have the most righteous robes of all. Every believer has put on Jesus Christ and thus is dressed with the perfect righteousness of Christ’s obedience to God. We do not stand on our own merits, which would never be good enough for God. Instead, God accepts us on the basis of what Jesus has done. We are clothed with Christ.

God has washed us by his Spirit and clothed us with his Son. He has also anointed us for his service. This was the third step in the ordination of the high priest. Aaron was anointed with oil, which consecrated him for God’s service. We too have been anointed—not with oil but with the Holy Spirit. The Bible says that we have “an anointing from the Holy One” (1 John 2:20). To be specific, God “anointed us ... and put his Spirit in our hearts” (2 Cor. 1:21b, 22a). God the Holy Spirit has set us apart for sacred service.

Finally, there were sacrifices. There was a sin offering—a sacrifice of atonement pointing to the propitiation Jesus made on the cross for our sins. There was a burnt offering—a sacrifice of dedication in which a whole animal was offered to God. Then there was the offering that was only for priests—a sacrifice of purification that consecrated them for God. Each of these offerings began with the priests laying their hands on the head of the sacrifice. They identified themselves with the animal, which then died in their place. The sacrifice was their substitute.

We too have a substitute. A sacrifice has died in our place to make atonement for our sin. This substitutionary sacrifice has been made by the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God and the Savior of sinners. To receive forgiveness, all we need to do is lay our hands on him by faith. When we do, God imputes all our sin to him.

One man who received forgiveness through the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ was Charles Simeon, the great preacher at Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge, England. When Simeon began university he was not yet a Christian. This explains why he was so alarmed to receive—shortly after his arrival—a summons from the head of his college requiring him to take Holy Communion in three weeks’ time. Simeon panicked. “The thought rushed into my mind,” he later wrote, “that Satan himself was as fit to attend there as I; and that if I must attend, I must prepare for my attendance.”

Desperate for help, Simeon bought a Christian book called *The Whole Duty of Man*. As he read it, he began to cry out to God for mercy. Eventually Simeon began to feel the first glimmerings of hope. In his own words,

It was an indistinct kind of hope, founded on God’s mercy to real penitents. But in Passion week as I was reading Bishop Wilson on the Lord’s Supper, I met with an expression to this effect: “That the Jews knew what they did when they transferred their sin to the head of their offering.” The thought rushed into my mind, What! May I transfer all my guilt to another? Has God provided an offering for me, that I may lay my sins on his head? Then, God willing, I will not bear them on my own soul one moment longer. Accordingly I sought to lay my sins on the sacred head of Jesus; and on the Wednesday began to have a hope of mercy; on the Thursday that hope increased; on the Friday and Saturday it became more strong; and on the Sunday morning (Easter Day) I awoke early with those words upon my heart and lips, “Jesus Christ is risen to-day! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!” From that hour peace flowed in rich abundance into my soul; and ... I had the sweetest access to God through my blessed Saviour.

The mercy that Charles Simeon received—forgiveness, peace, joy, and access to God—come to everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ for salvation.

### ***THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS***

God has provided full salvation in Christ. He has washed us clean, robed us in righteousness, anointed us with his Spirit, and atoned for our sins. When God did all these things in Exodus 29, it was for the ordination of the priests. So why has he done it all for us? For one very important purpose: to ordain us as priests.

The New Testament takes the word *priest* and applies it to *everyone* who has been saved from sin by the atoning work of Jesus Christ. We are “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9). We are “a kingdom and priests to serve ... God” (Rev. 1:6). We are “priests of God and of Christ” (Rev. 20:6). Martin Luther called this “the priesthood of all believers.” He said, “We are all priests, as many of us as are Christians.”

This means that God has important work for us to do. We have been called into his holy service. Many Christians still think of ministry as something that is primarily or even exclusively for ministers and missionaries. It is true that ministers and missionaries are called to serve. Like the Old Testament priests, men ordained to gospel ministry have been consecrated for holy service to God. But God has given all of us a sacred calling. We are priests of the living God, and we have a holy obligation to serve him. We no longer serve him in the tabernacle but in his holy sanctuary the church, and also in the world. We serve him by praising his name. We serve him by giving generously to the church. We serve him by binding up the wounds of the brokenhearted and embracing the outcasts of society. We serve him by loving those who are hard to love with the same merciful love that we have received from God in Christ. We serve him by telling people to trust in Jesus and by doing whatever we do for his glory.

When the Old Testament priests were ordained, they were marked with blood in three places: their earlobes, their thumbs, and their big toes. This meant that they belonged to God from head to toe. As John J. Davis explains it: “This act implied the complete dedication of life and ability to the service of God. Symbolically the blood put on the right ear sanctified that organ to hear the word of God; that which was put on the right hand set the hands apart in their performance of mediatorial work. The right foot spoke of the sanctified walk of the life of the priest as an example to others.”

God has made the same claim on everyone who belongs to him through faith in Jesus Christ. We have been marked with the blood of the very Son of God. The Bible says, “The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (Heb. 9:13, 14).

We have been set apart to serve. Our ears belong to God. He wants us to listen to his Word. Our thumbs belong to God, too, along with the rest of our hands. God wants us to serve him with all our strength. Even our big toes belong to God, which is something to think about every time we put on our socks! God wants us to walk with him as we make our way through the world. We have a high and holy calling. We have been ordained as priests to serve the living God.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ryken, P. G., & Hughes, R. K. (2005). *Exodus: saved for God's glory* (pp. 906–911). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

## WORD WEALTH

**2:9 chosen**, *eklektos* (ek-lek-*toss*); Strong's #1588: Compare "eclectic." From *ek*, "out of," and *lego*, "to pick, gather." The word designates one picked out from among the larger group for special service or privileges. It describes Christ as the chosen Messiah of God (Luke 23:35), angels as messengers from heaven (1 Tim. 5:21), and believers as recipients of God's favor (Matt. 24:22; Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12). The NT traces the source of election to God's grace.

## KINGDOM DYNAMICS

**2:9 Priority of Worship, WORSHIP AND THE KINGDOM.** As a "royal" priesthood, the kingly nature of the redeemed worshiper is noted. This passage is rooted in God's call to ancient Israel (see Ex. 19:5-7). Peter and John (Rev. 1:5, 6) draw this truth to full application and prophetic fulfillment in the NT believer. As with Israel, deliverance through the blood of the Lamb is but the beginning. As promised, dominion and destiny will unfold as their priestly duty is fulfilled. True authority is always related to a walk in purity and a constancy in worship. The spirit of worship is essential to all advance of the kingdom. Just as ancient Israel will only take the Promised Land while doing battle from a foundation of righteous worship before the Lord, so with the contemporary church. We will only experience promised power for evangelism and spiritual victories as we prioritize and grow in our worship of the living God. Kingdom power is kept from pollution this way, as kingdom people keep humbly praiseful before the King—and witness His works of power with joy. See also Rev. 1:5, 6.

## KINGDOM DYNAMICS

**2:9 Worshipful Walk with God, PRAISE PATHWAY.** This text not only appoints praise, but represents a basic revelation of the Bible: God wants a people who will walk with Him in prayer, march with Him in praise, and thank and worship Him. Note the progression in Peter's description of the people of the New Covenant: 1) We are a chosen generation—a people begun with Jesus' choice of the Twelve, who became 120, to whom were added thousands at Pentecost. We are a part of this continually expanding generation, "chosen" when we receive Christ. 2) We are a royal priesthood. Under the Old Covenant the priesthood and royalty were separated. We are now—in the Person of our Lord—all "kings and priests to His God" (Rev. 1:6), a worshiping host and a kingly band, prepared for walking with Him in the light or warring beside Him against the hosts of darkness. 3) We are a holy nation, composed of Jews and Gentiles—of one blood, from every nation under heaven. 4) We are His own special people. God's intention from the time of Abraham has been to call forth a people with a special mission—to proclaim His praise and to propagate His blessing throughout the Earth.

**2:9** The church is the new "Israel," now including Gentile believers **who once were not a people and who had not obtained mercy**. This quote from Hos. 1 is an indication that the



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apostles could view OT prophecies about national Israel as fulfilled in the church, the new spiritual Israel.<sup>28</sup>

“Integral to Peter’s strategy for guiding the Anatolian Christians in their response to persecution is addressing the pressing psychological and spiritual issue of self-identity. Being maligned and ridiculed erodes one’s sense of self-worth. Being ostracized and marginalized by the primary social institutions, customs and citizens of the Greco-Roman world of Anatolia engenders fear and makes it next to impossible to acquire the highly prized value of honor. Its opposite, shame, was a stigma almost worse than death itself; indeed, some Romans and provincials committed suicide when forced to face shame cast on them by their opponents or community. Viewed in this light, Peter’s letter reflects the work of a virtuoso. Here is a masterful reconfiguring of self-image that transcends time and place. One might say he creates a gallery of painting, each one portraying the new people of God, each one a “glittering image” requiring careful analysis and appreciation.”

**The Life and Witness of Peter by Heyler**

#### **NotES:**

### **3. Live obediently in hope**

#### **1:13–2:3**

#### **1. Hope is ready (1:13)**

The imperatives of Christian living always begin with ‘therefore.’ Peter does not begin to exhort Christian pilgrims until he has celebrated the wonders of God’s salvation in Jesus Christ. The indicative of what God had done for us (and in us) precedes the imperative of what we are called to do for him. ‘Without the indicative of what God does, the imperative is addressed to a helpless sinner, the victim of his illusions; it becomes a commandment that crushes or that drives to vain and presumptuous efforts.’ Our hope is God’s gift, an inheritance created for us by Christ’s resurrection (1:3). Because we have been given hope, we are called to live in it.

Peter’s exhortations continue through his letter. Yet he also continues to remind us of the reality of redemption that underlies his call to obedience. In the rest of this chapter he summons us to the obedience of hope, hope that is marked by readiness and holiness.

*Set your hope fully*, he says. The form of this imperative suggests a clear-cut, decisive action. The force of the command is heightened by the adverb *fully* or ‘firmly.’ Since our hope is sure, we can bank on it. It is not so much an attitude to be cultivated as a reality to be recognized. To set our hope is to believe the gospel. Our faith and hope are in God (1:21). We cannot first improve our skill in hoping and then direct our more hopeful attitude toward God. Hope moves the other way. It is our response to God’s work. We look to God, hear his word of promise, see his salvation in Christ, and fix our hope on him. Peter makes this clear by defining again the object of our hope. It is the grace that is being brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. To fix our hope is to fix our gaze on the coming glory of Christ’s appearing (4:13). The blessing (grace) of that day is future, but it is already arriving, for we already have a foretaste of what God will give us when Christ appears.

The certainty of our hope has a remarkable effect on our lives. Hoping Christians cannot live carelessly, seeking self-indulgence and pleasure. *Prepare your minds for action*: literally, ‘Gird up the loins of your mind.’ The figure describes what a man wearing a long robe had to do if he were to go into action—gather the garment up between his legs and tuck it into his belt. Like Israel in Egypt, we have been called out of our slavery to begin a journey to the promised land. The Israelites were commanded to eat the passover, their last meal in Egypt, ‘girded’ for travel. God calls his servants to be girded for mission; Elijah to run and Jeremiah to prophesy.<sup>3</sup> Peter may have been thinking especially of the words of Jesus, ‘Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning; and be ye yourselves like

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<sup>28</sup> Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., 1 Pe 2:7–9). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.



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men looking for their lord, when he shall return from the marriage feast; that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may straightway open unto him.’

Jesus contrasted the watchful expectancy of the faithful servant with drunken indifference to the return of the Lord. Peter makes the same contrast; we are to be sober, ‘self-controlled’, disciplined in mind. Sobriety, both literal and figurative, marks the Christian lifestyle (4:7; 5:8). Drunken stupor is the refuge of those who have no hope. But Christians who look for the coming of the Lord live in hope. They will not seek escape in the bottle, for they have tasted already of the Spirit of glory. Alive and alert, they look for the Lord.

To be sober is to be realistic. Drunkenness brings delusions before stupor sets in. The hallucinations of spiritual drunkenness are not amusing pink elephants, but devouring monsters; the ideologies of political oppression, the fantasies of sexual lust, the jealous hatreds of personal spite. The world seeks orgies of perversion before it sinks into the drunken stupor of hopelessness. Sober reflection is the opposite of the carousings of the old life in lustful inebriation (1:14). Sober watchfulness grows with the practice of prayer (4:7), and is alert to the assaults of the devil (5:8). Christian realism knows the actuality of sin and the folly of utopian dreams. Yet Christian sobriety is not joyless gloom, but glad hope in the new order to come with Christ. Peter had seen the Gadarene demoniac wild and naked on the shore. Jesus had cast out the demons, clothed him with his right mind and girded him to proclaim salvation in his own village. Christian living needs order as well as ardour. Our joyful hope is expressed, not in mindless ecstasy, but in alert wisdom that seizes opportunities to serve the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

#### **2. Hope is holy (1:14–2:3)**

##### *a. The holiness of children of the Father (1:14–17)*

The alert and disciplined mind of the Christian is fixed not simply on the coming event, but on him who will come, Jesus Christ, and on our Father God who calls us to himself. Because God calls us to stand before him, our hope brings accountability as well as triumph. Does not that accountability change our hope to dread? Can any sinner hope for the day of judgment? Knowing that God will judge each person’s work must surely inspire reverent fear, but does it not inspire much more—consuming terror? Who can stand before the throne of God?

The apostolic teaching about God’s judgment has been misunderstood. On the one hand, some have considered that God’s justifying grace must remove accountability to God in the day of judgment. They have therefore denied that the Christian will stand before God’s judgment seat. On the other hand, many have affirmed accountability in the day of judgment, but have interpreted God’s final verdict as justification by works added to an initial salvation by grace. No Christian could then be sure of heaven until the last judgment.

The New Testament writers do not share the confusion of either error. The reality and finality of God’s judgment are often affirmed; we are taught that Christ will be the Judge in that day. At the same time we are told that God’s verdict on us has already been pronounced; in Christ we are justified; we have passed from death to life. The Judge in the last day is our Saviour.<sup>3</sup> God’s final judgment will glorify his justice; he will pronounce for all the redeemed the satisfaction of Christ’s atoning death and the merit of his perfect obedience. Yet the faithfulness of the Lord’s people will also be displayed, not as the basis of their acceptance, but to show the reality of their faith in the Saviour. To those who have been unfaithful, the Lord himself will declare the folly of their hypocritical confession: ‘Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”’ God’s examination of his saints will also make evident the worthlessness of shoddy ministry. Heavenly reward will be proportionate to the faithfulness of the Lord’s redeemed stewards.<sup>5</sup>

Peter, therefore, does not call us to soul-destroying dread. The Judge is our Father, who has begotten us to be his children and given us a sure hope as heirs of his blessing. Yet Peter does call us to reverent fear. Our Father is the living God. He is holy: holy in the high mystery of his deity, holy in the perfection of his righteousness. Because he is holy, we too must be holy, for we are his people. Peter quotes a central passage from the old covenant. Israel as the people of God were to be holy; they were separated from the nations by the presence of God in their midst. The purity that God’s presence demanded was symbolized by elaborate ceremonies of washing and cleansing. Israel’s soldiers, for example, were required to carry a shovel with their weapons. Hygiene in the camp honoured in symbol the presence of the Lord in their camp.<sup>2</sup>

Soiled flesh or clothing, however, served only to picture spiritual defilement. Israel was to be clean from idolatry and from the immoral practices of the Gentile nations. Peter, on a housetop in Joppa, was shown that God’s laws for ceremonial cleanness had been fulfilled in Christ. No longer were certain foods unclean, nor would Peter be defiled

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by eating with Gentiles.<sup>4</sup> Rather, the holiness of the true Israel was now to be seen in the fruits of an obedient life. Israel had been summoned to Sinai to enter into covenant with the Lord. They had vowed to obey him, to be his true and devoted people. Now Peter writes to those who have heard and heeded the call of the gospel. They are, literally, 'children of obedience'. This Hebrew form of expression is not the same as *obedient children*. It is an idiom describing those who are characterized by obedience, as though obedience were their parent. The term for 'obedience' derives from the word for 'hearing'. Christians are those who have 'hearkened' to the gospel.<sup>6</sup> They have turned from sin to submit themselves to Christ as Lord and Saviour. Reverent submission to God furnishes the key to Peter's exhortations in this letter.

Coming to God as our holy Father means leaving the lifestyle handed down from our fathers (1:18). We cannot continue to follow the lusts that controlled us when we lived in ignorance of our Father in heaven (1:14). Peter with Paul describes the Gentiles as not knowing God, without hope and without God in the world. When God is not acknowledged, a void is opened at the heart of life and culture (1:18). Into that void rush desires for power and sexual exploitation. Again Peter reflects the charge given to the Old Testament Israel: they were not to pattern their lives on the customs of the land of Egypt that they had left behind, nor on the customs of the land of Canaan that they were to enter. Rather, they were to pattern their lives on God's commandments.

The murals of Pompeii reflect the decadence of the Gentile world of Peter's day. Hollywood still titillates viewers with images of Nero's saturnalian orgies. Contemporary Western culture seems to be overtaking the Roman world in moral decay. Pornographic magazines and video films, licentious music and dance forms, and sex-ridden advertising, have fed the 'flood of dissipation' that Peter describes (4:4). Perhaps more threatening is the 'power' philosophy of popular 'success' literature; a cynical appeal to selfish exploitation. Ruthlessness in climbing over others can be seen in arbitrageurs as well as in the blitzing tackles of American football. A dictator's grasp on power through torture and assassination only shows the mania openly.

Charles Colson describes an interview on American television. Mike Wallace was speaking with Yehiel Dinur, a concentration-camp survivor who testified against Adolf Eichmann at the Nuremberg trials. Wallace showed a film clip from the 1961 trial of this Nazi architect of the Holocaust. Colson describes the scene as Dinur walked into the courtroom to come face to face with the man who had sent him to Auschwitz eighteen years earlier.

Dinur began to sob uncontrollably, then fainted, collapsing in a heap on the floor as the presiding judicial officer pounded his gavel for order in the crowded courtroom.

Was Dinur overcome by hatred? Fear? Horrid memories?

No; it was none of these. Rather, as Dinur explained to Wallace, all at once he realized Eichmann was not the godlike army officer who had sent so many to their deaths. This Eichmann was an ordinary man. 'I was afraid about myself,' said Dinur. '... I saw that I am capable to do this. I am ... exactly like him.'

It is the reality of sin in the heart of everyone that patterns the evil and oppression in the world. Holiness means that the pattern is broken, that the sinner is transformed.

God himself becomes the model for the repatterning of our lives. We are to be imitators of God as beloved children; holy as he is holy, perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. *Be holy in all you do* (1:15). The pattern of holy living cannot be reduced to a limited number of 'holy' actions. God's righteous deeds flow from his holy nature; holiness patterned on his must express transformed hearts. On the one hand, this seems to set an impossible standard: how can we be like the holy God? On the other hand, there is a marvellous simplicity in a holiness patterned on God himself; it does not require encyclopedic grasp of endless directives and prohibitions. It flows from the heart; its key is love. To be holy is to love the Lord our God with heart, soul, strength and mind, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. We imitate the love of grace that saved us, the love of God's compassion poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

Peter had encountered the holiness of God in his fishing-boat. After a night of fruitless labour, he had cast his nets again at the word of Jesus. The catch had been miraculous; Peter had fallen down at the feet of Jesus: 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!' Kneeling amid the fish, Peter had recognized the Lord of creation, the Holy One. The holiness of the *lamb without blemish* (1:19) is the holiness of the Father revealed in the Son. To be holy is to sanctify Christ in our hearts as Lord.

God's holy people are no longer at home in this world. They are *strangers*, residing in a land that is not their own. Their citizenship is in heaven.<sup>2</sup> Like Israel in exile, they pray for the peace of the city where they live, but their hearts

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are in Jerusalem—the heavenly city of God.<sup>4</sup> In spite of their humanness, Christians are ‘extra-terrestrials’ at heart. Or, better, they are ‘neo-terrestrials’, representatives of the new humanity in Jesus Christ.

The new Israel in exile has not been banished from the house of God. They *live ... in reverent fear* of the Father. Their lifestyle as a holy people is a witness to the nations. Christians are therefore called to set about living as strangers with a mission. They are ambassadors on earth, revering their Father in heaven.

Awe for the Father does not drive us away from him, but draws us to his care and compassion. The role of the father is so trivialized in our society that the thought of reverence toward a father has become a novelty. As E. G. Selwyn points out, however, ‘in the hierarchy of Jewish society, the father ranked higher, and was a more “numinous” figure, than the judge; for it was the father’s function *par excellence* to command and teach, which was held to be a more august function than the judge’s giving rewards and punishment’.

The One whom we call ‘Abba, Father’ is not only our creator and judge; he is also our redeemer. He has given his Son for us, as a lamb for the sacrifice (1:19). We may with confidence call him Father, not only because the whole family in heaven and on earth is named from him, but because he has revealed the infinite reach of his compassion in the price of our redemption. The word that Peter uses for ‘calling’ is regularly used for formal appeals, and for calling by name.<sup>2</sup> Peter is clearly referring to our use of the name ‘Father’ as we appeal to him in prayer.

#### *b. The holiness of redeemed believers (1:18–21)*

Peter has encouraged us to holy living by pointing us to the Lord. Christ’s coming spurs us on (1:13); the holiness of God gives us his pattern and his demand (1:14–16); the judgment of our Father fills us with fear, but a fear that calls on his name (1:17).

Now Peter comes to the heart of our salvation: how can we as sinners be drawn to the holiness of God? The answer is redemption. Unless God had made us his, we could not gain his holiness or want it. But God has claimed us as his own, claimed us at a cost that sears our minds with the flame of his love. Peter appeals to the two most profound emotions our hearts can know. One is love, love that sees the price God paid to redeem us. The other is fear, the fear of despising God’s love. What judgment would we merit if we were to trample upon the blood of Christ, and treat God’s precious ransom with contempt, the contempt that mere gold and silver would deserve in comparison? Remember Peter’s response to the magician Simon who offered him money for the Holy Spirit: ‘May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!’

The way in which Peter speaks of our redemption here shows how central it was to the apostolic gospel. Some have suggested that Peter is using credal or liturgical formulas in this passage. More probably any fixed form is rooted in apostolic preaching.

In the Hellenistic world a slave might be redeemed by a payment made to his master, sometimes through a temple treasury. The Old Testament law provided for the redemption of slaves, and noted the special privilege of a *gō’ēl*, a close relative who could redeem family members or possessions. In the prophecy of Isaiah, God takes the role of the *gō’ēl*, of his people. He makes himself ‘next of kin’ by the ties of his love. He assures his people that the Creator, the Holy One, is also their *gō’ēl*, and will exercise his right of redemption. Peter makes this same connection. God, the Holy One, has bought back his people as his inheritance.

The price paid is not always in view when the Old Testament speaks of redemption. God’s redeeming of Israel from Egypt refers to the bondage from which they were delivered and the liberty into which they were brought, rather than to the payment of a price. Yet the need of a ransom, a price to be paid, is not forgotten.<sup>6</sup> God asserts his power to ransom when he declares, ‘You were sold for nothing, and without money you will be redeemed.’ No-one can pay the price to redeem his soul from death; only God can redeem his people.<sup>8</sup>

Peter stresses the costliness of the ransom that is paid; he also makes it clear that it is God who pays it. Psalm 34 was much in Peter’s thoughts as this letter was written; the psalm closes with the exultant affirmation: ‘The Lord redeems his servants; no-one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.’ Peter makes it plain that we cannot redeem ourselves. At best, we could offer only corruptible *silver or gold*. Not money, but a life must be given to ransom our lives. God has paid that price in the life of Christ offered up for us. He is God’s lamb of sacrifice; the chosen Servant of the Lord, who bore our sins on the tree (2:24). Peter preached what he had heard his Lord say, ‘For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.’

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Again, as in the salutation of his letter, Peter links the blood of Christ's sacrifice with the saving purpose of God (1:2). As Peter had heard John the Baptist declare, Jesus is 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world'. God's lamb is perfect, without spot or blemish. This was required of all animals for sacrifice, and specifically for the passover lamb.<sup>4</sup> Peter may also have had in view the meek lamb of Isaiah 53:7.

The price of Christ's blood has been paid to redeem us from death. His blood is given for our blood. God's redemption breaks not only the chain that binds us to future doom; it breaks also the chain of the dead past. We are redeemed from the meaninglessness of pagan life. 'Vanity' is a synonym for 'idols' in the Old Testament. Jeremiah describes the Gentile nations as coming to confess, 'Our fathers have inherited lies, even vanity and things wherein there is no profit.'

Peter contrasts the traditions that Gentile Christians had received from their fathers with the gospel they have received from the Father. Human culture preserves the past to structure the present. Every society reveres its fathers, whether they be Confucius or Marx, Jefferson, Darwin or Freud. Peter describes the liberation of Christians from the traditions of the fathers; not simply from a few mistaken ideas that have been hallowed by time, but from the deepest meaning (or lack of meaning) of cultural tradition. Not just a few customs, but a whole lifestyle has been swept away by God's redemption. To be sure, Peter is thinking of the immorality and vice of idolatrous paganism, but modern paganisms have produced lifestyles no less corrupt.

In contrast with the empty life of 'hollow men', Christians are given faith and hope in God. Meaninglessness evaporates in the glory of ultimate meaning: the eternal plan and purpose of God. The awesome cost of God's redemption fulfills his infinite design. God has revealed Christ now, at the end of time, to accomplish the purpose that was his before creation. God's sovereign purpose centres on Jesus Christ; all history culminates in him. The Father knows the Son in the eternal fellowship of the Trinity. But here Peter speaks of God's *foreknowledge* to describe his choosing and appointment of Christ the redeemer. God's purpose, even before creation, was that Christ would come to die and rise again for the salvation of all who are chosen in him. The astonishing truth is that God's eternal purpose in Christ is *for your sake* (1:20)! Aliens and transients Christians may be in this age, but their hope is sure. They are foreknown with Christ before the world was made (1:2), beloved of God the Father who made the worlds and gave his Son for them.

Historians may mark off the ages according to developments in politics or technology (the iron age, the colonial period, the computer age), but in God's book the last age of human history is ushered in by the coming of Jesus Christ; it will last until Christ comes again. It is the age of Christ's resurrection and glory, a time when the light of eternity shines on the pilgrim people of God, illumining the life of the humblest believer.

The marvellous salvation that God has planned for us and accomplished for us is also given to us. Christ has paid the price of our redemption, and Christ seals his redemption to our hearts. We believe on him, but, as Peter says, we also believe *through* him. Paul speaks of the way God used the witness of the apostles to bring people to faith in Christ. Paul and Apollos were 'servants, through whom you came to believe'. But Paul and Apollos were servants of Christ; it is the Lord Jesus himself who, by his Spirit, is the agent of our salvation. Peter knew that at first hand. The risen Lord himself, who had prayed that Peter's faith should not fail, had appeared to him personally on Easter morning to restore his faith. Peter rejoiced in the fact that the Lord who had brought faith to his heart was the same Lord who granted repentance to the Gentiles.<sup>2</sup>

All that Peter says centres on God's revelation in Jesus Christ. When he says that Christ *was revealed in these last times*, he implies not only that Christ is the goal of God's eternal plan; he indicates as well the divine pre-existence of Christ. Our salvation is all of God. He planned it, he accomplished it through the sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ, he brought it to us through Christ. Our *faith and hope are therefore in God*. Human traditions, idolatrous religions offer empty illusion. Hope can be found only with faith, faith in the God who raised Christ from the dead. This was Peter's own experience as he saw first the empty tomb, and then the living Lord.

#### *c. Holiness through the word of truth (1:22–2:3)*

Believers in God are redeemed from their empty and guilty past; they are bound to their Lord and also to one another. Holiness flames in devotion to God and in love of the brethren. Peter therefore exhorts Christians to love one another. His earlier exhortation to holiness (1:13) was at once supported by a strong affirmation of redeeming grace (1:18–21). Now again, as he urges Christians to *love one another*, he shows that what we are to do is grounded in what God has done. God's word renews, cleanses, and matures us for a life of love.

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Love and truth, so often set at odds in contemporary Christianity, are bound together by Peter. Clearly, Peter requires love for fellow-Christians as the great mark of true holiness. He is not satisfied with tolerance or acceptance, far less with formalized distance. He will have love, sincere love, without pretence or hypocrisy. (In the New Testament, ‘unhypocritical’ always describes love.) But even sincerity is not enough: our love must be ‘deep’ and intense. Peter uses a word that means ‘stretched’ or ‘strained’. The same term describes the earnestness of Christ’s prayer in Gethsemane.

The deep, heartfelt love that Peter urges is in no way artificial. It is the brotherly love that unites the family of God. Paul says to the church of Thessalonica, ‘Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.’

How can such love be commanded? Peter writes to people divided by the jealousies and hatreds of their past; some were Jews, some Gentiles. To bind them in family love Peter directs them to the one source. The love that binds the redeemed flows from the love of the Redeemer. Christian love is the love of grace, the love of compassion. For such love to appear, the pride and selfishness of our alienation from God must be swept away. They must be replaced by a heart made new with the motives of grace. Peter shows how both needs are to be met. It is the *word of God*, the good news of the gospel, that is the means both of our new birth and of our nurture in holiness.

Because God’s love is the source of ours, the message of his love is what kindles ours. Christian love may be demonstrated by a hug, a holy kiss, or a helping hand, but Christian love cannot be transmitted that way. Christian love is born as Christians are born: through the truth of the gospel. That which clears away the *malice ... deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander* of the old lifestyle is the cleansing of our souls through obedience to God’s truth. Peter addresses those who already know that cleansing; they experience true brotherly love because they *have purified themselves by obeying the truth* (1:22). He exhorts them to deepen and strengthen a love they already have. In the same way, Paul urges the Thessalonians to love ‘more and more’ as God has taught them.

The obedience to the truth of which Peter speaks is the initial submission to the claims of the gospel. In saving faith the truth of God is heard and heeded. If these words reflect the catechetical teaching that accompanied Christian baptism, as some scholars think, it is striking that God’s *word* rather than the water is described as the cleansing agent. Christian baptism carries a deeper symbolism than the ceremonial washing of the old covenant. It symbolizes not only the removal of all defilement, but also the renewing of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of new life. Not only are we purified by the word; we are also given new birth by *the living and enduring word of God*.

Peter compares the life-giving power of the word of God to human procreation. It is the *seed* of life, sown in our hearts to create new life. God’s word is creative: he speaks, and it is done; he commands and it stands fast. ‘By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.’ Since God’s word is his vocalized breath, it goes forth with the power of his Spirit. The word of the gospel is God’s call; it communicates and converts. Both Abraham and Sarah had laughed at God’s impossible word of promise: ‘Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?’<sup>3</sup> God had replied, ‘Is any word too difficult for God?’ When the angel promised to Mary an even more miraculous birth, she did not laugh, but she did marvel. Gabriel repeated to her the word that had been spoken to Sarah, ‘For no word is impossible with God.’<sup>5</sup> God’s word of promise is self-fulfilling. By the word of God Jesus was born of the virgin Mary; by the word of God we are born anew. The people of God respond to the gospel call with the words of Mary’s faith, ‘May it be to me as you have said.’

The word of God that has given us life is *enduring*; it is not subject to decay or change. God’s eternal word creates eternal life. The physical life of human procreation is no more permanent than the grass of the field. But the life that God gives is more than physical; it is the life of the Spirit. Peter cites the prophecy of Isaiah to contrast our mortality with the eternity of God’s word. That same passage goes on to promise good tidings to Zion: ‘Here is your God!’ Recalling this, Peter adds, *And this is the word that was preached as good tidings to you* (1:25).

In the power of his gospel, God has indeed come to cleanse and renew his people. The Lord Jesus Christ ‘loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless’. Peter describes the cleansing of the church as already accomplished. With Paul, he would say of their former wicked life: ‘And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.’<sup>3</sup>

Even when Peter lists the evils from which they have been cleansed (2:1), he is describing what has already happened to them as God’s gospel has changed their hearts; ‘Having therefore put off all wickedness, all deceit,

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pretences and jealousies, and all recriminations ...' Of course, by reminding Christians of what their conversion means, Peter is indirectly warning them against the sins from which they have been delivered. Yet he states what is already the case. The filthy garments of their past have been removed; they have put them off in receiving the gospel of Christ.<sup>5</sup> In later liturgies, perhaps in reference to his scriptural language, candidates for baptism removed their clothing before entering the water and donned a new set after the ceremony.

The evils from which Christians have been converted are the very opposite of the strenuous love that Peter has pressed upon them. They are contrasted with the fruits of the Spirit and the outworking of sound teaching. Similar lists are found in other letters. Peter first mentions evil in a general sense, then deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and defamation. Pagan moralists, too, recognized and sometimes listed such vices.<sup>8</sup> They are easily identified as poisons in social life; they are not so easily set aside! Yet Christians have been delivered from them by the power of the gospel; they have cast them away.

Christians who have been given new birth by the word must also grow. They are cleansed by the converting power of the gospel, but they must mature in their new life. What will advance their growth? What will deepen their love? The same truth of God that gave them birth also nourishes them. If the word of God is water to wash us, it is also *milk* to build better bodies in Christ. Christians must be addicted to the Bible.

*Like newborn babies, crave the pure milk of the word.* The wonder of a mother at the birth of a child becomes delight at the readiness of her infant to feed. Any delay at feeding-time brings a powerful reaction from the tiny person. For an infant, milk is not a fringe benefit. Peter writes to young churches; he has in view many who have only recently confessed their faith in Christ and been baptized. Some were no doubt senior citizens; they are nevertheless newborn in Christ. They must have an infant's desperate desire for basic nourishment.

Peter is not the first to compare the receiving of truth to feeding. In the hymns of the Dead Sea community the Teacher of Righteousness likens his disciples to suckling babies with open mouths. Both Paul and the author of Hebrews use the figure of milk to describe the initial teaching of those who are babies in Christ.<sup>2</sup> Peter, however, is not thinking of milk as infant diet to be replaced by meat. In Peter's figure the milk of the abiding word is simply the Christian's necessary food.

The word *logikon*, translated *spiritual* in the NIV, may mean simply 'metaphorical' in contrast to 'literal'. It may also mean 'reasonable' or that which is related to the word (*logos*). Since Peter has just been describing the living *logos* by which Christians are given new birth, it would seem that he is using *logikon* in that sense: 'the milk of the word', as the AV has it.

Peter commends a milk product that is free from additives. The word of God abides without preservatives. Consumers in the ancient world were well aware that milk or wine could be watered down; when Paul says that he was not a huckster of the word of God, he alludes to the common practice of selling diluted wine. Peter uses a word that was employed by merchants to describe *pure*, unadulterated products. The term contrasts with the 'deceit' that Christians have renounced (2:1). While this letter does not contain the warnings against false teaching that we find in 2 Peter, it is clear that the growth of new Christians must be in the truth of the apostolic word. Peter's letter sets forth the truth that new Christians must earnestly desire. *The word of the Lord ... that was preached* (1:25) is more than an abbreviated formula describing the way of salvation. It is the full gospel message that we find in this letter, grounded in the revelation of the Old Testament and expanded in the sweep of apostolic teaching. Simple formulas of gospel truth are to be prized, and Peter presents us with some of the most memorable in the New Testament. But the gospel is unique in richness as well as simplicity. The milk that Peter recommends is 'the whole will of God'.<sup>5</sup>

How does growth take place through the word of God? The appeals and exhortations of the gospel are grounded in the proclamation and instruction of the gospel. Growth is always growth in faith. The word of the Lord constantly presents the Lord of the word. Coming to the word is coming to the Lord. This central truth cuts both ways. We cannot detach the word from the Lord and, like the scribes and the Pharisees, profess to cling to the Scriptures while refusing the Lord. On the other hand, neither can we profess obedience to the Lord while rejecting his word. To separate a living Lord from a 'dead' book or a divine Lord from a merely human book is to reject the apostolic gospel. For Peter, God's word is living as well as enduring (1:23). When Paul describes how the church is built up in faith, he begins with the ministry of the word. By the word the Lord's servant is equipped for the upbuilding of the saints.

The goal of our growth is salvation, the full salvation in Christ that the gospel proclaims, and for which we are kept (1:5). Again we see the alpha and omega of our hope. Peter writes to those who have already been given new birth by the word, who have already come to the Lord and tasted that he is good.<sup>3</sup> Theirs is a sure hope, for their

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inheritance is kept for them and they are kept for it. Yet their hope is also future; they do not merely wait for it, they grow toward it, like flowers toward the sun. Faith is purified, love is intensified, grace is tasted as we are tested.

Peter again shows that the Lord who gave us new birth by the word also gives us growth by the word. The word for 'grow up' is in the passive: we grow only as we are 'grown' by the milk of God's word. Peter and Paul may plant and water, but it is God who gives the growth.

What quickens our desire for the life-giving word of God? Peter answers that we know the taste. Our culture makes the image clear; advertisers spend millions to promote the taste of a cola. Reading the Bible is addictive when we begin to get the taste. What we taste in Scripture is not simply the variety and power of the language. What we taste is the Lord. Peter refers to Psalm 34:8, 'Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.' Peter omits 'and see' in his reference. Perhaps he would keep just the tasting in view; he knows that those to whom he writes have not seen the Lord as he has. Yet, not having seen him, they love him in the same personal way. They have found the Lord in the word of the gospel, or, better, he has found them by his living word.

Those who read the word of God, and surely those who teach it, must never forget why the word is given and whom it reveals. The word shows us that *the Lord is good*; his words are sweeter than honey to our taste because in them the Lord gives himself to us.

#### 4. Live as the people of God

##### I: The life of the spiritual temple

2:4–10

##### 1. The building of the temple in Christ

In the first chapter Peter showed the wonder of God's salvation through Jesus Christ. Now he wants to show the status that Christians have as the true people of God, so that he may encourage us to live before the world with that awareness.

He intends to emphasize the humility and submission to which Christians are called. That humility, however, is not slavish subjection to others. Rather, it is modelled on the humility of the Lord. It is the free and willing service of a royal people. Jesus willingly endured humiliation, but God has exalted him. God indeed calls us to humility, but he has already joined us to Christ's exaltation. In Christ we are God's people, God's temple, his kingdom and priesthood.

*As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him....* As always, Peter begins with the Lord. The status of Christians depends upon the status of Christ, for they are joined to him. How striking it is that Peter names Christ the *Stone!* Peter's given name was Simon. It was Jesus who named him Cephas (in Greek, Peter), the 'rock'. Peter gratefully used the name Jesus gave him as an apostle (1:1). But Peter points us, not to himself, but to Christ as our Rock.

Peter draws this name for Christ from Isaiah 28:16, a passage that he proceeds to quote. Isaiah's prophecy alludes to one of the master figures of the Old Testament, the temple as the house of God. Isaiah speaks the word of the Lord against the princes of Jerusalem who foolishly suppose that their city is secure against the threat of invasion. They speak as though they had a treaty with death and hell so that the lethal waters of the abyss could never sweep over them. God declares that their pride is no refuge, their covenant with death no security. Only one edifice can stand against the storm of destruction: God's building, established upon one sure foundation stone.

It is this figure that Jesus used when he said to Peter that the gates of hell could not prevail against his church. In the word of Jesus, he was himself the builder and Peter an apostolic rock of foundation; in the figure that Peter takes from Isaiah, Christ is the *precious* and tested *cornerstone*.

In the building technique from which the figure is drawn, the cornerstone of the foundation would be the first stone to be put in place. Since both the angle of the walls and the level of the stone courses would be extended from it, the cornerstone must be square and true. Large and precious stones were cut for the foundation of Solomon's temple.

The passage Peter quotes had already been seen to be messianic: some Greek versions of Isaiah had translated, 'He that believeth on him shall by no means be ashamed' (adding the words 'on him'). Peter identifies the cornerstone with Christ. He calls him a *living Stone*; he would not have us think of his Lord as inert marble! Christ is the living Stone, however, not just because he is a living person, but because he is alive from the dead as the risen Lord. God set his cornerstone in place by the resurrection.

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Christ, the foundation stone, fulfils the image of the temple as God's house. God sets him in place in spite of his rejection by the builders. Peter knew well the passage from Psalm 118:22 that he quotes in verse 7. He had been troubled to hear Jesus cite that scripture after his parable about the wicked tenants. What could Jesus mean? He spoke of the leaders of Israel killing the Son sent by God to receive from them his due. 'Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.' As for *the builders* who *rejected* God's cornerstone, Jesus had said, 'He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.'

After the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit, Peter understood the words of Jesus. He confronted those very 'builders' and boldly challenged them with the words of the Psalm, adding, 'Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.' Now, in his letter, Peter refers to the same Old Testament passages he had heard from the lips of Jesus. Peter had learned that the death of Christ was not an unthinkable defeat for the Son of God and the kingdom of God. Rather, by the cross and the resurrection God's eternal purpose of salvation had been fulfilled. Those who had crucified Jesus had accomplished what God's 'power and will had decided beforehand should happen'.<sup>4</sup> In their rejection of Christ, the builders, in spite of themselves, served to put God's Stone in place.

Salvation is in no other; there is no other Son of God, no other atoning cross, no other resurrection life. Peter's message begins and ends in the purpose of God; God has set in place his chosen cornerstone; God has determined, too, the rejection and doom of the builders.

It is not merely the leaders of Israel that have rejected Christ. The living Stone has been *rejected by men* (2:4). 'Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.' The severity of God's judgment falls not only on the builders who had rejected God's chosen Stone, but on all unbelievers. Peter repeats the solemn warning of Jesus.<sup>7</sup> Those who stumble at the word of the gospel are broken in their unbelief. The translation in 2:7, *capstone*, is misleading; the phrase, literally rendered 'the head of the corner', refers to the same foundational cornerstone. This is the stone over which people trip when they refuse to hear the word of God.

The Stone that people have rejected is the Stone that God has *chosen*. Peter stresses God's choosing and honouring of Christ as the precious cornerstone of his holy temple. He does so not only to rejoice in the person and work of Christ, but also to show the holy and honoured place that Christians have, united to their Lord. In 2:4–5 Peter summarizes this argument. Then, in 2:6–10 he gives the basis in Scripture for his affirmations. Verses 6–8 are quotations from the Old Testament; verses 9–10 are a series of descriptive epithets drawn from the Old Testament.

Peter makes the same contrast that we find in Isaiah 28, the contrast between the foolish pride of man and the sure work of the Lord. God's choice of his precious cornerstone rebukes human arrogance. The term *precious*, used in Isaiah, can be applied to gemstones as well as to the value of a great cornerstone. Peter has just said that the Lord is good.<sup>2</sup> How good he is, the Father has shown; he has chosen him as precious beyond describing. Peter could bear witness to the voice from heaven, 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' The Father's words concerning his Son reflect his prophetic words concerning his Servant: 'Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him.'<sup>4</sup> Consider the intensity of the Father's love for his only Son as he took the role of a servant, accepted the Father's will in Gethsemane and accomplished his task on Calvary. The delight of the Father in the finished work of his Son is seen in 'the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who had gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.' (3:21–22).

Peter now spells out the wonder of God's salvation: the delight that the Father has in his Son is given to *us*. As Christ is precious to the Father, so are we made precious (2:7). As Christ is the cornerstone of God's temple, so are we stones in that house of God. He is the living Stone; we, too, are *living stones* (2:5), born again by his resurrection life (1:3). Peter does not explicitly call Christ the Priest of the house of God, but it is through Christ's priestly work that we, his people, may offer up *spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God* (2:5).

These blessings are ours through faith. By faith we *come to him* (2:4, 7). Peter uses a word from the Greek Old Testament that describes the approach of the worshipper to God. Once far off in the darkness, we now have access by faith to God's house; indeed, we are built into that living temple, the true people of God. Many medieval churches in Europe have crypts where kings, queens and nobles are entombed. Effigies of the dead may be seen in the dim light, silent figures carved in stone on the lids of coffins. Not so are Christians made part of God's temple. They are *living stones*, and they are part of a growing house. God's architecture is biological. His house grows as new stones are



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added, but also as the stones in place are perfected. The living stones, as Paul says, grow into a holy temple of the Lord.

To speak of a growing temple of living stones stretches an Old Testament figure to convey New Testament reality. The figure of the tabernacle/temple pictured the presence of God among his people. God's tent was pitched in the centre of Israel's wilderness camp; in the land of promise God made the temple at Jerusalem his dwelling. God was there, among his people; they belonged to him, and he to them.

When the Word became flesh and 'tented' among us, the symbol became reality. The God of glory came to dwell with us: 'We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only,' John testifies. The true temple is Christ's body.<sup>2</sup> We are united to Christ; the living stones are joined to the cornerstone. In that way the church becomes the true house of God. Peter's language is corporate. He thinks of the spiritual temple, not as the body of an individual believer, but as the body of believers, the company of those who are joined to Christ. Yet, as the instructions of the letter show, Peter is concerned about the holiness of God's temple not only when Christians are assembled for worship, but in their daily lives as well. The reality of union with Christ is seen in the life of each living stone. Our mutual union with Christ removes the tension between the claims of the individual and of society. In Christ we find the meaning of our personal lives; in Christ we find the joy of belonging to one another. We rejoice in the honour and the ministry of being built together.

The word *house* that Peter uses may mean not only a dwelling, but also the family that lives in it. The living temple that Peter describes is also the 'household' of God, made up of those who are brought near to God as his sons and daughters.

#### 2. The ministry of a priestly people

In this section of his letter, as we have seen, Peter presents the high calling of the people of God to prepare us for his instructions about our lifestyle. The people of God are a holy temple, united to Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone. Two main emphases shape this section. As God's dwelling-place, the church has both a status and a ministry. In verse 5 Peter summarizes these two points, then proceeds to support and expand them with quotations from Scripture. First, he describes our standing before God. We are *a spiritual house* and *a holy priesthood*. He validates that from the Old Testament: *a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God*, the recipients of mercy (2:9–10). Then, after saying who we are, Peter tells us what we do. We offer *spiritual sacrifices* that God accepts. He supports that statement by saying that we *declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light* (2:9).

What Peter says about our standing is set in the framework of the grace of God. God's claim upon us makes our position secure, and places us in the closest fellowship with him. This is the teaching of the beautiful language that Peter marshals from the Old Testament. In fellowship with God we are *a royal priesthood, a holy nation*. Peter cites a key passage from the book of Exodus. In making this covenant with Israel, God declares that he has redeemed them from Egypt; he has brought them on eagles' wings to himself at Mount Sinai. Now he claims them as his people, distinct from all the peoples of the earth, to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. The point of the passage is not to appoint Israel a priesthood for the nations; neither does it exclude a special priestly office within Israel. The point is that Israel has been brought into such close fellowship with God that their access to him is priestly.<sup>2</sup> God dwells among them. They are holy because he is holy. God's calling comes as a command as well as a promise. Israel is called to be what it is, *a holy nation*.<sup>4</sup>

The people of Israel broke God's covenant and defiled themselves with immorality and idolatry. God delivered his judgment through the prophets: they had become Lo-Ammi, 'no people', no longer the holy people of God. Yet God also promised a marvellous restoration. Israel would again be made holy. Instead of shame they would be given glory. 'And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God.'<sup>6</sup> The prophets describe the marvel of God's restoration in the latter days. Not only will the remnant of Israel be gathered to worship the Lord; the remnant of the nations, even the enemy nations, will be gathered, too. In an amazing passage, Isaiah describes the Egyptians worshipping in Assyria, and the Assyrians in Egypt, both passing by Jerusalem to do so. 'In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance."' In the day of God's salvation, the covenant blessing will be shared by the enemy nations.

It is this fulfilment that Peter proclaims. The temple of the new covenant is a spiritual temple; those who are made a nation of priests are not simply the restored of Israel, but believers whom Christ gathers from the nations. If Israel

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through sin had become no people, and had lost the right to the covenant promise, then the grace that can restore Israelites to their forfeited inheritance can equally bring polluted Gentiles into the intimacy of fellowship with God (2:10).

The change of the new covenant is intensive as well as extensive. Not only are Gentiles included in God's nation of priests; their priestly access is *spiritual*, not merely ceremonial (2:5). Uncircumcised Gentiles were prohibited by the law from entering the temple. They were barred, of course, from the sanctuary, where only priests could minister. Neither could they come with the people of God into the courts of the Lord. They were kept outside, on pain of death. But now Gentiles are no longer aliens; they are 'fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.... And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.'

How can Gentiles gain this priestly privilege? The book of Leviticus cannot be amended to admit uncircumcised Gentiles into God's courts. That is what Paul's enemies accused him of doing; bringing Gentiles into the sanctuary of the Lord. They tried to tear him limb from limb. They were right in thinking that the law could not be altered. Their mistake was in refusing to see that it had been fulfilled. The breadth of the gospel flows from its depth. Outward washing, the cutting away the flesh, the offering of bulls and goats, could never remove sin or qualify any sinner to stand in the presence of the Holy One of Israel. Those elaborate preparations and safeguards bore witness to the reality of God's holiness, and to the need of cleansing and atonement. But only God could provide the true and spiritual sacrifice. Only One who had clean hands and a pure heart could ascend at last the hill of the Lord. Jesus Christ came; the one righteous, covenant-keeping Servant of the Lord. His atoning death fulfilled the temple sacrifices. His blood provided the cleansing that the old ceremonies could only picture.

Our approach to God in worship is now our coming to the living Stone of God's appointment. It is not a physical approach into an earthly edifice: it is the spiritual approach of faith in Christ. By the same token, the holiness of the believer cannot be achieved by outward washing with water; it must be the cleansing of the heart by God's Spirit. Spiritual holiness is required of the Gentiles as new members of the people of God. Peter describes the spiritual reality of our position in order to remind us of the spiritual depth of the holiness God requires.

The church of the new covenant is not only a holy temple and priesthood enjoying the presence of God; it is also an elect race, the *people* of God's own possession (2:9). God dwells among his people because he has chosen them. The heart of the covenant is God's electing love. The scriptural teaching of God's choosing is sometimes questioned because it is not understood, and sometimes hated because it *is* understood. It can be received only by faith, for to receive it one must confess that God is God. The wonder is not that God chooses some and not others (Abel, not Cain; Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau). The wonder is that God chooses any. Certainly God does not choose an élite. Israel is a *chosen* people, but not a choice people. God's elect have no ground for pride. On the contrary, God chooses not the wise, the mighty, or the noble, but the foolish, the weak, the despised (Paul says, indeed, the 'zeroes'). No-one may boast before him.

If God does not choose his people for their worth or their serviceability, why does he choose them? The answer is clear. 'The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers.' The Lord loves ... because he loves! Nothing can explain the love of God for sinners. God's 'good pleasure' is the movement of his own will, springing from his own nature.<sup>3</sup> How the language of love is lavished upon God's people in the Old Testament! They are God's inheritance, his personal and prized possession, his treasure. God bears them on his shoulders, carries them in his arms, holds them in his hand, seats them at his feet.<sup>5</sup> He loves them with a jealous love; they are to be his alone to the exclusion of all other gods; they bear his name. The love of a father for a son, of a husband for a wife, is used to describe God's love for his people.<sup>7</sup>

The claim of love that God makes upon his people in the Exodus 19 passage quoted by Peter is not, however, the end of the story in the Old Testament. Israel despised God's covenant love and committed adultery with the gods of the nations. God chose Israel, but Israel chose other gods.<sup>9</sup> The wanton abuse of God's singular love must result in singular judgment: 'You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.' God pours out the vengeance of the covenant.<sup>11</sup>

Must all the promises of God be voided in exile and destruction? Looking at the valley of dry bones, the prophet Ezekiel might be tempted to think so. But the vision he received gave the answer of the Lord. God's judgment on his people would be neither total nor final. Not total, for God would preserve a remnant. Not final, for God would give renewal.<sup>2</sup> Against the dark background of God's judgment, the reality of God's choosing of his people shines with

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new glory. The chosen of God are his elect remnant, those whom he will come to gather at last. The scattered flock, exploited by those who should be their shepherds, will be gathered by the Lord himself, the true Shepherd, and brought to the green pastures of his salvation.

God must come to gather his own: they will hear his voice, for they know him. The Old Testament teaching of election points us forward to the election of God's own Servant. Jesus, the true Shepherd, comes to gather the scattered remnant flock and to bring in the renewal of resurrection life. 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.'

The Old Testament, therefore, presents an election within an election. Israel is chosen, but is unfaithful to its calling. Jesus comes as the elect one, the beloved Son of the Father, and he fulfils the calling of the Servant of the Lord. The elect whom Peter addresses are chosen in Christ who is foreknown before the creation of the world (1:20). As Paul tells us, 'Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.' Not the son of the flesh but the Son of the Spirit inherits the promises of God. Those who are united to Christ are those the Father has given him. The Good Shepherd holds them for ever in his hand.<sup>6</sup>

There is a vast difference between the election of Christ and the election of believers in Christ. Christ is the chosen of the Father in the sense of choice, the one and only beloved Son. 'Worthy is the Lamb....' We are chosen in the opposite position. We have no status as sons or daughters, for we are no people, enemies of God, unworthy of his love. Yet, as Peter declares, we who were no people are now *the people of God*, chosen in Christ as an elect race, a *holy nation*.

Peter's declaration of our 'peoplehood' in Christ has vast consequences for the life of the church of Christ. The church is not just a religious association formed by saved individuals to give united expression to their faith. Rather, the church is more a people than Israel was under the old covenant. Scattered in the world, indeed, as Israel was in dispersion, but a people nonetheless, bound together in the community of those who are united to one another as surely as they are united to their Lord. Church fellowship is not an optional advantage, to be chosen or ignored, like membership in a social club. It is the calling of every Christian. There is a spiritual 'ethnicity' to the church of Christ; Christians are blood relatives, joined by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Peter declares who we are. He declares also what we are to do. The *holy priesthood* offers up *spiritual sacrifices*, declaring *the praises of him who called us out of the darkness into his wonderful light*. The parallel between offering spiritual sacrifices and praising God shows us what sacrifices Peter has in mind. 'Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.' The sacrifices of the Old Testament were ceremonies of worship, glorifying God; they symbolized atonement for sin and the giving to God of the life and devotion of the worshipper.<sup>3</sup> The offering of the blood of Christ on the cross has for ever abolished the bringing of bloody sacrifices in the worship of God. But worship remains, not impoverished, but fulfilled. We present ourselves to God as spiritual sacrifices. The dedication of our lives is presented to God with the confession of our lips. Peter says that we *declare the praises* of the Lord. He is citing Isaiah 43:21, 'the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise'. Peter uses the word for 'praise' that is found in the Septuagint of Isaiah. The Hebrew term that it translates may mean the 'praises' of God in the sense of the praiseworthy deeds of God. The Greek term, too, applied to deity, meant 'mighty deeds'.<sup>2</sup>

The language of the prophet in this passage is the language of the Psalms. Declaring the praises of God is the great work of worship. Two forms of praise appear in the Psalms: praising God for what he had done, and praising God for who he is. Isaiah used a verb that means to 'count' or to 'tell' in the sense of 'recount'. The praises of Israel are full of the recounting of the mighty works of God.

His deeds of creation excited the marvelling awe of the psalmist: 'When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers ...'. God provides the armour of the crocodile and feeds the goats on the mountains.<sup>5</sup> God works in history; he raises up kings and puts them down. But above all, it is God's work of salvation that his people celebrate in praise.<sup>7</sup>

Praise is more than thanksgiving. Praise not only offers the sacrifices of thanksgiving for God's deliverance; praise adores God the deliverer. From declaring the works of God, the sacrifice of praise moves on to praise the name of God. To commemorate the saving deeds of the Lord is a thrilling task, but the pinnacle of devotion is to rejoice in God himself, the doer of those deeds. The supreme prayer of devotion is 'Hallowed be thy name.' When we thank God for who he is and ask him to be God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we enter into the high sanctuary of heaven's praise.

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Peter says that we have been brought from *darkness* to *light* and made a *priesthood* so that we may show forth God's *praises*. This spiritual worship has no earthly altar or ark; it has transcended the elaborate ceremonials of Old Testament worship. It is vain to imitate in pageantry the ceremonies that ended when the veil of the temple was torn in two. Yet worship remains the central calling, not only of the Christian, but of the Christian church. The worship of God consists not only in hearing and responding to his word, as Peter has been reminding us. It finds its burning focus in lifting the name of God in adoration. This function of the priesthood cannot be delegated. God's praises must rise from the lips of all his people, assembled before his face and joining with the festival assembly of the saints and the angels. If the singing and speaking forth of the praises of God are viewed as 'preliminaries' to the sermon, the meaning of worship has been lost.

Nothing can be put above worship. We adore God not to gain his favour, but because adoration is our response to his grace. We are, to be sure, uniquely blessed through worship, and as God's worshippers we seek his blessing. But the core of our worship is not receiving but giving. Peter reminds us that the inestimable privilege of entering the presence of the Lord contains a yet greater privilege: to lift his name in praise. He lifts us up so that we may lift him up.

Yet our praising of the name of God has another result. We declare before the nations the works and the name of the Lord. Our praises to God bear witness to the world. The heart of evangelism is doxological. Peter emphasizes our offering of praise to God. Yet he is also thinking of the Gentile world in the midst of which we are called to praise. Our hallelujahs do indeed join the anthems of the heavenly host, but here on earth they are heard by our neighbours. They, too, are called to doxology (2:12). In the following section of this letter Peter links the witness of our lives to the witness of our lips as we offer praise to God. His citation from Isaiah reminds us of the call to the nations that springs from doxology in the prophets and Psalms. 'Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples' (Ps. 96:3). Paul in Romans cites the Psalms and Isaiah to describe the way in which Jesus Christ has set the Gentiles singing God's praise.

*The praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light...* Israel was brought from the darkness of Egypt under the plague to the light of God's glory at Sinai. We are brought by God's mighty deed from the darkness of death and the tomb where Christ was sealed. The rising of the light of salvation is celebrated in the prophecy of Isaiah. Christ's ministry in Galilee brought the dawn of the Sun of righteousness; his transfiguration disclosed his heavenly glory, his resurrection brought his people from darkness to the light of eternal morning. Jesus, our Messiah, is given

to be a covenant for the people  
and a light for the Gentiles,  
to open the eyes that are blind,  
to free captives from prison  
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

God's call does more than invite his people to leave the darkness for the light. As Jesus called Lazarus from the tomb, so God calls us from the darkness into the light of 'his eternal glory in Christ' (5:10). We give thanks to the Father 'who has qualified [us] to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.' When the designers of the Billy Graham Center in Wheaton, Illinois, sought to provide an architectural parable of conversion, they appropriately planned a passageway through darkness into a room walled with brilliant light. The early church prepared candidates for baptism by instructing them in the enlightenment found in Christ.<sup>4</sup> Few images express more vividly the transformation of God's saving call. Once we were darkness, but now are we light in the Lord, called to walk in the light of Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

Peter had experienced God's deliverance from dungeon darkness when the Lord sent his angel to deliver the apostle from Herod's prison. Charles Wesley used Peter's deliverance as an image of the dawn of faith:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—

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I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

#### 5. Live as the people of God

##### II: The new lifestyle

##### 2:11–20

##### 1. The new lifestyle's pattern: freedom in bondage (2:11–17)

Peter moves to a surprising and urgent application of the teaching he has just given. He has been emphasizing the status that Christians have as the people of God, chosen by him and drawn into privileged fellowship. They are a priestly nation, the recipients of God's grace and favour.

But why should Peter remind them of their status? To be sure, he would have them exercise their priesthood in praising the Lord who bought them; but he has another reason. He would prepare them for lowly service. Just because they are God's royal people they can be servants. The example of Jesus is already before Peter, although he does not yet mention it directly. Knowing who he was, and what he came to do, Jesus could subject himself to people. He came not to be ministered to, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. Called as children of the light, Christians are free. Their freedom, however, binds them to their calling. They are free in bondage to God. They know what it means to fear God in his presence. They are free to love their fellow-Christians. The dark blindness of sinful selfishness is gone; they are free to love. They are also free to honour unbelievers as God's creatures, and to respect the role of authority given to each one.

This whole section is in direct antithesis to the spirit of the world, where every individual and group demands its 'rights' and understands liberty as freedom from responsibility. The apostle describes what is, for our time, a strange liberty. Yet, as Roberto Mangabeira Unger has pointed out, the liberal ideal of liberty is bankrupt. The liberal ideal would free every individual to do what he wants. If there must be curbs to this freedom, they must be neutral and impersonal. But the liberal can find no ground for this neutrality in his own liberal assumptions. The letter of the law cannot provide neutrality, for, on liberal assumptions, the language of law is arbitrary, carrying such meaning as we choose to assign to it. Similarly, if law is viewed as social policy, neutrality is impossible. As Alexander Solzhenitsyn has reminded us, the Soviet Criminal Code of 1926 makes any action directed toward the weakening of state power counter-revolutionary. Only what advances the Soviet state is legal. If there is no standard for values outside of society, there can be no true liberty in social policy.

Peter proclaims liberty in Christ. Because our liberty is under God there is an objective standard of value. But our liberty is not under an abstract deity. It is under the true and living God. It could be no liberty at all if Christ had not died to set us free and to proclaim liberty in the jubilee time of God's favour.

Our freedom is necessarily in servitude to God. Paul delighted to call himself the slave of Jesus Christ. But we also are called to serve our fellow-Christians and to render proper service to the people of the world. In this section Peter describes our freedom in service; to God, to the church, and to the world.

##### a. Free in bondage to God: 'Fear God!'

The freedom of God's servants in this world is the freedom of *aliens* and transients. Those who belong to God as his people can have no abiding city here. Like Abraham, they are strangers and pilgrims, even while they live in the world which they will inherit at last. Peter asks his *dear friends* to *abstain from sinful desires*, as *strangers* in a sinful world. The verb *to abstain* fits the calling of strangers. It means literally 'to distance' themselves from fleshly lusts. A temporary resident in a foreign land is not likely to adopt the customs of the land through which he is travelling. His standard of values, his lifestyle, is different. Peter wants Christian pilgrims to remember their heavenly citizenship. Calling his hearers 'transients' or 'pilgrims', Peter returns to a description he used at the beginning of his letter (1:1). He has now shown why they must regard themselves as pilgrims: they are the people of God, a holy nation, and they dare not conform to the wicked conduct of their neighbours. Instead, they must bear witness by their *deeds* to the kingdom of light.

Peter calls the pilgrims *dear friends* to express his affection for them. It expresses as well their belonging to God. They are 'dear' or (better) 'beloved' (*agapētoi*) not only to Peter, but to the Lord, as his own possession. Their

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alienation from the world is just because they are dear to God. Jesus himself is the Beloved of the Father.<sup>5</sup> (The biblical use of the term goes back to the description of Isaac as the beloved son of Abraham.) Peter's *dear friends* are God's beloved children, adopted in his Son.

Because they are God's children and pilgrims in this world, Christians are also warriors, repulsing the attacks of fleshly lusts that war against the soul. Peter clearly states the opposition between the *desires* of the flesh (literally) and the welfare of the *soul*. This does not mean that our souls are innately good and our bodies innately evil. When Peter lists the 'evil human desires' in the Gentile world, he includes the non-fleshly sin of 'detestable idolatry'. Yet, in our fallen world—Rome in Peter's day, New York or London in ours—the corruption of bodily desires for food, drink, and sex sweeps over us like a flooding sewer. The apostle calls on Christians to be 'out of it', out of the compulsive urgings of hammering sexual music, the seductions of pandering commercials, the sadism of pornographic films and paperbacks. In fleshly temptation the devil promises life, but his assault is against life; he would devour our very souls (5:8). John Stott well points out that the apostolic counter to lasciviousness is thankfulness for sex in loving marriage. God is the creator of our bodies; sex is his gift, not Satan's invention.

Christians have been liberated from sin's bondage, not only to praise God, but to live as his witnesses in the world. Here is an apparent paradox. Christians are not to be *of* the world, but they are to be *in* the world. Peter warns against the desires of the flesh, but instructs us how to live 'the rest of your time in the flesh' (4:2, ASV). In a long section in the middle of his letter, Peter presents the kind of ethical instruction that was common in the early church. We find similar lists of duties within domestic relationships in Paul's letters.<sup>3</sup> But Peter presents these duties in the framework of his special concern. He urges Christians to be the servants of God in the world, and therefore to submit themselves willingly, and even to suffer, so that God might receive the glory.

Peter's instructions tell us how to relate to the world while we are pilgrims in it. On the one hand, we do all before God and for God. (Notice how many times through the rest of this chapter Peter refers to God or Christ.) On the other hand, Christians also live before the world. Some of the duties in the Christian 'household code' were also advocated by Greek or Roman moralists. This is not unintentional on the part of the apostles. To some extent the Gentiles do recognize right and wrong in human relationships (performance being quite another matter!). Surely to that extent Christians must commend themselves to their neighbours and win their grudging respect. When Peter tells his hearers to live *good lives*, he uses a word that can also mean 'beautiful' or 'attractive'. The high holiness of fellowship with God must also produce observable conduct, admirable in its consistency and integrity. This theme of luminous goodness runs like a thread through all of Peter's exhortations. It reflects the word of Jesus, 'Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.'<sup>3</sup>

But, given the bias of unbelievers against God, even the good that Christians do will be ill spoken of. That certainly happened. The Roman historian Tacitus remarks that Christians were 'loathed because of their abominations'. Another author, Suetonius, approved of Nero's persecution of Christians, 'a class of people animated by a novel and mischievous superstition'.

Peter knows that the opposition of the Gentile world will not be limited to gossip, calumnies, and fantastic lies. Christians will be accused in the courts; false charges will lead to imprisonment and death. Peter had escaped the sword of Herod, but he would not escape the perverse hatred of Nero.

Yet in spite of pagan injustice, the impact of the Christian witness will not be lost, in Peter's day or ours. The surrounding world will see the *good deeds* of the Christian community (2:12). They cannot avoid it. For some, unbelief will turn to belief as they behold the obedience of the people of God. Unbelieving husbands will see, and be touched by, the godliness of their wives (3:1–2). In the day of God's 'visitation', even those who misrepresented and hated the good works of Christians will *glorify God* for them.

The term 'visitation' in the Old Testament most often refers to God's coming in judgment. It is also used, however, of God's coming in mercy. Zacharias praises God for 'visiting' and redeeming his people in the birth of his son John. John is the forerunner of the Messiah, in whom 'the dayspring from on high hath visited us.'<sup>2</sup> If the 'day of visitation' bears a positive sense here, it would mean the conviction and conversion of those who have seen Christian behaviour. However, in view of the emphasis that Peter puts on the coming of judgment in the day of the Lord, it seems more likely that Peter is describing the day when every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. God's searching judgment will then compel the acknowledgment, to his glory, of the faithful living of his true servants.<sup>4</sup>

b. *Free in submission to others*

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Peter draws a radical and difficult conclusion. Christians who would *live as servants of God* in this world (2:16) must be willing to be in submission to others. There is, of course, a vast difference between our submission to God and our submission to other people. He tells us to fear God; he does not tell us to fear people. Peter does not call to us to become their slaves. Even when he addresses those who are slaves, he uses another word, ‘household servants’ (2:18). Peter does not argue that we should be lowly before others because we are lowly before God. He does the opposite; he stresses the privileged position to which God has exalted us. We have been brought near to God as priests, saints, sons and daughters. Because we are God’s own possession, beloved of the Lord, we need not cherish our own dignity. Indeed, we may not. For the Lord’s sake, for our fellow-Christians’ sake, for the world’s sake, we must be ready to subordinate ourselves to others.

We submit ourselves for the world’s sake so that our good deeds may be a witness to them or a testimony against them. We submit ourselves for our fellow-Christians’ sake out of sacrificial love for them. We submit ourselves for God’s sake because we honour his image in our fellow-creatures, and because we respect his ordering of our lives, but especially because we gratefully seek to take up our cross and follow Jesus Christ. In the code of duties that follows, Peter describes Christian living in terms of submission: submission to one another as Christians, and especially to unbelievers.

#### **2. The new lifestyle’s practice: submission in role relationships (2:13–14, 18–20)**

##### *a. Submission as citizens of worldly kingdoms (2:13–14)*

Peter provides almost a title for what follows: *Submit yourselves*. In this whole section the general principle of submission is developed according to the roles that we fill: citizens are to submit themselves to their *governors* (2:14) and servants to their masters (2:18); wives to their husbands (3:1) and, in a yet deeper sense, husbands to their wives (3:7); and Christians to one another (3:8).

It is this link with what follows that helps us to understand what might seem to be a strange expression: literally ‘Be subject to every human creature’ (2:13). Many interpreters give another meaning to the word for ‘creature’. They take it to mean ‘order’ or ‘institution’. (The NIV expands this to *authority instituted*). It is hard to find a clear example of this meaning outside the Bible, and it never means this in biblical usage. Peter is not talking about submission to institutions, but submission to people; to people, however, who have been given roles to fill in God’s appointment. Our submission is to creatures of God made in his image. We are to show proper respect to everyone (2:17), recognizing them as God’s creatures to whom honour and respect are due. C. S. Lewis has said that if we could see a lowly Christian as he will be in glory, our temptation would be to fall down and worship him. Peter does not call us to worship human beings, of course. Indeed, he may speak of human creatures so as to oppose emperor worship. In spite of the claim of Caesar, he is only a human creature. Such a creature is not to be worshipped, but is to be shown honour; we are to be in submission to him.

There is a submission that is due to every human being, the submission of respect and honour. As Paul says, we are ‘to show true humility towards all men’. The particular submission that we owe another will vary according to the role that the person fills in the divine ordering of human life. Peter goes on to describe certain roles. The form of our submission is unique to Christian witness. Christians are called to serve others, to go the second mile, to suffer injustice without demanding their rights, knowing that they have an assured status before God, and that he will vindicate them at last. In this willingness to serve while suffering injustice, Christ himself is the great example for those who bear his name.

It is this submission to suffering, not as something inevitable, but as the Lord’s calling, that distinguishes the Christian pattern of loving service. It is true that Stoic moralists had also made lists of duties appropriate to the various stations of life; Jewish authors had similar codes for good behaviour. The same framework appears in Paul’s letters, and seems to have been a fixed pattern in Christian teaching.<sup>4</sup> But while Christian instruction followed to some extent a common form of classified duties, the contents were transformed by the teaching and the love of Christ. Peter, in particular, shows the completely new dimension brought to morality by the sacrificial love of the Saviour.

For good behaviour among the pagans, Christians must be subject to the existing rulers. This may seem a commonplace to us: Christians are to be law-abiding citizens. Yet it was a burning issue when the letter was written, and it has become an issue again today. How are God’s people to relate to the kingdoms of this world? Israel had been given the land of promise through God’s blessing on armed conquest. God used Israel to judge the Canaanites and Amorites when the cup of their iniquity was full. David’s kingdom was established with victories over the Philistines and other surrounding nations. When Israel sinned, God used the Assyrians and Babylonians as his instruments to

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judge and punish Israel. The whole nation went into captivity. The prophets, however, promised a vast restoration, including the triumph of the people of God over all their enemies.<sup>2</sup> Fired by the memory of independence under the Maccabees, Zealots in the time of Christ fought as guerrillas and terrorists against the Roman occupation. At least one of Christ's disciples seems to have been a Zealot. Revolt led by Zealots was to bring the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70, a few years after the time that Peter wrote this letter.

The teaching of Jesus, however, cut across revolutionary political expectations. When he refused to claim political kingship and lead revolt against the Romans, the crowds began to desert him. Peter's confession revealed his faith in Christ even when he could not understand the kingdom Christ was bringing in. The Old Testament promises, as even John the Baptist understood them, predicted salvation through judgment. To deliver the poor and the oppressed, the Messiah must judge the oppressor. The Coming One must hew down all unjust power to inaugurate his peace.

In the light of Easter and Pentecost, Peter could remember the delegation of John's disciples who had come to Jesus. 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?' they asked. John, in Herod's prison, had heard of Jesus' power to raise the dead, and was baffled that Jesus did not use his power to bring in his kingdom (and to deliver his forerunner!). Jesus kept John's disciples with him while he performed miracles that directly fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah. He then sent them back to tell John what was happening, and added the word, 'Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.'<sup>6</sup> Jesus was performing signs of kingdom blessing without first inflicting kingdom judgment. John must trust the King to bring in his kingdom in his own way. That way was the way of the cross. Jesus came not to destroy people but to save them. To accomplish that, he had to defeat the great oppressor, Satan; he had to redeem sinners from the guilt of sin. His hands did not grasp a sword, but were stretched out to be pierced with nails. He did not lift a spear but received the thrust of the spear in his side. He did not come to bring the judgment, but to bear it ... for us.

Christ's death was his victory over Satan; it was the judgment of the prince of this world. Yet the day of Christ's final judgment will come only when Christ comes again. Peter awaited that coming (1:5, 7, 13; 4:5, 13; 5:1, 4; *cf.* 3:22). Christ had made Peter put up his sword; not in that way would his kingdom be brought in. As Jesus suffered meekly, so must his followers (2:21). His kingdom cannot therefore be one of the kingdoms of this world. His servants cannot use the sword to bring in kingdom justice. Kingdom justice must be absolute; only Christ can bring it.

What, then, of this interval between the first and second coming of Christ? Christ rules in glory, but what of human government on earth? Peter has already given the key to this question when he calls the new people of God the Diaspora (1:1). Just as the Jews in exile were scattered among the nations of the earth, so now are the people of God scattered. In the exile God had shown how his people might live among the nations, praying for the peace of the cities where they were captive. The subjection to Gentile government of the Jewish communities in dispersion paved the way for the pilgrim form of the people of God. New believers from the Gentiles joined believing Jews of the dispersion; they must be taught a similar loyalty to the existing Roman government.

Peter's instruction to this effect has always been needed. There has been no end of confusion about civil and spiritual power. Some have directly challenged the word of the Lord that his servants do not fight because his kingdom is not of this world. Claiming to be Christ's servants they have taken the sword in his name. Often this has not been done directly in the name of the church. Rather the church has summoned the kings of the earth to do its bidding and to carry out its crusades. Empires, nations and city-states have identified themselves as the political arm of Christ's kingdom.<sup>2</sup> They have imagined themselves to be the theocratic successors of Old Testament Israel, and have gone to battle singing imprecatory psalms against their foes.

Nations claiming theocratic status are now limited to the Muslim lands dominated by Islamic fundamentalists. The temptation to take the sword in Christ's name is again offered, however, in liberation theology. The error is not the conclusion that there can arise regimes so unjust as to make revolution justifiable. The error is the sanctifying of revolution as the work of God's kingdom, a work of salvation to be pursued in his name. No state, no freedom fighters today can lay claim to Israel's theocratic calling as warriors of God's covenant. The new Israel is the church of Jesus Christ, and he has forbidden the sword to the church. Under the lordship of Christ the kingdom of God does take form in the church, but through mightier weapons than the sword: weapons, as Paul affirms, that can reduce every towering imagination of the rebellious human heart.<sup>5</sup> No other weapons can advance Christ's kingdom. The political renovation of the world awaits his return, for he is the sole monarch of the universe. Until he comes, Christians are to be in submission to the governments that exist in the world.

This, too, is part of God's plan. We submit to the king for the Lord's sake, not just because the king has the force to govern. While Peter does not say explicitly, as Paul does, that the powers that be are ordained of God, he



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nevertheless recognizes their authority as part of the order that is God's will for us. That he does recognize this authority as more than a circumstance of God's providence appears from his summary of this section. There he places the honour we owe to the king beside the fear we owe to God, the honour we owe to all people, and the love we owe to the brethren (2:17).

*For the Lord's sake* refers not so much to our duty as to the opportunities God gives us in our relationships. We serve and honour the Lord by submitting to others. We honour every 'human creature' and acknowledge the supreme authority of the king and of governors sent by him. This is amazing when we reflect that the supreme king of the Roman empire was the neurotic Nero and that a governor sent by another Caesar was Pontius Pilate! Jesus, however, had justified paying tribute to Caesar, and had recognized the authority of Pilate as given, not merely from Rome, but from heaven.

*For the Lord's sake* implies, then, that our obedience serves God's purpose. By our civil obedience we *silence the ignorant talk of foolish men*. Christians were often charged with subversion of the established order. They were accused of spreading disloyalty against the government, of disrupting trade, and of all manner of shocking practices, including cannibalism and incest. By their law-abiding conduct they could give the lie to such wild and ignorant accusations.

Peter could speak of the Roman government, in spite of its exploitative economic practices and its curtailing of liberty, as a government that punished those who did wrong and commended those who did right. Clearly he does not imply that the perfect justice of Messiah's reign was executed by Nero. Nor does he encourage civil disobedience until Nero's administration of justice improved. Rather, Peter states the purpose of government in terms that Roman government adequately fulfilled: the restraint of crime and wrong-doing and the encouragement of civic righteousness. No doubt regimes may arise that would be so oppressive and unjust that they can no longer be said to fulfil that function. Peter's description of the function of governments serves indirectly to limit his command to be in subjection to them.

Peter gives instruction to subjects, not to rulers; to servants, not to masters. He instructs both husbands and wives in a significantly different relationship. Why does he not caution Christian masters? What of Christian rulers? Part of the answer may have been the membership of the churches that Peter addressed. Presumably very few were rulers or wealthy householders. Yet there is clearly another reason. Every Christian needs to learn the secret of freedom, freedom in bondage to the Lord and in humility toward people. Peter never forgot that his Lord had washed his feet. As Jesus girded himself with a towel, we must all gird ourselves with humility in order to serve one another. Peter reminds the proud that they must learn this lesson of humility (5:5). The lesson of submission in freedom is particularly important, however, for those who must bear subjection in their daily life. Theirs is a special privilege: they find that they can serve the Lord in serving others; their humble witness can powerfully show the love of Christ. Peter addresses them in particular to teach the humility that all must learn.

As Paul's letters show us, there is apostolic instruction for those who receive submission as well as for those who render it. The lesson is the same. Particularly in the church, all authority is exercised as a ministry. Jesus' disciples are not to govern the church in the fashion of rule among the nations (5:2-3). Christ's lordship must also transform the way Christians exercise authority in the other spheres of life. They will understand that political authority, too, is service under God. Its purpose is the good of those governed, not the glory of the governor or the profit of the governing class. This principle guides Christians who share in governing authority in democracies. Their goal must also be to serve, to seek the good of the whole people, with special concern for the poor and weak.<sup>3</sup>

Peter summarizes his teaching of humility in compact and memorable form: 'Honour everyone; love the brotherhood; fear God; keep honouring the king' (2:17). The form of our submission differs greatly, although it is all grounded in the fear of God, who made us in his image. We do not simply honour our fellow-Christians, we love them dearly (1:22). Our continuing respect for the king (2:13) does not worship him as divine, but is of a piece with the respect we owe to all. These brief mottoes summarize again the two commandments that fulfil the law: love for God and love for neighbour.

#### *b. Submission as servants of worldly masters (2:18-20)*

The NIV translation *slaves* is not precise. Peter addresses 'domestics' (*oiketai*), those servants and retainers who would be under the rule and control of an often despotic head of the household. Nevertheless, he seems to have slaves mainly in view: perhaps he wants to reserve the usual Greek word for 'slaves', *douloi*, for our service to the Lord (2:16).

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Slavery was widespread in Peter's world; it included many who would today be regarded as professionals: managers of estates, physicians, teachers and tutors.

Peter's admonition reveals in pointed fashion the heart of his teaching about submission. Obviously his concern is not social stability or the perpetuation of slavery. He does take for granted faithful service on the part of Christian household slaves. In a sense, this is the least they can do to show their willingness to serve God where he has placed them. If they are at fault in this service, they should expect punishment and not suppose that such suffering has any particular value. What does have point and value for their Christian testimony is their response to unjust punishment. Such treatment offers a golden opportunity to show the uniqueness of Christian service. By patiently enduring unmerited abuse they show the opposite of a servile attitude. They demonstrate their freedom. In their servitude they may not escape beatings. They may be beaten without cause, or even for good things that they have done; a 'crooked', perverse master may repay evil for good. If the Christian responds in kind—good for good, evil for evil—he becomes merely a victim when he is treated unjustly. In burning resentment he seeks an opportunity to repay the evil. But if he bears the evil patiently he has broken the chain of bondage in the power of the Lord. He shows his confidence in God's justice; he need not avenge himself. He also shows that his service is not really forced but voluntary. He is willing to serve his master for the Lord's sake, even to honour him for the Lord's sake. His master cannot enslave him, for he is Christ's slave; he cannot humiliate him, for he has humbled himself in willing subjection.

Peter is here applying the teaching he heard from his Lord. It is the privilege of those who are sons and daughters of the Most High to imitate the magnificence of their Father's mercy. They rise above simple justice to reflect God's goodness and love. Unthreatened by evil, they can overcome evil with good, and in the midst of suffering show mercy to those who would show no mercy toward them.

'And I thank God that he has given me the love to seek to convert and to adopt as my son the enemy who killed my dear boys.' These were the words of Korean Pastor Yang-won Son. The year was 1948; the place was the town of Soon-chun, near the 38th parallel. A band of Communists had taken control of the town for a brief period, and had executed Pastor Son's two older boys, Matthew and John. They died as martyrs, calling on their persecutors to have faith in Jesus. When the Communists were driven out, Chai-sun, a young man of the village, was identified as one who had fired the murderous shots. His execution was ordered. Pastor Son requested that the charges be dropped and that Chai-sun be released into his custody for adoption. Rachel, the thirteen-year-old sister of the murdered boys, testified to support her father's incredible request. Only then did the court agree to release Chai-sun. He became the son of the pastor, and a believer in the grace of Jesus Christ.

How different is the forgiving love of Christ from the best of pagan ethics! Seneca wrote, 'What will the wise man do when he is buffeted? He will do as Cato did ... He did not burst into a passion, did not avenge himself, did not even forgive it, but denied its having been done.'

The respect that servants show for their masters is not a slavish fear, but the result of their fear of God. The word translated *respect* in 2:18 is *phobos*, which does mean 'fear'. Some think that Peter is here speaking of the fear of God rather than of respect to masters: 'Servants, be in subjection to your masters with all fear [of God].' In favour of this understanding is the fact that Peter has just distinguished between the fear we show toward God and the honour that we give to people (2:17). He also says that we do not share the unbeliever's fear (3:14). But *phobos* may carry many shades of meaning, as Peter's usage shows (3:14). Peter commends *phobos* in a wife's behaviour toward her husband (3:2) Paul shows the connection between 'fear' of masters and fear of God when he tells slaves to be obedient, with fear and trembling, 'but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.'<sup>4</sup> Slavery to Christ transforms servitude into freedom.

*For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.* The translation *conscious of God* interprets the word *syneidēsis* in the general sense of 'consciousness', rather than in the more technical sense, 'conscience', that is usual in the New Testament. The NIV gives the word its usual translation in two other passages where Peter speaks of a good conscience (3:16, 21). The difference is that in 3:21 Peter speaks of a good conscience *toward* God, while in 2:19 his phrase is 'conscience *of* God'. Perhaps Peter is describing the conscience as being of God in its origin, God-given. More likely, he thinks of the conscience as directed toward God. In that case, the difference from 'consciousness' is not great; the translation 'conscience' would stress ingrained and habitual reference to the will of God in the midst of patient suffering for his sake.

The term for *commendable* is *charis*, which means 'grace', or 'gracious' in the sense of 'pleasing' (2:19–20). Could it have the stronger meaning that it has elsewhere in the letter (1:2, 10, 13; 3:7; 4:10; 5:10, 12)? 'This is grace, if a man bears up ... this is grace before God.' Samuel Bénétreau thinks so: 'Peter dares to claim it: this unmerited

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suffering takes place in the majestic current of grace. It is a favour of God! Only the light thrown by the christological section which is going to follow could permit the accepting, if not the comprehending, of so demanding a thesis.'

In spite of Bénétreau's appeal, however, the weaker meaning of 'gracious' or 'thankworthy' seems to fit better. The word is used this way in Luke 6:32–34, and this saying of Jesus was evidently in Peter's thoughts as he wrote the passage. Further, Peter puts *charis* in parallel with *kleos*, 'glory' or *credit* (2:20).

Clearly Peter has the submission of Christ already in view as he describes the submission of Christian servants. Christ is the suffering Servant of the Lord. He, too, was beaten. Mark's Gospel, reflecting Peter's preaching, uses the term to describe Christ's beating before Pilate. Now Peter turns to the suffering Lord whom Christians are called to follow.

#### 6. Live as the people of God

#### III: The new lifestyle (continued)

#### 2:21–3:7

#### 3. The new lifestyle's motivation: Christ's suffering (2:21–25)

##### a. His saving example: in his steps (2:21–23)

*To this you were called.* Peter has shown the glory of God's calling. Christians have been called out of darkness into God's marvellous light (2:9). They are called as God's elect, his chosen people, heirs of his blessing (3:9). But now Peter says, *To this you were called.* To what? To suffering, to unjust abuse, to patient endurance when they are beaten for doing right! Peter has described our heavenly calling; he does not conceal our earthly calling. 'Many are the afflictions of the righteous,' declares the psalm to which Peter often alludes in this letter. Clearly Peter is thinking not only of Christian servants who were subject to abuse. They have a particular duty to serve the Lord where he has called them; in this, however, they do not differ from their brothers and sisters in other situations. All Christians are called to suffer with Christ before they are glorified with him. Archbishop Leighton comments on the readiness of Christians to claim the peace of Christ while expecting no tribulation in the world. 'They like better St. Peter's carnal advice to Christ, to avoid suffering. Matt. 16:22, than his Apostolic doctrine to Christians, teaching them, that as Christ *suffered*, so they likewise *are called to suffering*.'

Peter does not ask us to view suffering as inevitable in the world under the curse. He does not ask for stoic resignation. A life of suffering is our calling, not our fate. It is our calling just because we are God's people. It is our calling because it was Christ's calling. He calls his disciples to follow him. To be sure, suffering is a flame to burn away the dross so that our tested faith may shine as gold (1:7; 4:12). Some of the suffering that we endure is the direct result of our own sin (2:20; 3:17). But our example in suffering is One who was totally innocent and free from sin (2:22). He suffered, not for his own sake, but for the sake of God's purpose, and for the salvation of others. As we follow him, we suffer for his sake, and for the sake of winning others to his saving gospel (3:1–2; 4:13–16).

Two themes are woven together in this magnificent section of Peter's letter. One is the theme of the *example* of Christ's suffering: *leaving you an example*. The other is the more basic theme of the *saving purpose* of Christ's suffering: *Christ suffered for you*. Some commentators suppose that the cadenced prose of this passage must reflect an early Christian hymn or a credal statement. It has been suggested that the references to the atoning power of Christ's suffering are present here because they were in the source that Peter quoted. Kelly even speaks of 'the stress of the vicarious nature of Christ's sufferings, which is a theme that is strictly irrelevant to the conduct of slaves.'<sup>3</sup>

Far from being irrelevant to Peter's exhortation, the atoning sacrifice of Christ lies at the heart of all that he has to say. The cadences of the passage could well reflect the eloquence with which Peter had preached Christ, the suffering Servant, from the prophecies of Isaiah. The example of Christ is a *saving* example. Peter does not hold forth the meekness of Christ simply as an abstract pattern, a pattern that might have been offered by any uncomplaining sufferer. Christ's suffering is our model because it is our salvation. It does not simply guide us; it is the root of all our motivation to follow. Our 'living to righteousness' follows in Christ's steps because we died to sin in his atonement (2:24). Remove Christ's atonement from the passage and its point would be lost.

Knowing that we were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ (1:19), we take up our cross to follow him. He has left us an example, a pattern to follow. Peter's word translated *example* refers to a pattern to be traced. Clement of Alexandria gives samples of Greek sentences containing all the letters of the alphabet (the Greek equivalent of 'The

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quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog'). They were written out to be traced so that children would learn their ABC. The word could also apply to an artist's sketch to be filled in (our painting-by-number kits).

To the vivid figure in his word for *example*, Peter joins another, the figure of footsteps to be traced. Peter, Christ's disciple, had followed in his Master's footsteps along the narrow paths of the hill country and through fields of grain in Galilee. No doubt Peter also witnessed the dreadful procession that led to Calvary. To save himself from that path he had sworn fearful oaths. Now he is ready to follow Jesus all the way. He calls every Christian to walk that path with him.

The path that Jesus took was the path of meek obedience to the calling of his Father. Peter now presents Jesus as the suffering Servant of the Lord, taking his language from the song of the Servant in Isaiah 53. Jesus advances toward Calvary as a lamb that is led to the slaughter (Is. 53:7). He is without sin or deceit; here Peter quotes directly from Isaiah 53:9. The sufferings of the Servant are not for his own faults, but for the sins of others. He suffers to fulfil the will of God: 'It was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer' (Is. 53:10). He is a willing sacrifice: 'he poured out his life unto death' (Is. 53:12). His meekness appears in his silence—before the high priest, before Pontius Pilate, and before Herod. On the cross he answered nothing to the mockery of his enemies as they cursed the King of the Jews, or to the taunts of the thief crucified with him. Peter had cause to remember all too vividly the silence of Jesus before the high priest. He can bear witness: *When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate*. Oppressed and afflicted, he was silent: 'as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth' (Is. 53:7).

The meekness of Christ not only showed his submission to his Father's will; it showed also his confidence in his Father's righteous judgment. He did not revile or threaten because he *entrusted himself to him who judges justly*. He had no need to vindicate himself. Paul writes to Christ's followers: 'Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.'

Perhaps there is even a deeper sense to Peter's description of Christ's meek commitment to God. The verb translated *entrusted* is used twice in the Greek version of Isaiah to describe the 'delivering up' of the Servant for our sins (Is. 53:6, 12). It is also used in the gospels for the delivering up of Christ to Pilate. Stibbs says of the term, 'Here in the phrase *committed himself* it is used to describe our Lord's own surrender of Himself to bear the penalty of sin—not His own sin but ours (cf. Rom. 4:25), and not at the hands of men, but at the hands of God, the righteous Judge.'

Certainly the way of Christ's meek suffering, so well remembered by Peter, is the way of redeeming love. By the welts of his scourging we were healed: Isaiah foresaw it, and Peter witnessed it. The very torture that Peter wanted Jesus at any cost to escape was the torture that Jesus came to endure. In Isaiah's songs, the Servant is both identified with the people of God and distinguished from them. He suffers for them, stands in their place, and bears the judgment of their sins. The example of Christ's meekness is drawn from the mystery of Christ's sacrifice.

#### *b. His atoning sacrifice (2:24)*

Jesus is far more than our example; he is our sin-bearer. As Leighton says, 'This was his business, not only to rectify sinful man by his example, but to redeem him by his blood.' In one brief sentence Peter uses the prophecy of Isaiah to interpret what he had seen: Jesus going to his death. Jesus' predictions of rejection, suffering and death had contradicted the expectations of the disciples. But they did not contradict the words of the prophet. Isaiah had said, 'He bore the sin of many.'<sup>2</sup> Now Peter understands those words; they convey the heart of the gospel.

The background for Isaiah's prophecy and Peter's teaching is the symbolism of sacrifice that God appointed for Israel. Sin was pictured as a burden to be placed upon the head of a sacrificial animal before it was killed. Death was the penalty for sin; the sacrificial animal died in the place of the sinner, who confessed his sin with his hands on the head of the animal. That action graphically pictured the transfer of the weight of his sin from himself to the substitute. The sprinkling of the blood of the sacrificed animal marked atonement; the penalty of sin had been paid.<sup>4</sup> Isaiah describes the mysterious tragedy of the righteous Servant of the Lord: his astonishing agony, his scornful rejection, his submissive meekness. Then he discloses the meaning of the apparent tragedy. The suffering Servant offers himself as a sacrifice for sin. He was stricken with death for the transgression of his people. His soul was made an offering for sin. He bore the sin of the many.

We lack Peter's preparation for understanding Christ as the sacrifice, the lamb whose precious blood redeems us (1:19). We have not witnessed, as Peter did, the offering of lambs, bulls and goats on the altar of sacrifice; the symbolism is not vivid in our minds. Yet Peter knew that the sacrifices at Jerusalem had not cleansed his heart from

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sin. Faced with the divine power of Jesus on the Lake of Galilee, he had fallen on his knees in his fishing-boat to cry, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’

Peter, who had slept through his Lord’s agony in the garden of Gethsemane, now knows what cup it was that Jesus had to take; he knows why Jesus cried out in his abandonment, ‘*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*’ When Jesus went to Calvary, ‘he bore the sin of many’. The wood of his cross could be put upon another; the weight of sin was his alone to bear. Should anyone think lightly of his sin—and Peter could not—then to see the agony of the Son of God must call him to think again. Jesus bore our sins personally, in his own body. Only he could do so, for only he was sinless, God’s lamb without spot (1:19; 3:18). Only he could do so, for only he was who Peter confessed him to be: no mere man, not even the greatest prophet, but the Lord’s Anointed; indeed, the Lord himself, the Son of God, now crowned with glory (3:22; 4:11). If our death does not confront us with the wages of sin, then his death must. That such a price was paid, by the Son who gave his life, by the Father who gave his Son, is the measure of the measureless love of God.

The priests of old put away sin in the symbolic ritual of sacrifice; Jesus put away sin through the sacrifice of himself. The author of Hebrews reminds us of the words of Psalm 40:

‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,  
but a body you prepared for me;  
with burnt offerings and sin offerings  
you were not pleased.

Then I said, “Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—  
I have come to do your will, O God.” ’

The expression Peter uses seems to describe not simply Christ’s bearing of sin *on* the cross, but his carrying the burden of sin *to* the cross. In any case, it is the death of Christ, the shedding of his precious blood, that accomplishes our redemption. Peter’s expression emphasizes the dreadful extent of Christ’s sin-bearing. He suffered not only to the point of death, but to death as one accursed. Peter is well aware of the law’s curse upon one who died as a criminal *on the tree*. To Pharisees like Saul, before his conversion, Christ’s death on the cross refuted any claim to Messiahship. The Messiah could not die as one accursed of God. The astonishing prophecy of Isaiah shows the very opposite; only the One who becomes a curse for us can be the true Messiah, for his accursed death in our place paid the price of sin. Peter had proclaimed to the Sanhedrin the horror of their offence in killing Jesus, ‘hanging him on a tree’.<sup>2</sup> Yet the wicked hands of men had fulfilled the counsel and will of God. God raised up Jesus, and by his death brought forgiveness of sins to all who trust in him.

By bearing our sin Jesus brings healing as well as atonement. The curse of sin includes suffering as well as death. From this, too, Jesus saves us. Peter again quotes from Isaiah: *by his wounds you have been healed*. Slaves who had been beaten bore the scars of the lash to which *wounds* (‘welts’) refers. Jesus had been tied to a post on the ‘Pavement’ of the palace where Pilate administered justice. There he had been whipped with the Roman scourge, a lash with multiple thongs, weighted with lumps of lead or bone. How did Christ’s wounds bring healing to slaves who might also have felt the lash? Did not Peter call them to follow in Christ’s steps, to imitate him in receiving wounds for his sake?

The apparent contradiction reveals the heart of Peter’s message. That which is to be feared is not the wrath of men, but the wrath of God. That which is to be desired is not the passing comforts of the world, but the blessing of God’s eternal inheritance. This is not just a matter of suffering now and glory to come: the promised blessing is already the possession of believers in Christ. They now taste the joy of heaven, for they taste the Lord’s grace (2:3). They know Jesus, the great Physician. Peter well knew the healing power of Christ. As an apostle he had power to declare, ‘Jesus Christ heals you.’ In hope of the resurrection, Peter could promise the final healing of all the people of God. But here Peter speaks of healing, not by the hands of Jesus, but by the wounds of Jesus. Christ’s wounds heal suffering at its root: the curse of sin. Not only do they plead the sinner’s case in the judgment; they transform his present suffering. No longer is it the bitter legacy of unrighteousness; it has become fellowship in the steps of Jesus. The pain that remains for the Christian is not the penalty of sin: Christ has suffered that in his place. The pain that remains is Christ’s calling to follow in his steps, sharing his reproach.

c. *His saving claim* (2:24–25)

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Christ's atoning sacrifice has accomplished our salvation. We were like sheep going astray, but now we have been brought back to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. Jesus is not only the Good Shepherd who gives his life for the sheep; he is also the seeking Shepherd, the Lord who gathers his remnant flock. He bore our sins with a marvellous purpose: 'that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness'. (This translation in the ASV is to be preferred to that in the NIV.<sup>3</sup>)

Peter here speaks in a way that is close to the language of Paul. Central for Paul is the doctrine of union with Christ. We were united to Christ in his saving death; when he died to sin, so did we. When he rose, we rose with him. We are therefore to live in accord with our new position. Peter, too, stresses what Christ has accomplished for us. He makes Christ's finished work the ground of his exhortations to live for righteousness. While he does not develop the theme of our union with Christ in the way that Paul does, he presents the same conviction from a different perspective, using particularly the Servant songs of Isaiah.<sup>2</sup> In this passage he is showing us the meaning of the death of Christ from Isaiah 53, a passage in which the Servant suffers for the sins of the people because he is identified with them. In affirming that Jesus bore our sins, Peter teaches that Jesus is identified with us as our representative. That enables Peter to say that because of Christ's sin-bearing in our place, we have died to sin. Peter makes it clear that Christ has done more in his death than enable us to die to sin. By his death in our place 'once, the righteous for the unrighteous', he has brought us to God (3:18). We have ceased from sin in Christ's suffering and death for us, and therefore we are to live to God (4:1-2).

Peter had begun this section by addressing servants, speaking to them of their calling to follow Christ. But now he speaks in the first person plural, not 'you' only, but 'we'. Peter's hope is one with theirs, remission of sin through the death of Christ and freedom for a new life of righteousness.

By his atoning death Jesus puts his saving claim upon us. *We have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.* The title *Shepherd* for the One who is the suffering Servant of the Lord is suggested in Isaiah 53:6, the passage that follows the statement that we are healed by his wounds: 'We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.' David's confession, 'The Lord is my shepherd ...', presents one of the major images of the Old Testament describing the Lord's care for his covenant people. The Lord, the true shepherd, promises to gather and care for his scattered flock. In the prophet Zechariah the figure of the shepherd and that of the sufferer are brought together. The shepherd, the one who was pierced, is identified with the Lord himself,<sup>2</sup> yet distinguished from him as his 'fellow', the man close to him:

'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd,  
against the man who is close to me!  
declares the LORD Almighty.  
  
'Strike the shepherd,  
and the sheep will be scattered,  
and I will turn my hand against the little ones.'

Peter would well remember that passage. He had heard Jesus quote it as he led the disciples from the last supper to the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus used it to warn the disciples of their scattering, their falling away, when he, the Shepherd, would be struck down. Peter had replied, 'Even if all fall away, I will not.' Yet Peter, too, had forsaken Jesus and fled. When he later followed from a distance, he had been prepared to swear that he never knew Jesus. What joy filled Peter's heart to receive forgiveness and blessing from his risen Lord! Peter had returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of his soul. His own calling as an apostolic shepherd had come from the Lord, the good Shepherd, who had reclaimed Peter from his desertion.<sup>5</sup>

The Zechariah passage goes on to describe how the Lord will purify his people, refining them as silver or gold in fire. This image, too, is in Peter's thoughts (1:7; 4:12). The Lord who is now gathering his own from the nations of the world leads them through suffering to know him.

They will call on my name  
and I will answer them;  
I will say, 'They are my people,'

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and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'

Our Shepherd is also our *Overseer*, the 'Bishop' (AV; Greek, *episkopos*) of our souls. The overseer is one who watches over a charge to protect and preserve it. A shepherd is the overseer of his flock. The elders of the church are to exercise oversight as they tend the flock of God (5:2). Yet the oversight of the 'Chief Shepherd' (5:4) has majestic breadth and depth; it goes far beyond the care of any under-shepherd. The Lord who knows the secrets of our hearts watches over our souls. So Jesus was the Overseer of Peter's soul, warning him, calling him to watch and pray, praying for him that his faith should not fail, and searching his heart in order to restore him to his calling.<sup>2</sup> Household slaves, designated as 'things' by the Romans and 'bodies' by the Greeks, are in Christ a kingdom of priests; Jesus the Lord is their Shepherd, the guardian of their precious souls.

#### 4. More on the new lifestyle's practice: submission for the Lord's sake in role relationships (3:1–7)

##### a. *Submission of wives to husbands (3:1–6)*

Both Greek philosophy and Roman custom required order in the household as the foundation of order in the state. In calling for the submission of wives to their husbands Peter is requiring behaviour that would be approved in society at large. Such conduct would put to shame the slanderers of Christian lifestyle (3:16). Plutarch, the Greek biographer and moralist, wrote in his *Advice to Bride and Groom* (not much later, perhaps, than Peter's letter):

So it is with women also; if they subordinate themselves to their husbands, they are commended, but if they want to have control, they cut a sorer figure than the subjects of their control. And control ought to be exercised by the men over the women, not as the owner has control over a piece of property, but, as the soul controls the body, by entering into her feelings and being knit to her through goodwill.

But Peter is by no means urging Christian wives to pattern their lives on even the best traditional values of their society. He has already condemned the 'empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers' (1:18). The distinctive behaviour of the Christian wife is signalled at once by the word translated *in the same way*. Peter refers us back to the whole pattern of Christian conduct he has described, the life of Christian pilgrims in this world. This style of life will force hostile pagans to recognize Christian genuineness (2:12). Christians fear God; they are his slaves, therefore they do not fear people. They are free, because they are the royal people of God. Free in slavery to God, free as followers of Christ, they submit themselves to others freely. No-one else has the status and honour of Jesus Christ, whom Peter confessed to be the Son of God. Yet Jesus had washed Peter's feet like a domestic slave. His girding himself with a towel for that humble task was as nothing compared to his bowing beneath the cross to bear Peter's sins. It is Christ's example that Peter calls us to follow in all the relationships of life. We need not be concerned about maintaining our rights. Jesus trusted his Father, the righteous Judge, to do that; and so should we. The Christian who follows Jesus does not grasp for privilege; he or she is already privileged beyond imagination. The Christian seeks rather opportunities to imitate Christ in willing subjection to service.

Christian women submit to their husbands, and particularly to non-Christian husbands, not because they are in some way inferior, for they are God's elect. Rather, they submit for the Lord's sake, with the particular purpose of winning their husbands to the Lord by their unselfish example. The key expression, *in the same way*, is applied to the husband as well as the wife (3:7). Both follow Jesus, the suffering Servant. Although the husband does not fulfil the same role in relation to his wife as his wife does to him, there is a fundamental identity of attitude: both are servants of God, seeking to serve others for Christ's sake.

Peter shows how all social relationships are transformed by following Jesus Christ. These relations differ in their nature. The honour that we give to civil rulers recognizes the appointment of God. They have been authorized by him to restrain evil-doers and encourage civil peace (2:14, 17). In contrast, no divine warrant or approval is given to slavery; rather it is assumed that slave-masters may be guilty of despotic and wicked treatment of their slaves. The submission that Christian servants give is presented as a privilege, the privilege of glorifying God by submitting willingly to an unjust situation (2:19–20). In the case of wives also there is the possibility of mistreatment. Christian wives are to remain faithful to God under pressure; they are not to deny the Lord for fear of their unbelieving husbands (3:6).

But the submission that wives are to yield to their husbands represents more than an opportunity to endure injustice for the sake of Christ. Peter presents this submission as an adornment of the Christian woman, the *beauty* of a meek and quiet spirit that is pleasing to God. The *spirit* of which Peter speaks is not here the Holy Spirit, but it is the fruit of the Spirit in the heart of the Christian. The *gentle and quiet spirit* is not presented as distinctively feminine,

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for Jesus described himself as ‘gentle and humble in heart.’ He entered Jerusalem, not like a proud conqueror on a war charger, but ‘gentle and riding on a donkey’. Meekness or gentleness is one of the principal fruits of the Spirit.<sup>2</sup> The ‘quietness’ of a woman is linked with her submission in 1 Timothy 2:9–12, a passage that is similar to Peter’s exhortation. But Paul also urges quietness upon all, as a Christian virtue, in 1 Thessalonians 4:11. The role of the wife gives her an opportunity to display Christian love and humility in a distinctive way, but Peter makes it clear that Christian men and women are alike called to reflect toward others the meekness they find in following Christ.

Peter points Christian wives to the example of *holy women of the past* who, like Sarah, were submissive to their *own husbands*. While Peter does not expand on God’s creation ordinance of marriage as Paul does, he clearly assumes that wives have a role to fulfil in marriage that pleases God.

While Peter’s exhortation applies as well to wives of Christian husbands, he has particular concern for the witness of women married to unbelievers. This flows from his burden in this part of his letter. In 2:11 he begins the section with a plea for behaviour that will be a witness to the pagans. In 3:16 he is still speaking of how the good behaviour of Christians will put to shame those who slander them. Peter sees the ‘impossible’ position of the Christian as a remarkable opportunity to bear witness to Christ.

In the Roman world it was assumed that wives would conform to the religious practices of their husbands. This became an issue in Roman history when many women were attracted to the cult of Bacchus or to the worship of the Egyptian goddess Isis. The rituals of Bacchus had been banned by the Roman Senate; the senators saw a threat to the state in the participation of women in bacchanalian revelries at night in the mountains.<sup>5</sup> These suspicions were later directed against Christians. In the eyes of imperial Romans, here was another subversive Eastern religion threatening the stability of the home and of the state.

Peter’s letter might certainly have been shown to pagan rulers, masters, or husbands as evidence of the falsity of the charges made against Christians. But Peter is not writing to suspicious non-Christians. He is writing to encourage Christians to accept suffering and reproach for the sake of Jesus Christ (4:16). Christian wives can have an important part in the church’s witness. That witness may not be easy. Their husbands have resisted the claim of the gospel. They may ridicule the message and insult their wives. So strong may be their hostility that it is no longer possible for their wives to speak of the Lord to them. Even then the Christian wife must not despair. She still possesses a mighty weapon for winning her husband to the faith; it is the testimony of her life. Her husband has refused to heed the word; very well, let him be won *without words*. The silent eloquence of his wife’s pure and reverent behaviour can preach daily the transforming power of Jesus Christ. No-one could be more emphatic than Peter has been about the place of the word of God in conversion (1:23). Yet there are situations in which the silent witness of Christian love must support and prepare for the presentation of the truth.

Augustine describes the faithful witness of his Christian mother Monnica to his pagan father Patricius:

She served her husband as her master, and did all she could to win him for You, speaking to him of You by her conduct, by which You made her beautiful ... Finally, when her husband was at the end of his earthly span, she gained him for You.

The deep and growing beauty of a woman who trusts in the Lord will have its effect on her husband, but, above all, her spiritual beauty will be precious in the sight of God. Peter’s contrast between the outward vanities of fashion and inward spiritual adornment calls to mind the catalogue of beauty aids that Isaiah denounces in proclaiming God’s judgment against the idle luxury of the daughters of Zion.

Peter’s teaching may be misunderstood in two directions. On the one hand, the positive thrust of his contrast may be missed. Later church fathers interpreted the passage as banning all aesthetics in women’s dress, attributing such desires to the work of fallen angels. If the ‘literal’ force of Peter’s warning is taken out of context, he could be made to say that the wearing of clothing is prohibited as outward adornment (3:3)! The point is not a legalistic ban on beauty of attire. (The father of the prodigal welcomed his returning son with the best robe and a ring!) The point is the vastly superior value of inward beauty and the danger of extravagant and sensual fashions in dress.

The opposite misunderstanding is much more popular. Peter’s warning can be brushed aside; it was conventional for the times. Did not Plutarch say,

That adorns a woman which makes her more decorous—not gold, emeralds, scarlet, but whatever invests her with dignity, good behaviour, modesty.



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Indeed, the same author opposed gaudy clothing and the equivalent of rock music (cymbals and drums) in connection with the cults that attracted women:

Those who have to go near elephants do not put on bright clothes, nor do those who go near bulls put on red; for the animals are made especially furious by these colours; and tigers, they say, when surrounded by the noise of beaten drums go completely mad and tear themselves to pieces. Since, then, this is also the case with men, that some cannot endure the sight of scarlet and purple clothes, while others are annoyed by cymbals and drums, what terrible hardship is it for women to refrain from such things, and not disquiet or irritate their husbands, but live with them in constant gentleness?

We must not discount Peter's warnings, however, just because pagan moralists warned against some of the same things. The contrast that Peter makes is real. Enslavement to fashion by men or women runs counter to growth in spiritual holiness. Coiffure, jewellery, dress: the categories have not changed since Peter's day, as any shopping centre demonstrates. Ornate hairstyles were prevalent in the high society of the Roman world:

Curl climbs on top of curl and over the forehead there arose something which at its best looked like the *chef d'oeuvre* of a master pastry cook and, at its worst, like a dry sponge. At the back the hair was plaited, and the braids arranged in a coil which looks like basketwork.

Today's hairstyles are less ornate, but the time and expense demanded have hardly decreased. The issues of stewardship are pressing: Christian expenditures for beauty aids, jewellery, and modish costumes increase while church funds go begging and thousands starve. Nor is the cost the only factor. Open licentiousness sweeps in and out of the fashion world: modesty as well as restraint should mark the Christian style.

The submission of a Christian wife must always be first to God. Worldly husbands may wish to flaunt the beauty or even the sexuality of their wives. Christian women will seek to please their husbands, but they cannot avoid the issue of obeying God rather than men. Peter calls for the fear of God that dispels the fear of men (3:6, 14).

Knowing how precious to the world are the gold and gems of outward show, Peter displays that on which God puts a high-price tag: the hidden but unfading beauty of the heart. The contemporary world resists the aging process at all costs, yet the youthful body that it idolizes quickly fades. Christians need God's values to reject the futility of the worldly search for beauty. Can real beauty still be blooming along with wrinkles? Peter offers the answer of a long-established beauty school: the daughters of Sarah (3:5–6).

Peter names *Sarah* as an example of a class of godly women who cultivated the beauty of spirit that he has been describing, and who were *submissive to their own husbands*. He calls attention to the fact that Sarah spoke of Abraham as her *master* (the reference is to Gn. 18:12). The Greek term *kyrios* was used in polite address, rather like our 'sir' or 'Mr'. It indicates the respect with which Sarah spoke of Abraham. Certainly Sarah's submission to Abraham was not slavish.

It would be misleading to think of a separate line of 'children of Sarah' like the 'seed of Abraham'; nevertheless the Lord insisted that Isaac, the son of the promise, be born of Sarah, not Hagar. Sarah, like Abraham, was a chosen believer, and theirs is the line of the promise from which Christ was born. In speaking of Sarah and her 'children', Peter indicates her calling and dignity. Her willing submission to Abraham was therefore freely given. Like Sarah, Christian women of the new covenant are believers, doing what is right, and not giving way to fear. It is better not to put an *if* in the translation of verse 6, but to follow the Greek more closely: 'of whom you have become children, doing good and not being afraid of any terror'. Peter consistently begins with the privilege we have and moves on to the behaviour we show.

#### *b. Consideration of wives by husbands (3:7)*

*Husbands, in the same way ...* The path of Christian living is no different for the husband than for the wife. Both are called to follow Christ in humble and compassionate love, accepting rebuffs with forgiving grace (3:8–9). Since the husband's role is different, the form of his service is different. The wife is called to be submissive to her husband; the husband is called to honour his wife. That honour includes considerate understanding.

The husband is to live with his wife considerately, literally 'according to knowledge'. The expression describing their living together is not limited to sexual intimacy, but it has particular reference to it. In all their life together, and particularly in their sexual union, the husband is to relate to his wife 'according to knowledge'. Does Peter mean knowledge of the wife, or knowledge of God and his calling? The close connection with the description of the wife as

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*the weaker partner* favours the specific sense: the husband must dwell with his wife as one who knows her needs, who recognizes the delicacy of her nature and feelings. On the other hand, Peter has warned against ‘the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance’ (1:14). Knowledge of God distinguishes Christian love from pagan lust. That saving knowledge enables the husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.

Peter describes the wife as *the weaker partner*. The word translated *partner* in the NIV means ‘instrument’ or ‘vessel’. Again it is possible that the sexual relation is particularly in view.<sup>3</sup> The description of their bodies as ‘instruments’ might suggest that *the gracious gift of life* of which the man and wife are *heirs* together is not eternal life, but the gift of new life in children. Peter’s description of the inheritance of Christians (1:4), however, is a persuasive argument for holding to the traditional interpretation. In any case, whether the gift in view is of physical life or of spiritual life, Peter is stressing the mutuality of the relationship. While the wife is of the weaker sex in muscular strength, her role in the gift of physical life is surely not less! In relation to the gift of spiritual life, the woman is in no sense weaker, for in Christ there is no longer male and female. No less than her Christian husband, the Christian wife is a living stone, ‘being built into a spiritual house’ in the Lord (2:5).

The husband gives to his wife the ‘honour’ that is her due. *Respect* is not strong enough. Peter uses the word translated ‘precious’ in 2:7; literally it means ‘preciousness’. The honour or preciousness that the husband must bestow on his wife is not only the recognition of her place in God’s ordinance of marriage; it is the honour that is hers as one of God’s precious and holy people. If husbands fail to give that honour, their fellowship with their wives will suffer; so will their fellowship with God. Their prayers will be ‘hindered’, a strong word. The prayers of the husband will be blocked, will lose their effectiveness. Probably Peter also has in view the joint prayers of the couple. Husband and wife are to pray together; their home becomes a temple where they together approach God in the worship of a holy priesthood, offering up spiritual sacrifices.<sup>2</sup> Paul, too, emphasizes the importance of prayer in the marriage relationship. He counsels consideration in the sexual expression of marriage; marital intercourse is not to be unduly denied by either partner. But he makes special note of times of mutual continence ‘so that you may devote yourselves to prayer’. Piety becomes hollow and false if it is not expressed in the closest of human relationships. Marriage is not a sacrament conveying divine grace, but it is the human relationship that God has designed to mirror the love of Christ for the church, and of the church for Christ.

#### 7. The blessing of living with Christian suffering

##### 3:8–22

#### 1. Response to suffering in a life of blessing (3:8–12)

##### a. Called to a life of blessing

Peter has concluded the section of his letter in which he has encouraged Christians to display their freedom in submission for Christ’s sake, as citizens, servants, wives, and husbands. He has encouraged them to bear unjust treatment as part of their calling. Now he turns to deal with the issue of suffering at greater length. He has spoken of trials from the very beginning of the letter (1:6), and has presented the example of Christ to show Christians how to submit to suffering for doing right (2:19–24). In 3:8–9 he summarizes what he has been saying and prepares for what will follow. As always, he begins with what God has done. God calls us to be heirs of his blessing (3:9). That calling commits us to a life of blessing, a life that responds to the free grace of God. Peter thinks of God’s blessing as it is proclaimed in Psalm 34 (quoted in 3:10–12). Does he not also remember the Beatitudes pronounced by Jesus? Certainly he reflects Jesus’ teaching regarding the love and meekness of the heirs of the kingdom, especially as it is shown toward enemies.

Peter names five characteristics of the life that brings blessing: like-mindedness, sympathy, brotherly love, compassion, and humility. These are not virtues chosen at random. Like the fingers of the hand, they radiate from one centre and work together. The key to them all is the love of grace: they reflect the grace, love, and compassion of Jesus Christ. The teaching and example of Jesus have become the teaching of the apostles.

*Live in harmony with one another.* The NIV translation paraphrases one word, ‘like-mindedness’. Greek and Roman philosophers spoke of the need for such harmony in the home and in the state.<sup>3</sup> In Peter’s letter, however, the word has new depth. It is interpreted by the parallel terms, and by the focus of the letter on Jesus Christ. Peter describes the ‘clear mind’ in which Christians are to be united (4:7–11). It is the mind of those who prayerfully await the coming of the Lord and serve one another in fervent love. They prepare their minds for action by setting their hope on Christ

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(1:13). When Peter had urged Jesus not to speak of the cross, Jesus had rebuked him for minding the things of men rather than the things of God. Christians find oneness of understanding in the gospel of the cross.

The unity of mind that Christians are to show includes harmony of attitude as well as of understanding. It relates directly to the humility and love that Peter goes on to mention. When Paul urged the Philippians to be ‘of the same mind’, he added ‘having the same love’, and continued, ‘Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.’ The magnificent passage that follows describes how Christ humbled himself, even to the death of the cross. Being of one mind means having a common understanding of the truth, but it means more. When the truth of Christ is affirmed in arrogance it is denied. The ‘like-mindedness’ that Peter requires manifests the mind and love of Christ. It is precisely willingness to submit ourselves to others for Christ’s sake that undercuts the misunderstandings and hostilities that can divide the Christian community. That willingness flows from the love of Christ.

Christ’s love also shines in the *sympathy* that marks the Christian life of blessing. The author of Hebrews describes Christ as the high priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses. Peter has just spoken of the sympathetic understanding that husbands must show to their wives (3:7). Sympathy means readiness to rejoice with those who rejoice and to mourn with those who mourn. In his vivid image of the body of Christ, Paul reminds us of the sympathy that exists among bodily parts: when one member suffers, the other members suffer with it.<sup>4</sup> The love that binds the body of Christ together not only seeks the other’s good, but enters into the other’s needs and concerns. Such identification begins in the heart, but it is seen, often enough, in the event. Peter could remember the event that exposed his failure to ‘sympathize’, to suffer with Christ, who had come to suffer for him. Much contemporary research into human motivation and psychology has the purpose of manipulating people for economic or political advantage. Christian sympathy does not exploit; it shares and supports.

*Love as brothers.* Like these other graces, brotherly love is specifically Christian. It is not simply a sense of comradeship, but the knowledge that we have been given new birth. We are children of the heavenly Father and therefore brothers and sisters in Christ. As we have been loved by God, so we must love our fellow-believers. Here Peter returns again to the theme of the ‘family’ love of the Christian community (1:22; 2:17). Jesus Christ is not ashamed to call us brothers, since he has taken part in our flesh and blood.

Each of these graces reflects the love of Christ. In none is this clearer than in the case of compassion: *be ... compassionate*. It is God who has in Christ shown compassion to us. Paul urges us: ‘Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.’ The root of the word refers literally to one’s inner organs, and therefore to one’s feelings. The Greeks associated inner organs with courage (*cf.* our use of ‘guts’). But in the Bible these inner organs are linked with mercy and concern (the ‘bowels of mercy’ in the AV). The prophet Isaiah uses the term as he seeks the mercy of the Lord. His cry is accurately, though euphemistically, translated, ‘Your tenderness and compassion are withheld from us.’<sup>5</sup>

The Gospels speak of the compassion of Jesus for the crowds, and for the sick. Jesus describes the compassion of his Father in the parable of the prodigal son.<sup>7</sup> In the parable of the good Samaritan Jesus binds that compassion upon his disciples. He contrasts the tender care of the Samaritan with the indifference of the priest and Levite. The Samaritan had *compassion* on the critically wounded man. The priest and Levite would surely be considered ‘neighbours’ to the victim. The Samaritan would not. No-one would hold a Samaritan accountable to nurse a wounded Jew at his own expense. Yet the Samaritan showed a love that could not be demanded, the love of mercy. He made himself a neighbour in the love of compassion.

The burden of the Lord’s teaching is the burden of Peter’s letter. We have received the free compassion of Christ’s grace. Jesus himself bore our sins; he suffered, the righteous for the unrighteous (2:24; 3:18). The love that he now requires of us as his people is not a self-righteous, legalistic love, working to score points for heaven. Rather, as those who are made heirs of the blessing of life eternal (3:9), we must model our love on the love of God in Christ. God’s compassion demands love like his, love that cannot be demanded, the love of free grace. Only God’s love, poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, can move us to show his compassion.

The last of the graces that Peter mentions is humility: *be ... humble*. Friedrich Nietzsche scorned this biblical virtue. He called the Jews ‘a people “born for slavery”’, and accused them of inverting values by making the word ‘poor’ synonymous with ‘saint’ and ‘friend’. The Scriptures do, indeed, give place to the poor and humble in contrast to the rich and proud. The remnant of God’s people, redeemed by his grace, are the poor and lowly. In Greek literature, by contrast, the word that Peter uses is often taken in a derogatory sense: ‘low-mindedness’.<sup>2</sup>

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For this grace, too, Christ is our model. He called disciples to him as one who is ‘gentle and humble in heart’. The word is a compound, like the first in this list, and the two are in close harmony, for if there is to be ‘like-mindedness’ there must also be ‘lowly-mindedness’. Peter will return to this theme, urging Christians to ‘clothe yourselves with humility’, to serve one another (5:5). Clearly Peter had learned humility the hard way. His pride had been crushed by the denials that shamed his boasting. But Peter sees humility as deeper than the levelling of pride. He finds it in the free humiliation of his Lord, not only in taking the towel and basin, but in taking the cross. This is the lowliness that calls us to humble service. Christian humility will be mocked, as Jesus’ humiliation on the cross was. But it will be honoured by God in the triumph of the returning Lord. Even before that day, the power of Christian humility bears witness. Our world has seen the outworking of Nietzsche’s ‘master-race’ in Nazi Germany. Does it yet recognize the power of what Nietzsche scorned?

#### *b. Called to bless in response to cursing*

God’s calling of the Christian appears in a marvellous contrariness. Opposition and hatred cannot thwart the life of blessing. Even when Christians are cursed, they bless. This is how Christians ‘get even’. They pay back evil with good, insults with blessing. This, of course, was the teaching of Jesus, as well as his example (2:23). ‘But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.’ Christians are free from vindictiveness because they trust God’s justice; but they are free for blessing because they know God’s goodness. Again, this was standard apostolic instruction.<sup>2</sup> It is not only in the world that Christians must repay evil with good; they must do it in the church, too. Certainly this attitude of loving humility will provide the strongest rebuke to the conscience of a fellow-Christian.

The blessing with which a Christian meets insults cannot, of course, pronounce God’s favour on those who blaspheme his name. In the psalm that Peter quotes we read that ‘the face of the Lord is against those who do evil’ (3:12). Our blessing of evil-doers and persecutors must take the form of a prayer that seeks their salvation and good. Yet this does not reduce blessing to mere well-wishing words. Stephen prayed for those who stoned him, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ A young Pharisee named Saul was one of those for whom Stephen prayed. The Lord who stood at the right hand of God received Stephen and answered his prayer.

#### *c. Called to bless as heirs of blessing*

Peter joins our calling to bless with our calling to receive God’s blessing (3:9). His words may be taken to mean ‘You have been called to this, to bless, to the end that you may inherit a blessing’. Alternatively, the ‘this’ may refer to what follows: ‘Bless, because you have been called to this, that you might inherit a blessing.’ As we have seen, Peter regularly appeals to what the Lord has done for us in order to encourage us to live for him. According to the second interpretation, this is what Peter now does again. But he cites Psalm 34 to support his statement, and this favours the first interpretation. The psalm summons the righteous to keep their lips from evil that they may see good days. Peter, of course, does not understand the psalm to present a ‘works’ religion, suggesting that we can *earn* God’s blessing by guarding our tongues. He speaks of God’s gracious calling, and of the inheritance of blessing that we receive (1:4). Yet the Lord who keeps the inheritance for us keeps us for the inheritance by keeping us in the faith, and by leading us in the paths of righteousness. God who calls us to inherit his blessing calls us to follow the path of peace that leads to blessing (3:11). The Christian’s knowledge of the blessing that he will receive from the Lord encourages and enables him to bless others, even his enemies.

Peter quotes from Psalm 34 without any introductory phrase. He has alluded to it already (2:3–4); it may have been used regularly in the instruction of new Christians and in the worship of song. Peter cites the psalm to describe the blessing of the life to which Christians are called. Those who practise the love of compassion, refrain from speaking evil, and pursue peace are blessed by the Lord. His *eyes are on* them; he hears *their prayer* (3:12). The blessing that they inherit reaches to eternal life, but it also fills this life with *good days*. Peter affirms this, although he knows that days of suffering will come (3:14). Yet the blessing of the Lord will make days of suffering ‘good days’ in his favour. A ‘good day’ in a television beer commercial pictures friends imbibing in the sunset at a fishing-lodge. ‘It doesn’t get any better than this,’ they say. A ‘good day’ in the book of Acts shows Paul and Silas in a Greek prison, their backs bleeding and their feet in stocks. They are singing psalms at midnight—perhaps Psalm 34! Silas, now sitting beside Peter, would remember with him the word of Jesus, ‘Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.’<sup>4</sup>

## **2. The blessed witness of suffering for righteousness (3:13–22)**

### *a. The opportunity for witness in word (3:13–15)*

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Peter has moved to the issue that is central for the rest of the letter: the issue of Christian suffering. He has shown how the love of God turns the problem upside down. Christians are free from the need of vindication, and filled with humility as heirs of grace. Suffering has become an opportunity to meet evil with good and cursing with blessing. Peter describes the triumphant witness of this response.

‘Who, then, will *harm you if you are eager to do good?*’ This question could be taken to mean that, on the whole, Christians who heed the counsel of Psalm 34 need not expect any harm. Governments are instituted to commend those who do right, masters do not usually punish servants who do what they are told, spouses of pagans may win their grudging respect. No doubt there is truth in this observation. God’s blessing may give many ‘good days’ in this sense to those who are zealous for doing good.

But it is likely that Peter is saying much more than this. The ‘and’ at the beginning of the sentence (omitted in the NIV) has the force of ‘then’. It ties the statement to what has just been said, that the eyes and ears of the Lord are fixed on the righteous, while his face is against those who do evil. Further, the word ‘evil’ at the conclusion of the psalm quotation is picked up again in the verb for *harm* (3:13). ‘Who, then [in the light of the Lord’s care, and his control of evil], will do you evil ...?’ Peter is not encouraging Christians to suppose that their chances are better than average for escaping persecution. He is assuring them that, under God’s care and blessing, no evil can befall them. Peter’s words express Paul’s affirmation: ‘If God is for us, who can be against us?’ The psalmist had the same conviction: ‘In God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?’<sup>2</sup>

‘But if, indeed, *you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.*’ No harm, to be sure, can come to us at last. God’s vindication and protection will preserve the heirs of his blessing. Christ prayed that the Father would protect his own from the evil one. But he did not pray that they be taken out of the world. Jesus warned his disciples, ‘In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.’<sup>4</sup> Peter writes to those who feel the mounting pressure of opposition in their society. ‘Indeed, the spectacle of moral beauty does not disarm all the wicked; they are often even irritated by the radiance of a virtue that condemns them.’

Christians should therefore not think it strange that they are called to endure persecution (4:12). Yet they must understand that suffering is not the opposite of blessing. Jesus had declared those to be blessed who suffer for righteousness. He promised them a reward in heaven: ‘Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.’ That word of Jesus is more than a promise. It pronounces blessing. Those who will receive a heavenly reward are already blessed by the Lord. Peter emphasizes this. Those who suffer receive the benediction of Christ as a present possession. Their time of suffering has been made a time of blessing.

Paul knew the blessing of Christ’s grace given in the midst of suffering. ‘That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.’ Tertullian, an African church father at the beginning of the third century, said that ‘Prison does for the Christian what the desert did for the prophet. Call it not prison but the place of retirement. The body is shut in, but all is open to the spirit: it may roam abroad on the way to God ... The leg does not feel the chain if the mind is in heaven.’ It was Tertullian who said that the blood of martyrs is indeed the seed of the church. Peter writes at the outset of centuries of persecution that the church of Christ has endured, a chronicle that is still being written today in the labour camps and prisons of a world that rejects the gospel.

*If you should suffer ...*, he writes. The imperial persecutions that would sweep across the Roman world had not yet come. Christians were not yet being compelled to affirm the deity of Caesar. No doubt there were already those who had given their witness as martyrs (see 4:6), but much more was to come. Yet it was already time to prepare. Churches today that experience little persecution need Peter’s instruction; in a future nearer than they suppose they may find themselves suffering with the rest of Christ’s afflicted church in the world.

Peter would prepare the church, not simply to endure persecution, but to find in persecution an opportunity for witness. Both the boldness and the humility needed for witness come about through a fundamental exchange. Christians must exchange the *fear* of men for the fear of the Lord. Peter gives the secret of boldness as one who had found it after failure. Waiting in the courtyard of the high priest’s house while Christ was being examined, Peter had failed miserably. Rembrandt’s painting captures the scene: Peter has just denied Christ for the third time, swearing with fearful oaths that he was no disciple of Christ, was not with him, did not know him. In the background shadow stands Jesus. He has just turned to look at Peter.

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Contrast Peter, filled with the Spirit as the apostle of the risen Lord. He is no longer huddled by the fire in the outer courtyard. Now he is the accused. He stands before the same tribunal that had examined Jesus. He who had feared to confront a maidservant now confronts the high court. He accuses them of crucifying Jesus, and refuses their order to be silent. 'We must obey God rather than men!'

Peter had lost the fear of men by gaining the fear of the risen Lord. He had set apart *Christ as Lord* in his heart. Yes, Peter knew the meaning of fear. He remembered the panic that unmanned him when, by the fire in the courtyard, he was recognized as a Galilean. His accent had given him away! Peter also knew the secret of a boldness that conquers fear. That secret was announced long ago in the prophecy of Isaiah:

'Do not fear what they fear,  
and do not dread it.

The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy,  
he is the one you are to fear,  
he is the one you are to dread.'

Peter quotes from that passage to share his secret of boldness. No doubt the Lord's words through Isaiah had strengthened his own heart. He had already quoted from this section of Isaiah concerning the stone of stumbling (2:8). *Do not fear what they fear*, writes Peter. (His statement could also be read, 'Do not be afraid with fear of them.') In Isaiah's prophecy the Lord calls his true disciples not to share the fears of the people: they see only the armed power of the enemy. The antidote to the fear of men is awareness of the glory of the Lord himself. Peter's words *But in your hearts set apart*—literally, 'sanctify'—*Christ as Lord* echo Isaiah's words 'The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy', literally 'Sanctify the Lord' (AV). When the Lord sanctifies us, he makes us holy (1:2; 2:9); when we sanctify the Lord, we set him apart as the Holy One. We recognize his lordship and confess his transcendent deity. Jesus taught his disciples to pray to the Father, 'Hallowed be your name.' That petition asks God to set apart his own name, to be the God that he is in all his glory.

To break the throttling grip of fear we must confess God's lordship with more than mental assent. We must confess it with our heart's devotion. Setting him apart as Lord means bowing before him in the adoration of praise. A praising heart is immune to the fear of other people. Fear of another sort takes possession of our hearts and minds: a fear that does not flee in terror, but draws near in awe and worship.

We are amazed, then, at the force of the addition Peter makes. He says, literally, *Do not fear what they fear*, ... *But in your hearts* sanctify the Lord, the *Christ*. He repeats the words of Isaiah, 'Sanctify the Lord', but adds, 'the Christ'. He does not hesitate to identify the Lord of hosts with Jesus Christ. More than that, he does so in a passage that calls for our total devotion to the Lord in his transcendent deity. Peter is not making a merely verbal connection between two meanings of 'Lord', as applied to God and men. He is explicitly identifying the One who slept in the stern of his fishing-boat with the almighty Creator of heaven and earth. Nor is Peter simply stating the orthodox theology of the earliest period of the church. He speaks from his own experience. The Father in heaven had enabled him to confess the deity of Christ as the Son of the living God. The reality of the resurrection had confirmed his conviction: Jesus who could command the storm and the demons had conquered death and ascended to the right hand of his Father. The Spirit of Christ, given from the throne of glory, worked in Peter awe and reverence for his Lord and Saviour. Filled with that awe, he scorned all that men might do to him. In prison he could sleep securely; on trial he could accuse his accusers. His secret was not simply that he had been with Jesus, but that the Lord Jesus was with him.

Peter had heard Jesus say, 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both body and soul in hell.' Jesus had followed that solemn warning with words of supreme assurance to his disciples. Their Father in heaven has numbered every hair in their heads; nothing can happen to them outside of his care.

For the Christian, the fear of death has been removed by Christ's resurrection. He no longer shares the dread that shadows mortal life: fear of atomic holocaust, of terrorist attack or wasting cancer. Certainly he does not fear those who may persecute him for Christ's sake. Indeed, he can understand that their very persecution is fear-driven, the fear of the light on the part of those who live in darkness.

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Yet the conquest of fear does not yield pride or smugness. The Christian must not taunt his enemies, but bear witness to them. This, too, will be the fruit of sanctifying the Lord in his heart. The fear of the Lord in the heart of the Christian is not the terror of the guilty under judgment. It is awe before the love of God as well as before his holiness. Awareness of the Lord's presence means tasting afresh that the Lord is good (2:3). We adore the Lord Jesus Christ who redeemed us at the cost of his life's blood (1:19). Peter has already joined our fear of God with our knowledge of his redeeming love (1:17–19). The Lord whom we sanctify in our hearts is the Lord who died for us.

Our courage before those who persecute us is born of *hope* in the Lord as well as fear of the Lord. In our response to those who may interrogate us we give a reason for our hope. Peter's letter is of hope. Hope is not substituted for faith; it *is* faith as it looks to the future of the Lord's salvation. As we have seen, it is a sure hope, not wishful thinking, and it is firmly grounded in the redemption that Jesus Christ has established for us. Hope is the form that faith takes under the threat of death. Stephen's hope lifted his eyes to Christ in glory as he finished his defence before his accusers. They viewed his hope as blasphemy, and stoned him in their fury.

Peter shows us that our hope provides both the courage for our witness and the content of our witness. Our hope is in our risen Lord. We sanctify the Lord Christ in our hearts; there is the end of fear. We sanctify Christ in our words; there is the start of witness. In the Greek, Peter does not begin a new sentence when he tells us to be always ready to give a reason for our hope. Rather, he says, 'Set apart the Lord, the Christ, ready always for answer.' Our devotion to Christ the Lord makes us ready, not only in attitude but in rationale. The word that Peter uses for *answer* is our word 'apology'. We use the word exclusively in the sense of 'excuse', to express regret for a wrong. In the New Testament, however, the word is used to describe a 'defence', usually in a formal or courtroom context. (That meaning survives when we speak of an 'apologist' for the Christian faith.) Paul, for example, speaks of his right, under Roman law, to meet his accusers face to face and to make his 'defence' against their charges.<sup>2</sup> Jesus had promised the presence of the Holy Spirit to enable his disciples to state their case before authorities. Peter well knew what it meant to stand accused in court and give answer.

As Peter speaks of Christian readiness to defend their hope, he is certainly allowing for situations in which they might be haled before Roman magistrates. His encouragement is not limited to Christians in court, however. He speaks of readiness to make a defence to all who might ask a reason for their hope. Persecution was not as intense as it would become; Peter could still speak of *if* rather than 'when' times of trial and suffering would come (3:14). Yet Christians must be ever ready, not only because they would be called to face Roman courts one day, but because they might be accused or challenged by suspicious or malicious pagans any day. It is true, of course, that the witness of a godly life can evoke questions of another sort. Unbelievers may become inquirers, asking with more than curiosity about the distinctive Christian hope. But Peter is here speaking of suffering for Christ's sake. He is arming Christians against attacks, showing them how such confrontations can be turned into occasions for witness.

How, then, does setting apart Christ as Lord prepare Christians to make defence of their hope? The formal speeches of defence in the book of Acts provide the answer; so, indeed, does the whole New Testament. For the Christian faith, a strong offence is the best defence; indeed, it is the only defence. Christians defend their faith by proclaiming the gospel, declaring the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the plan and power of God. That which is foolishness to the Greeks and an offence to the Jews is the saving wisdom of God.

Paul's defence before Agrippa shows us why Peter speaks of giving a reason for the *hope* that we have. Paul declares, 'And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers.'<sup>2</sup> 'Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?' he asks. Peter and Paul both centre on the reality of the resurrection, and they both proclaim the resurrection as the fulfilment of Scripture. Paul summarizes his defence: 'I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.' In this letter, Peter has proclaimed the same gospel to those who have been given 'new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.' (1:3). Peter, too, presents this salvation as the fulfilment of what the prophets have spoken (1:10–12, 25). The apostolic gospel bears witness to the historical fact of Christ's death and resurrection, and proclaims the meaning of that fact from the word of God. The reality of the resurrection and the rationale of the resurrection are joined under the authority of God. Apart from the testimony of God's word, the fact of the resurrection could be discounted as a strange and unexplained fact of history. The chief priests who bribed the soldiers to lie about the empty tomb were in full possession of the evidence, yet they did not submit to the word of God.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, there is no lack of contemporary theologians who display their skill in reconstructing apostolic Christianity so that an empty tomb is no longer necessary.

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When Paul gave the reason for the Christian hope, Festus, who with King Agrippa heard Paul's defence, declared that he had lost his reason. (Festus, indeed, shouted his charge, betraying by his emotion the offence that the gospel aroused!) Yet, in spite of hatred or scorn, the Christian presents his hope, humbly proclaiming God's work and word. As we acknowledge the deity of the risen Lord in our hearts, we bear witness to our hope in doxology; we declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his light (2:9). Worshipping the Lord, we set our hope fully on the grace to be given us when Jesus Christ is revealed (1:13).

Peter has made it clear that Christians are to be bold in their witness. Hallowing the Lord in their hearts, they are ready at all times to confess his name before others. But now Peter returns to his major theme, the other side of the coin. Humility of life is as important as boldness in word. This is the other result of glorifying Christ as Lord. We are unafraid to press his claims, but we do so as his servants. It has been said that the corruption of the best is the worst; certainly no pride is more offensive than pride in being trophies of grace. The *gentleness* or humility that we are to show is far more than politeness of manner. It reflects the fear of the Lord in which the gospel is presented. *Respect* seems to be the wrong translation here. It suggests a proper attitude toward those who question us. Peter may have used the Greek word *phobos* in that sense when he described the attitude of servants to their masters (2:18), but he has just used it to speak of our fear of God rather than of man (3:14). It seems unlikely that he is now reversing this to ask that we fear man, even in a lesser degree. Rather, Peter is teaching us that it is our fear of the Lord that enables us to bear witness in humility.

#### *b. The opportunity for witness in life (3:16–17)*

Bold words will not honour the Lord if they are not supported by a consistent life. Consider the bitterness of a wealthy old man: he was orphaned as a boy, but his father had made provision for him by entrusting funds for his support to the minister of his church. The minister made off with the money. Through a long life the victim of that injustice saw Christianity as financial exploitation of the gullible. The lives of Christians must reflect the gospel message to those outside the church. That consistency is not less needed in the church and in the heart of the believer. The witness of a good *conscience* is crucial for the witness of a good word. Again, Paul's defence illuminates Peter's words. Standing trial after his arrest on false charges of desecrating the temple, Paul could say, 'So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.'

*Conscience* has been defined as a person's 'inner awareness of the moral quality of his actions'. Pagan moralists recognized this inner awareness of behaviour, but apostolic teaching transformed its meaning. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer brings his conscience before God, with radical results. On the one hand, the Christian conscience is informed and reshaped by the light of God's righteousness. No longer is it insensitive to sin, like scar-tissue seared by a hot iron.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, because God is Lord of the conscience, the Christian is delivered from false guilt, and from the condemnation of sin that God has forgiven. Robert Leighton, with Puritan wisdom, traces the care and nurture of the Christian conscience, growing in the light of the Lord's presence and cleansed by his blood.

In this passage Peter is speaking of our clear conscience as obedient saints rather than simply as forgiven sinners. The clear conscience of a justified sinner indeed frees him for witness, but the impact of his witness will require the outward evidence of a consistent life. By maintaining a clear conscience before God we will be able to show a godly life to others. The Walt Disney version of Pinocchio has given us the cartoon image of conscience as a friendly cricket, an effort, perhaps, to reduce the hostility with which people are inclined to view the promptings of conscience. Christians are called to do much better: to cultivate conscience rather than to stifle its occasional chirps. Suspicious observers are quick to detect hypocrisy in a Christian's life; if we are to avoid self-deception we need a conscience that is both informed and clear.

A clear conscience gives stamina and faithfulness to a Christian's witness. He knows that the malicious slander that he hears is untrue; he can therefore wait patiently for the truth to win out. His detractors may be ashamed sooner than he thinks. It may be, however, that their shame will be evident only when Christ returns to judge. In any case, even if persecution and suffering do not end, he knows that he is in God's will and that to suffer for doing good brings blessing. To invite the scorn and hostility of others by doing evil would be quite another matter (3:17).

Christians with tender consciences may be dismayed by Peter's words. Aware of their sins and shortcomings, they may despair of having a clear conscience. They may find the suspicions of others confirmed by their suspicions of themselves. Peter shows that he knows our need of forgiveness and cleansing, for he goes on to describe again Christ's atonement (3:18). He also shows the source of power for holy living and a clear conscience. He expresses it in the telling phrase *your good behaviour in Christ* (3:16). Peter uses the phrase *in Christ* that is a keystone of Paul's



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teaching. Like Paul, Peter glories in the fact that Christ represented us in his death and resurrection. He suffered, the righteous for the unrighteous (3:18), bearing our sins in his body on the tree (2:24). We are given new birth because we are joined to Christ in his resurrection (1:3). We are therefore 'in Christ' as our representative: he died and rose for us. But our union with Christ does not stop there. We are 'in Christ' also because he gives us life. The Spirit of Christ joins us to our Lord as we hallow him in our hearts. We are in no sense alone as we seek to show by our lives that the gospel is true. Without the assurance of sins forgiven, we could not bear witness to those around us. Christians may rightly plead on bumper-stickers, 'Christians are not perfect: just forgiven.' Yet, because the Lord who forgives us also makes us new creations, we are able by grace to show in our lives the reality of his salvation. The God of all grace has called us to his eternal glory in Christ, and will restore and strengthen us (5:10).

Peter again summarizes by saying that *it is better ... to suffer for doing good than for doing evil* (3:17). We are reminded of his word to servants in a section that parallels this (2:20). In both passages this statement leads into a declaration about the sufferings of Christ, who did only good. One commentator suggests that Peter may also be warning those who might seek martyrdom through mistaken zeal in opposing the pagan government. 'It is unworthy of Christian believers to court martyrdom through deeds of violence, as for instance, the Jewish zealots did.' Peter, however, seems concerned to encourage Christians to endure suffering; he does not speak of their seeking it. In any case, the application of Peter's teaching does have importance for some forms of Christian protest today. Suffering for provocative acts in the name of Christ is not to be commended, but rather suffering that follows our Lord's example in doing good.

#### c. *The victory of Christ's suffering (3:18–22)*

Again Peter returns to the cross. Our willingness to suffer for the sake of Christ is grounded in the wonder of Christ's willingness to suffer death for our sake. This passage stands in close relation to 2:21–24. There, too, we read of Christ's atoning death as our substitute. There, too, the merciful purpose of Christ's suffering is declared (that we might die to sins, live for righteousness, and be healed, 2:24). Yet Peter now presents the suffering Christ as the Victor. He adds to his teaching about the saving power of Christ's *death* a fresh emphasis on the saving power of his *resurrection*. In the earlier passage, Peter points us to the example of Christ's meekness in suffering. We are called to imitate him as we suffer for his sake. In this second passage, Peter tells us that Christ who suffered and died was made alive again, has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand. He is the Conqueror; we share his triumph.

Persecuted and suffering Christians need to remember both the humiliation and the exaltation of Christ. His patient suffering will show them meekness when they are interrogated. His glorious triumph will give them courage to face their accusers. Undergirding both the meekness and the boldness of the Christian is the saving work of Christ.

*Christ died for sins once for all.* Christ's saving victory flows from the fact that his sacrifice was perfect, final, and therefore not to be repeated in history or in symbol. If Christ's sacrifice were not complete, it would have to be offered again, as the Old Testament sacrifices were. But, as the author of Hebrews teaches us, Christ's sacrifice was of a different order. If he had offered no better sacrifice than the priests, and had entered no better sanctuary than they, then he would have had to 'suffer many times since the creation of the world'. But he is the Son of God, his royal priesthood is heavenly, his sacrifice is his offering of his own blood. 'But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.' When the Protestant Reformers understood this, they could no longer participate in the mass, for the mass is celebrated as a bloodless sacrifice in which Christ is again offered for sin.<sup>2</sup>

Christ suffered and died to pay the price *for sins*, fully and finally. The phrase 'for sin' appears in the phrase for the sin-offering in the Greek Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> He who was righteous and without sin took the place of unrighteous sinners. His purpose, Peter tells the Christian 'pilgrims and strangers', was *to bring you to God*. Apart from Christ's saving work they were without hope and without God. The judgment of God against their sins separated them from fellowship with him. But now those who were far off are brought near. They may approach God in worship and fellowship, for he has claimed them as his own. On earth they are journeying pilgrims; Christ, their shepherd, is leading them home.

By his death Christ won life for his own. His resurrection brings triumph after suffering, a triumph that is the hope of suffering Christians. Notice the credal or confessional content of this section (a form that resembles the credal hymn of 1 Timothy 3:16): *For Christ died for sins once for all ... He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit ... has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.*

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That Peter is describing Christ's triumph is clear. His death was not defeat, but the once-for-all sacrifice that atoned for sin. It was followed by the resurrection and the ascension. In that context, Peter writes about Christ's preaching to *spirits in prison*. His words were no doubt clear to those who first heard them, but they have been hard for later generations to understand. Martin Luther writes in his commentary: 'A wonderful text is this, and a more obscure passage perhaps than any other in the New Testament, so that I do not know for a certainty just what Peter means.' Study of the passage may have progressed since Luther's day, but his confession still warns us against over-confidence!

Three major interpretations have been given to Peter's words, each with various modifications. According to the first, Jesus descended into hell and preached to the spirits of those who perished in the flood in the time of Noah. Some who hold this view also think that what Jesus proclaimed to the dead was the gospel, offering them a further opportunity to repent. Others would have Christ preaching to the righteous dead, proclaiming their release from the prison where they awaited his coming. Still others would understand his preaching to be the heralding of the doom of the wicked dead.

The second major interpretation was presented by Augustine, who objected to the first view as presented by Origen and others. Augustine held that Christ's preaching was done in the Spirit through Noah. Peter says that it was the Spirit of Christ who preached through the Old Testament prophets (1:11); Christ's preaching through Noah would be a case in point. Those to whom Noah preached were not in prison literally, but they could be described as in prison spiritually. (Or, it might be said that those to whom Noah once preached are *now* spirits in prison.)

A third interpretation would understand *spirits in prison* to refer to fallen angels rather than to human beings. Jesus proclaims to them his victory and their doom. This is seen by some as taking place after his resurrection. As he ascends into heaven, Jesus confronts the principalities and powers, showing his victory and power over them.

None of these explanations is free of difficulty; to weigh them we must answer several key questions. First, when did Christ preach to the spirits in prison? Was it long before the incarnation, in the time of Noah? Was it after his death, but before his resurrection? Or was it after his resurrection (either before he appeared to the disciples, or in the course of his ascension)?

To answer the question we must understand the words, 'having been *put to death* with respect to the flesh, *but made alive* with respect to the spirit' (3:18). Martin Luther explains these words as expressing the same distinction that Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 15:45, 49. Paul contrasts our present 'natural' bodies with the 'spiritual' bodies that we shall receive at the resurrection. It is Christ's resurrection that is the source of the spiritual: 'The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit'.<sup>2</sup>

Peter is not saying that Christ's body died but that his spirit continued to live. He is saying that Christ died as to the natural, physical sphere of existence, and that Christ was given life as to the spiritual sphere of existence. If Peter were distinguishing between the death of the body and the continuing life of the soul, he would not have said that Christ was *made alive*. 'Thus the second phrase does not refer to Christ *disembodied*, but to Christ *risen* to life on a new plane.'

This explanation would also help us understand somewhat similar language in 1 Peter 4:6. There Peter speaks of those to whom the gospel was preached so that they might indeed have been judged 'according to men with respect to the flesh', but might live 'according to God with respect to the spirit' (my translation). If those spoken of are the Christian dead, then the life that they receive through the gospel should not be thought of as the continued existence of the soul, but as the resurrection life of Christ they receive.

The phrase 'he was raised as to the spirit' rules out the thought of an underworld descent by the disembodied soul of Christ in the time between his death and resurrection. It does not settle the question, however, as to the time of Christ's preaching. Christ's death was physical, but his resurrection was in the realm of the spiritual, that is, in the power of the Holy Spirit. The NIV translation, *made alive by the Spirit*, may well capture Peter's meaning. It allows for Augustine's interpretation: Christ who rose 'spiritually' also preached 'spiritually' through Noah.

What, then, is the connection between Christ's death and resurrection and his proclamation to the spirits in prison? There are two possibilities. The Greek phrase which the NIV renders *through whom* (3:19) means 'in which'. It may refer directly to the word 'spirit' or it may be more indefinite, 'in which time'. If it is the latter, the preaching spoken of must have taken place after the resurrection. It could then have been before Christ appeared to the women, as Luther

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an interpreters have held. It could also have been during the forty days, or in the course of Christ's ascension. If, however, 'in which' refers to 'spirit', then the preaching of the Spirit of Christ through Noah remains a possibility.<sup>3</sup>

The next key question is: To whom did Christ make proclamation? Who are *the spirits in prison*? The phrase 'spirits in prison', taken by itself, could refer to fallen angels. In 2 Peter 2:4–5 fallen angels are described as imprisoned; the passage then goes on to speak of Noah and the judgment of the flood:

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell [literally, 'Tartarus'], putting them into gloomy dungeons [literally, 'pits of darkness'] to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others ...

In the letter of Jude similar language is found:

And the angels who did not keep their domain, but abandoned their own dwelling, he has kept in everlasting chains, under darkness, for judgment on the great Day.

Both the term *spirits* and the reference to *prison* fit well with these passages that describe the doom of fallen angels. But could angels be described as spirits *who disobeyed long ago ... in the days of Noah*? A case can be made for this by taking account of Jewish traditions and writings that were current when Peter wrote, especially the book of *Enoch*. (A prophecy of Enoch contained in this book is quoted in Jude 14–15.) In Genesis 5:24 are the striking words, 'Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.' These words contrast with the concluding formula of the Genesis genealogies, 'and then he died'. Enoch's walk with God links with the righteousness of his descendant Noah, and contrasts with the wickedness that abounded on earth before the flood.

What happened to Enoch when the Lord took him? Where did he go? Jewish traditions and writings speculated about this. In the version now designated as *1 Enoch*, we are told of Enoch's travels as he was shown the secrets of the universe. In particular, he went to the place where the fallen angels were kept under judgment. In *1 Enoch* and in some other Jewish traditions, it is assumed that the 'sons of God' in Genesis 6:2 were angels who took wives as they pleased from the 'daughters of men'. Their progeny, the 'Nephilim', were thought to be demons. The angels who had disobeyed and had left their place were imprisoned in a 'burning valley'. Enoch describes the place:

'Beyond that abyss I saw a place which had no firmament of the heaven above, and no firmly founded earth beneath it; there was no water upon it, and no birds, but it was a waste and horrible place.'

This is supplemented by a further description of 'another place, which was still more horrible than the former', a place cleft as far as the abyss, having descending columns of fire. 'This place is the prison of the angels, and here they will be imprisoned forever.' In *1 Enoch* this prison for fallen angels is distinguished from the places where the souls of men await judgment. Another writing, *2 Enoch*, locates the place of detention for the fallen angels in the second heaven.

It would be a great mistake to read into 1 Peter the fanciful descriptions of *1 Enoch*. But the use of *1 Enoch* in Jude 14–15 and the passage about the doom of fallen angels in 2 Peter 2:4 show us that the language of the 'Enoch' literature could help us to understand the terms used in 1 Peter. Since the disobedient angels and their offspring were viewed as instigators of lawlessness in the antediluvian world, it might be possible to speak of them as those *who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah* (3:20). On this understanding, Peter is claiming for Christ a mission that far transcends the journey that tradition ascribed to Enoch. Enoch was sent by God to pronounce doom upon the rebellious angels. They asked Enoch to present a petition to God to cancel their sentence. Enoch did so, but God sent him back with the same message.<sup>5</sup> Peter's word for *preached* (3:19) means 'heralded' or 'proclaimed'. It could carry the meaning of announcing judgment rather than offering salvation. In view of the description of Christ's victory in 3:22, that meaning is possible here. Christ's 'preaching' to the spirits in prison would then be his proclamation to the 'angels, authorities and powers' of his resurrection victory and their doom. Christ is the true Enoch: he walks with God and is taken up to be with his heavenly Father. Not Enoch, but Christ, is the one who confronts the angelic and demonic forces of evil.

Yet, attractive as this explanation may be, it is not completely satisfying. To speak of those *who disobeyed long ago ... in the days of Noah* recalls at once the generation that perished in the flood. In *1 Enoch* the disobedient angels are said to have sinned, not in the days of Noah, but in the days of Jared, the father of Noah. Even if angelic disobedience were thought of as continuing in the days before the flood, why would it be described as taking place while God was waiting patiently during the building of the ark? God's patience during the time before the flood is

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obviously like the patience he now shows in postponing judgment: ‘The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance’ (2 Pet. 3:9).

While the ark was being built, the possibility of escape from judgment existed for human beings, not for fallen angels. The patience of God was directed to the sinners of Noah’s generation, those to whom Noah preached righteousness (2 Pet. 2:5). This refers so clearly to human beings, not angels, that some who favour the reference to angels have concluded that human beings must also be included. Further, if angels were in view, it would seem strange that Peter should use the word that he does for *disobeyed*. It is a term that describes the disobedience of unbelief.

Yet another consideration supports the view that the ‘spirits in prison’ are the sinners of Noah’s generation. A recent commentator has pointed to a better translation of 1 Peter 3:19–20: ‘He went and preached to those who are now spirits in prison when they disobeyed formerly when God’s patience was waiting in the days of Noah.’ This preferred translation shows that the disobedience was going on along with the preaching. It is a perfectly natural expression if Peter is thinking of Christ’s preaching through Noah, and does much to relieve the usual objection to referring the preaching to the days of Noah. In the time that the ark was being built, it is true, the people of that generation were not in prison. (Augustine’s explanation that they were spiritually imprisoned is unconvincing.) But the shift in translation underscores the fact that we are to understand that the spirits are *now* in prison. These sinners, now under condemnation, were those who were disobedient when the Spirit of Christ preached to them *long ago* through Noah (3:20; 1:11). This understanding gives the same interpretation to *in prison* that is given to ‘dead’ in 1 Peter 4:6. In both cases Peter is referring to people in terms of their present state. (The NIV translates 1 Peter 4:5 ‘to those who are *now* dead’, adding the word to convey the meaning.)

An objection to this understanding of the text appeals to the word *went* in verse 19. The same verb is used in verse 22 (*has gone*) to describe Christ’s going to heaven in the ascension. ‘How,’ it is asked, ‘can Christ’s preaching through Noah be described as his “going” in the Spirit?’ This is not a compelling objection. God’s interventions in Old Testament revelation are often described in terms of his going or coming.<sup>2</sup> The verb *went* may also be used with little or no emphasis, as in colloquial English speech: ‘He went and told him.’

The strong case for regarding the ‘spirits in prison’ as the spirits of those who were disobedient to the preaching of Noah can settle the question as to what was preached. On this assumption, what was preached is identified in 2 Peter 2:5, where the same word-stem is used in the phrase ‘Noah, a preacher of righteousness’. It is the proclamation of God’s righteousness, and therefore of the need for repentance. That message was addressed through Noah to those disobedient sinners during their lifetime. The passage describes no second chance for repentance after death. Even less does it promise universal salvation.

In this whole passage Peter continues to give reassurance to Christians who must endure suffering and persecution. Christ has conquered by the power of his resurrection. He has prevailed to bring them to God. The devil may still be on the prowl like a roaring lion (5:7), but he cannot destroy those whose refuge is the Lord. Peter reminds suffering Christians of the period before the flood. The power of evil might then have been greater, the number of the elect even fewer. But God was in control. He withheld judgment, then as now, only to display his longsuffering grace. But his judgment did come: Noah and his family were delivered from that evil age by the judgment, the waters of the flood. Yet the judgment of the flood was only provisional, and the deliverance of Noah but a prefiguring, or ‘type’, of the final and full salvation of Jesus Christ. The doom of death in the flood pictures the doom that Christ suffered for us. He was put to death in the flesh. But he was made alive in the power of the Spirit. It was in that power that he preached through Noah to those whose disobedience brought eternal condemnation. It is in that same power that he now saves us. Those who reject the gospel put themselves under the judgment that will come when Christ comes. But those who are united to Christ are saved by the same promise that delivered Noah and his family.

Peter continues to relate the time of Noah to that of the church by appealing to typology. The inspired authors of the New Testament find in the Old Testament history not merely instances of God’s saving power, but also anticipations of his final salvation in Christ. By providing the ark, God saved Noah and his family from the judgment of the flood. That deliverance, however, did not in itself give eternal life to the eight persons that were spared. Like the exodus liberation, it was a symbol of God’s final salvation from all sin and death. Peter uses the term ‘antitype’ to describe the relation of the new to the old (3:21; NIV’s verb *symbolises* translates the Greek noun *antitypos*). This use of ‘type’ and ‘antitype’ is itself figurative, drawn from the striking of coins or the impression of seals. ‘Type’ describes either a matrix from which an impression is made, or the image created. In the letter to the Hebrews, the typology is vertical. That is, the heavenly realities are called the ‘type’ and the earthly symbols the ‘antitype’. The tabernacle in

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the wilderness was therefore the antitype of the heavenly sanctuary.<sup>2</sup> In Paul's letters and here in 1 Peter, the typology is horizontal in history: the Old Testament symbol is the type, and therefore Christ's fulfillment is the antitype.

What is the 'antitype' to which Peter refers? Apparently it is *baptism*, although the construction of the passage is difficult. (The antitype could be *you*: that is, Noah and his family were types of Christians: they were saved through water, and Christians are also saved through the water of baptism.) In any case, Peter would have us understand that the God who delivered Noah will also deliver us, and that ours is the final salvation.

That full and final salvation is sealed to us in Christian baptism. It may seem strange that Peter finds the fulfillment of Old Testament symbolism in New Testament symbolism. The symbol of the type points us to the symbol of the sacrament. Indeed, to prevent misunderstanding, Peter at once adds that he is not speaking of the outward application of *water, the removal of dirt from the body*. Rather, he is speaking of the new existence that we have through *the resurrection of Jesus Christ*. Baptism as an outward sign marks the putting off of the pollution of sin, and the beginning of new life in Christ.

Yet Peter also calls our attention to an analogy between the type and the sacrament. Both involve water in the context of gaining life out of death. The *eight* persons in the ark *were saved* 'by' or *through* water. 'By' would be the more usual translation of the preposition. We might think of the water of the flood as the means by which Noah's family was delivered from the threatening wickedness of their generation. But the verb for *saved* has the same preposition attached to it; there it must mean 'through'. Noah and his family, then, were saved 'through' water. Why does Peter not say 'saved *from* water'? Perhaps because the water that destroyed the wicked also bore up the ark. But more probably Peter is already pointing forward to the analogy that he has in mind. Meredith Kline has pointed out that covenants in the ancient Middle East, and in the Scriptures, are sealed by an oath. A powerful example is the oath that God himself takes in Genesis 15. There the divided parts of the animals symbolize the malediction that God calls down upon himself if he should not be faithful to his pledge. So, too, the blood shed in circumcision implies not only cleansing, but an oath involving one's descendants. In baptism, Kline reasons, the same element remains. When baptism is compared to the waters of the flood or to the waters of the Red Sea, the threatening symbolism of water is brought into view.<sup>4</sup> Israel was brought through the waters of the sea and of the Jordan; Noah was brought through the waters of the flood. Christians are brought through the waters of death, the flood of destruction, in order that they might be established upon the rock, secure in the resurrection life of Christ.

It is significant that Peter goes on to speak of the pledge made in baptism, *the pledge of a good conscience towards God*. The word for *pledge* implies an undertaking made in response to formal questions. Peter underscores the solemnity of the commitment made by these new Christians. They pledge the life of a good conscience. (Or, they make the pledge of baptism sincerely, out of a good conscience.) In that pledge Christians agree with God's judgment on sin, and on their own sinful past (4:3). They acknowledge that to turn from their commitment would be to bring upon themselves God's just judgment. Yet Peter's words stress the wonder of the sacrament even more than its solemnity. As Noah was delivered by the grace of God, although only in symbol, so have they been delivered in fact. Christ has saved them, for he died for their sins and gave them life through his resurrection (3:18, 21).

Like circumcision, baptism does symbolize cleansing. Indeed, when Peter says that we are not saved by the 'putting off' (NIV *removal*) of impurity, he uses language that seems even more appropriate to circumcision than to baptism. But baptism means much more. It means union with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection.<sup>3</sup> Christians have set apart Jesus Christ as Lord; they have been participants in his victory over death and all the powers of darkness. Christians need never fear their enemies; their concern must rather be to live in good conscience toward God.

Christ's conclusive death for our sins was accomplished *to bring us to God* (3:18). The victory of his atoning death is seen in his resurrection, and in his triumphant ascension to the right hand of God. He died to bring us where he now is. Peter has called Christians to lives of submission for Christ's sake, following the example of his humiliation (2:21). Yet the submission of Christians is not that of defeated captives, brought into hopeless slavery. It is the willing and joyful service of those who know that they are victors with Christ. Once he submitted himself, but now all the *angels are in submission to him* (3:22). So, too, Christians are called to submit themselves, but in the sign of baptism they are already participants in Christ's resurrection victory. Peter had witnessed the ascension of Christ; he had proclaimed from Psalm 110 the seating of Christ at the Father's right hand. Here in his letter he stresses the authority

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that Jesus has over all the powers of creation. Christians need not fear the sword of Roman magistrates or the fury of Satan. They belong to the Lord in glory.<sup>29</sup>

#### 8. The blessing of living as stewards of grace

4:1–11

##### 1. Union with Christ in death to sin (4:1)

At first sight, it might seem that Peter is presenting a general truth: bodily suffering inhibits sin. Accordingly, Christians should not regret suffering, since suffering will advance their sanctification. Yet it seems clear that this cannot be Peter's meaning. An immediate difficulty for this interpretation is that Peter does not begin with suffering in general, but with Christ's suffering. Christians are to have the same insight, the same perception that Christ had.<sup>2</sup> Are we to suppose that Peter is telling us that Christ embraced suffering to avoid sinning? Did the Lord seek the sanctifying power of suffering?

Further, the forms of the Greek verbs tell against this interpretation. The verbs for *suffered* and *has suffered* have a form that describes a definite event, not an ongoing process. The same form is used in 3:18 to describe the once-for-all suffering of Christ on the cross. There it is a synonym for his death, and indeed the NIV translates it 'died'. The phrase *is done with sin* describes a present condition determined by a past event. This phrase does not describe an ongoing process, either, but rather a new situation. Peter is speaking of one act of suffering that results in a situation where sin is stopped or finished.

What, then, is the 'suffering in the body' that Peter has in view? Surely, in the case of Christ, it is his suffering for sins once on the cross (3:18). The result was that sin was done away. He was finished with it. Peter does not mean, of course, that Jesus was sinning, and that the cross put a stop to it. He affirms that Jesus did no sin (2:22). But although Jesus did no sin, he bore our sins in his own body to the tree (2:24). The burden of our sin was on him; he carried it up to Calvary. But there it ended. His death finished his involvement with our sin.

Indeed, it is possible that in the last half of 4:1 Peter is still speaking of Jesus: *he who has suffered in his body is done with sin*. In any case, Peter applies this principle to us. We are to arm ourselves with a thought that is decisive for our new manner of life. Christ's mortal suffering ended his conquest of sin and ushered in his resurrection life. Peter has already shown the connection with us: Jesus bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness (2:24). In that passage, too, Peter spoke of an event in the past that marks the end of sin and the beginning of a life of righteousness. When Christ died to sin in our place, we died to sin, just as when he rose, we were given new birth (1:3). Our decisive 'suffering in the body' is that death which we share with Christ who suffered in the body for us. Baptism marks our union with Christ in his death and resurrection (3:21). It is nothing less than death that separates us from a life of sin. When Peter encourages us to arm ourselves with this thought, he is saying in his way what Paul, too, tells us:

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him ... The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

##### 2. The liberty of salvation (4:2–6)

The decisive death to sin that is marked by baptism ushers in a new time of life. You have heard it said that 'Today is the first day of the rest of your life'. For the Christian the rest of his life begins with the faith that unites him to Christ. Having died to sin, he is alive to God; the rest of his life is no longer to be shaped by the desires of sin, but by the will of God. Peter is not teaching that the Christian is now perfect, and that sin is no longer a problem for him. Indeed, he writes to urge Christians to forsake sin. Yet there is a decisive difference. They have died to sin and have gained the freedom to live according to the will of God. Their lives are different.

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<sup>29</sup> Clowney, E. P. (1988). *The message of 1 Peter: the way of the cross* (pp. 136–168). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

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Peter shows the difference by a vivid contrast. There are two ways of life. One is determined by *the will of God*. The other is marked out by the will of the Gentile nations, *what pagans choose to do*. The two cannot be blended: no one can serve two masters. Those who have been given new life through Christ will look with fear and revulsion at the life-style that once swept them along with the crowd. Equally, those living in the licentious fast lane will look with scorn and contempt at the pious life of ‘born-again’ Christians. Yet the Christians addressed by Peter had a sad advantage. They knew well what life in the fast lane was like. They had been Gentile pagans; wild drinking parties, sexual perversion, idolatrous cults—they had drowned in that *flood of dissipation*. But they now knew a better way, a way that their scornful friends could not imagine. Fervent love of brothers and sisters in Christ had replaced lust, alert awareness of the times had replaced drunken stupor, but above all, the joyful adoration of the risen Lord had replaced the folly of idolatry.

*For you have spent enough time ... doing what pagans choose to do*, writes Peter. Enough indeed! Those converted pagans would wince at Peter’s irony. How they would wish to erase those wasted years from their memory! But now they have a new life, and Peter reminds them that there is no turning back.

In listing the vices of pagan immorality Peter makes vivid the ‘evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance’ (1:14), the ‘empty way of life’ in the pagan tradition (1:18). Paul gives similar descriptions. Peter is accurate; his hearers would not dispute his description of their past. But there were pagan moralists who condemned many of the same vices. Has not Peter overdrawn the picture? Paul answers that question in Romans 2. The moralists are themselves hypocrites, practising in one way or other exactly what they condemn. The forms of sin may differ, but all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. The division of the city of Berlin after World War 2 brought contrasts of many kinds: the freedom of the West expressed itself in the flaunting of commercialized sex. In contrast to the neon glitter of flesh shows in the West, the drab avenues of the East seem puritan in their restraint. Yet the Communist effort to legislate morality without God has opened other floodgates of repression and murder.

Peter draws the line for those who have died with Christ to the life of sin. That life went on long enough. The new life, *the rest of our earthly life*, is before us. How long that will be we do not know. Some who earlier trusted in Christ have already gone to be with him. ‘The end of all things is near’ (4:7). We do not know when the Lord will return. But, by Christ’s resurrection power, we may be rid of that old life of selfish indulgence. We may live for the will of God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. How different the will of God now seems! Once it loomed like a dark prison, curbing our desires, threatening our freedom to do as we pleased. Now we find that his yoke is easy and his burden light. The law of love is the law of liberty.

Drawing the line in a new life will antagonize former friends. They will find our new behaviour bizarre, even threatening. Charles Colson had gained notoriety in the Watergate scandal as a close associate of President Richard Nixon. When he was converted in the midst of the Watergate proceedings, the press greeted his ‘born-again’ witness with hoots of derision. Cartoonists had a field day picturing a cover-up by this instant saint. With the passing years, however, Colson’s genuineness in caring for prisoners made its mark. The cynical laughter died down, and Colson’s conversion began to command respect. Something had happened in his life.

Peter has already urged Christians to make their new manner of life a witness (2:11–12; 3:1). Some may be brought to glorify God in repentance as they see the changed lives of Christians. But this will not always be the happy outcome. Rather, Christians who will no longer join the pagan parties can expect to have *abuse* heaped on them. (The one Greek word for *they heap abuse on you* is literally ‘blaspheming’. It may link with the idolatry of the pagans, and describe blasphemy, not against Christians, but against their God.) In the Wisdom of Solomon, an apocryphal book from before the time of Christ, the author cites the words of the wicked against the good life of a righteous person:

He professes to have knowledge of God,  
and calls himself a child of the Lord.  
He became to us a reproof of our thoughts;  
the very sight of him is a burden to us,  
because his manner of life is unlike that of others,  
and his ways are strange.

The passage goes on to describe how the wicked plan to put the righteous man to the test ‘with insult and torture’ to see how well his profession will hold up. Yet even if Christian testimony meets with this response, the Christian

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must not despair. Those who persecute him because of his faithfulness must one day give account to the Lord, *who is ready to judge the living and the dead*. Peter has twice reminded us of God's just judgment (1:17; 2:23), and he may be speaking of the Father's judgment again. On the other hand, the New Testament often speaks of the Father's committing his judgment to the Son.<sup>2</sup> Peter has brought Christ's role as Judge into view by describing his exaltation to God's right hand (3:22); the phrase *to judge the living and the dead* is used particularly of Christ to express the inclusiveness of the judgment given to him. The word *ready* also seems to point to Christ. By his finished work and his exaltation he has accomplished everything; he is now ready to judge.

The people of this world may haul Christians before judges, and demand that they give account of themselves. Christians must be ready in every situation to give a reason for their hope (3:15). But their persecutors are themselves accountable to Christ, the Lord. The thought of that contrast, and of the Lord's vindicating judgment, leads Peter to add 4:6.

This verse has been as much debated as 3:19, and for some of the same reasons. Those who see the earlier passage as teaching Christ's preaching *the gospel* to the *dead* find confirmation in this text. Some take it to say that Christ preached the good news to all the dead in his descent to hell; he gave them the opportunity to repent, so that while their death has judged them in *the body*, they may live in *the spirit*. Others have held that the dead to whom the gospel was preached are the saints of the Old Testament, who were brought from their confinement in Hades by Christ.<sup>5</sup>

There are sound reasons, however, for interpreting this text in quite a different way. It does not speak of 'spirits' as does 3:19, but of the *dead*. These cannot be the spiritually dead, as has been proposed, for the dead mentioned in 4:5 are physically dead. Further, the verb for *the gospel was preached* (all one word in Greek) is passive; literally, 'it, or he, was-preached-as-good-news'. Verse 6 is closely tied with what goes before: *For this is the reason ...* Since Peter has just spoken of the Lord's judgment of the living and the dead, the simplest translation would be: 'For this is why he was-preached-as-good-news to those who are dead also ...' From Peter's words it is much more natural to think of Christ as the content of the preaching than as the preacher. Other New Testament passages also speak of Christ's being preached (1 Cor. 15:12; 2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Tim. 3:16).

Who, then, are the *dead* to whom Christ was preached? Evidently Peter speaks of them to encourage the Asian Christians. That is why Peter refers to the judgment: persecutors will be held accountable (4:5), and Christians will be vindicated. Peter's reassuring word fits the context perfectly if we understand him to be speaking of the dead who will be vindicated by Christ in the judgment; that is, the Christian dead. Peter connects verses 5 and 6 with *For*. 'The point of *For*, therefore, is not to suggest reasons why Christ should judge the living and the dead, but rather to draw out and underline an aspect of His judgment which will comfort and sustain the Asian Christians, viz. that because he is a righteous judge their converted brothers who have died have not believed in Him in vain.'

We must remember that the death of Christians created a problem for the church in the time of the apostles. Paul had to write to reassure the Thessalonians: those who had died had not missed out on the promise of the return of Christ. Perhaps the opponents of the gospel also used the death of Christians to mock the Christian hope. They said, 'Where is this "coming" he promised?... everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.'<sup>5</sup> The death of Christians seemed to confirm their scepticism. This would surely be heightened if some of the Christians who had died had been martyred. They then would have died under human judgment.

Peter gives a strong answer. Christ the Judge was preached to those who are now dead. He was preached, and they believed. That preaching brought about a decisive change. Although they might be judged in the flesh in the eyes of human beings, they live in the spirit in the eyes of God.

We saw that Peter's statement about the reaction of the wicked to the new behaviour of the converted had a close parallel in the Wisdom of Solomon. What he now says also has a parallel in the same Wisdom passage:

But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,  
and no torment will ever touch them.  
In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died,  
and their departure was thought to be an affliction,  
and their going from us to be their destruction;  
but they are at peace.



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For though in the sight of men they were punished,  
their hope is full of immortality.

The connection seems more than coincidence. If Peter does not have the Wisdom passage directly in mind, he certainly is following the same familiar line of thought: the wicked scorn the behaviour of the righteous, but the righteous dead are justified in spite of the accusations of the wicked. For Peter, to be sure, this thought is transformed through Jesus Christ: the righteous are those who have been redeemed by his blood; their hope is sure in his resurrection.

Indeed, it is the confidence of Peter and of the Christian church in the greatness of Christ's salvation that makes these words of his necessary. Since death is God's judgment on sin, and since Christ has paid the price of sin, it might seem that Christians should not die, but live until the second coming. Peter explains that even though they are judged in the body *according to men* ('in the eyes of men'), they live in the spirit *according to God*.

#### 3. Understanding the time of our stewardship (4:7)

Peter presents the positive side of the contrast in lifestyle. Not drunken debauchery and licence, but sober clear-headedness, marks the Christian (4:7). Love, not lust, fills his heart (4:8); the Christian home is open for hospitality, not orgies (4:9). Ministry replaces exploitation (4:9–11). The dissolute life of the pagan fails to recognize his accountability to the Lord in the day of judgment, a day that is fast approaching. This is exactly what the Christian does recognize. *The end of all things is near*. Peter had seen the Lord ascend from the Mount of Olives until he vanished in a cloud. He had heard angels repeat the promise of the Lord that he would come again. The whole New Testament emphasizes the expectation of the Lord's return; Peter's hope in the Lord looks to that event, and to the salvation ready to be revealed with Christ (1:5, 8–12; 4:13, 17; 5:4, 10).

'The end is near': our contemporaries expect to see that warning crudely lettered on a sandwich-board carried by a figure with long hair and dirty sandals. The figure appears often enough in cartoons and advertising, but rarely on city streets. Yet the smug assumption that only a 'crazy' would prophesy the end has begun to ring hollow in our atomic age. How different is the Christian expectation of the end from the foreboding that sees atomic annihilation! The Christian looks for the Lord who will bring judgment, justice, and the wonder of a new creation.

That realization brings sobriety to the Christian's use of time. (*Self-controlled* is literally 'sober'.) Three times in this short letter Peter exhorts the Asian Christians to be sober (1:13; 4:7; 5:8). Obviously this includes literal sobriety in contrast to drunkenness, but it also indicates the attitude of mind that is the opposite of drunken stupor or delusion. Sobriety means watchful waiting for the Lord's return, realistic living. (See the comments on 1:13.) *Clear minded* describes the practical wisdom that comes from the knowledge of the Lord. In Greek use the term was contrasted with mania; the demonized man healed by Jesus was found seated, clothed, and 'in his right mind'. Preoccupation with the second coming, particularly by those who have set a date for it, has often led to hysteria rather than sober wisdom. 'Faced by the imminent end of all things the community must not give way to eschatological frenzy. In such excess it would fall victim precisely to this world.'<sup>2</sup> Jesus described the faithful servant as 'dressed ready for service' and busy as he waited for the returning Lord.

Sobriety and a clear mind have one value above others. They equip us for prayer. Peter does not think of prayer as an effort to induce ecstasy, but as sober, direct, profoundly thoughtful communication with the Lord. His whole letter points us to the depth and glory of our fellowship with Christ. We have not seen him, but we love him; we set him apart as holy in our hearts. Peter's love for Christ is intensely personal; he is overwhelmed by the glory of the Lord. He does not, therefore, advocate prayer as a cold, rational exercise. But we might say that he advocates it as a *fervent*, rational exercise. Fervent love, agonizing intercession, these are marks of true prayer. Peter knew of Christ's agony in the garden of Gethsemane. Prayer tastes the agony of struggle or the delight of communion with God. Yet prayer seeks the Lord, not a transformation of consciousness. Prayer demands alertness. Peter failed in Gethsemane. He slept when Jesus had charged him to watch and pray.<sup>5</sup> Peter goes on to speak of the fervent love for others that we should show, and of the service of love. Thoughtful and earnest prayer will seek God's blessing on those whom we love and serve.

#### 4. Serving in the grace of our stewardship (4:8–11a)

New life in Christ is lived in a community of loving service. Peter brings this section of his letter to a climax by appealing again to the fervency of love that binds together the new people of God (see 1:22). Jesus taught that love for God and for our neighbour fulfils the law, and Peter, with Paul, puts love first in our walk of obedience and

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fellowship. *Love each other deeply* ... The word translated *deeply* can also mean 'constant'. 'Keep love constant' would be a good translation. The word describes something that is stretched or extended. The love of the saints keeps stretching, in both depth and endurance, 'to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge....'<sup>3</sup>

It is the reach of God's love that stretches our love. We love because he first loved us. Our love, kindled by God's love, is stretched by exercise. If love collapses at its first test, it is not worthy of the name. 'Love never fails.'<sup>5</sup> A parent's love for a child grows as it is tested. Someone has said that a toddler steps on your feet and a teenager on your heart. Maturing children, in turn, may grow in love for their parents. As adults they perceive the faults and sins of their fathers and mothers in a new perspective; their love is tested, and grows.

We do not love others if we take delight in finding and exposing their faults and sins. Rather, *love covers over a multitude of sins* (4:8). Peter reflects the language of Proverbs: 'Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.' Unless love can stretch to forgive many sins, it will not avail among us sinners. Peter had asked Jesus how many times he must forgive his brother. He proposed a generous seven times. Jesus was not impressed. He replied, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven.' Love does not keep score, but grants forgiveness freely to every brother or sister who seeks it.

Some have taken this text to mean that it is our own sins that are covered by love. They appeal to the Lord's Prayer, 'Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.' But our forgiving does not gain our forgiveness. Rather, Jesus, after answering Peter's question, went on to tell of the servant who had been forgiven, and who must therefore forgive.<sup>3</sup> The love that covers our sins is the love of God, as Peter teaches in this letter (1:3; 2:24; 3:18). But our love, modelled on Christ's love, can also cover sins in his name. Our love cannot, of course, pay the price of sin. Christ did that. But our love can imitate the mercy of God; our love can forgive, and forgiveness always pays a price.

But lest we begin to commend ourselves on forgiving others (or at least on tolerating them), Peter reminds us that love must go further. Jesus took a towel and basin to wash his disciples' feet. Love for our brethren moves us to *serve* them. It is the love of God that brings us to our brother's feet; it is the *grace* of God that fills our basin for service. We are ministers of the rich and variegated grace of God. Early in his letter Peter spoke of the varied trials Christians must face (1:6). Here he presents variety of another kind: the varied grace of God. The term translated *in its various forms* is sometimes used of varied colours, the colours of precious stones. The rainbow colours of spring flowers can only suggest the richness of the gifts of God's grace.

Deep in the Luray Caverns of Virginia stands the console of a unique organ. Ages of seeping water have created thousands of stalactites, icicles in stone, hanging from the vaults of the caves. Each stalactite resonates, when struck, with a slightly different tone. The organ builder explored the cavern till he found the right stalactite for each note in the full range of an organ console. Some had to be 'tuned' by chipping away a bit of their length. He then wired an array of motorized mallets so that each stalactite could be struck from the keyboard of the organ. Visitors who have heard the music long remember the deep, throbbing echoes of the singing rocks. If such melodic variety may be found in calcium deposits, what varied tones has God's Spirit given to the heirs of Christ's glory?

We must respect the rich variety of gifts that God has granted to our Christian brothers and sisters. To be sure, some may be spoken of as 'spiritual' in the sense that they have been more evidently granted beyond the 'natural' range of a Christian's abilities. Such gifts have a certain priority in equipping the saints for ministry. Yet we must not forget that God's Spirit is the creator Spirit, and that the Spirit renews us in the image of Christ. Every gift that is ours by creation has been touched by the Spirit in our re-creation.

Peter does not list the gifts of the Spirit; he mentions only two broad categories of ministry: speaking and serving. On the side of service, hospitality is to be given high priority. Such service employs both 'natural' and 'spiritual' gifts. Peter speaks of gifts of the Spirit to focus not on ourselves, but on God and on others. He would have us look to the Lord for the gifts we need to serve him and others in his name. Peter's focus is often lost today. Christians eagerly discuss spiritual gifts, but in a way that would surely distress the apostle. Their concern is not how they can serve others and bring glory to the Lord. Rather they seek self-fulfilment. They want to discover their gifts so as to establish their own identity. In a Christian context, they want to 'do their own thing'. That gifts are granted for service is lost from sight.

Peter does not offer a sample list of spiritual graces, as Paul sometimes does. (It would be a mistake to suppose that Paul's lists are intended to be exhaustive.) Peter evidently does not fear that a Christian will miss his calling if he cannot find his gift classified in Scripture. Indeed, the rich variety of God's gifts of grace makes close classification

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impossible. When Peter distinguishes speech and ministry, he obviously indicates two areas of special importance, but areas that could include a great variety of gifts. Individual gifts may be classified, but they remain individual. Jesus promised to those that overcome, a white stone engraved with a name known only to the overcome and the Lord. The name the Lord has for us is entirely personal, and it describes the calling we have received from him. Jesus named Peter the 'rock', and granted him spiritual gifts to become a rock in the apostolic company. So, too, his call names every believer, and grants the spiritual gifts that equip each individual to serve God and other people.

The gift, or pattern of gifts, that each believer receives determines his or her function in serving the Lord. When Paul speaks 'by the grace given me' he is speaking as an apostle. To speak of his gift is to speak of his office and calling. Some gifts imply a measure of authority in the community of Christ. They require public recognition for their proper exercise.<sup>3</sup>

Peter affirms that as *each one* has received a *gift* he is to *serve* with it (4:10). Gifts are discovered in service. We may rightly ask about the gift we have received, but we will not gain the answer by introspection. Indeed, the gift that we have received may not be all that the Lord has for us. We may seek greater gifts, as Paul reminds us. We must ask, however, 'Why do I want a greater gift?' If the answer is that, like the sons of Zebedee, we are looking for places of honour in Christ's kingdom, we cannot expect our prayer to be answered.<sup>5</sup> Jesus came to serve, and calls us to serve in his name. It is in humble service that we discover the gifts that we have and the greater gifts that we may need.

If the testing of gifts in service is ignored, disappointment and calamity may follow. Some candidates for the gospel ministry in Britain and America move through an academic programme of preparation, and present themselves for a pastoral call with little or no record of service other than academic achievement. In contrast, most Third World pastors seek further preparation after their gifts for ministry have been shown in years of service. William Carey went to India under the compulsion of his missionary vision, but he had demonstrated his gifts as a linguist by mastering Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Dutch, and French, and had shown his pastoral gifts in caring for a little church. His gifts as a missionary statesman and educator became evident as he carried forward his own challenge: 'Expect great things from God and attempt great things for God.'

Peter calls us 'stewards' or administrators' of the grace the Lord gives us. The term describes a servant who has the administrative responsibility for household affairs. Joseph, sold into Egyptian slavery by his brothers, became the household manager for Potiphar. He refused the advances of Potiphar's wife so as to remain faithful to his stewardship. The steward's office has two doors. On the one hand, he is accountable to his master. He administers the goods and affairs of another. All that he has, he has received. On the other hand, he is an administrator, put in charge of his master's affairs and exercising authority in his master's name. Peter returns to this key of stewardship when he addresses the elders of the church (5:2-3).

Peter may already have the elders and deacons of the church particularly in view. His reference to *speaking the very words of God* surely has special reference to the 'shepherds of God's flock' (5:2). But that makes it the more important that he has expressed himself in general terms. It is not only the elders who have the responsibility of stewards in the house of God. Rather, the vast variety of gifts that God has poured out on the church are all to be administered in his name.

*Hospitality*, in particular, is a gift to be cultivated in every Christian home. No doubt hospitality had a special importance for the church at the time of Peter's writing. The inns of the time were few in number and unsavoury in reputation. Travelling evangelists and teachers were dependent upon the hospitality of the churches. Without the grace of hospitality the expansion of the church would be severely limited. Then, as now, hospitality had its problems. We are struck by the realism of the *Didache*, a Christian document perhaps as early as the first century. Speaking of travelling 'apostles' (missionaries) and prophets, the *Didache* gives these instructions:

But concerning the apostles and prophets, so do ye according to the ordinance of the Gospel. Let every apostle, when he cometh to you, be received as the Lord; but he shall not abide more than a single day, or if there be need, a second likewise; but if he abide three days, he is a false prophet. And when he departeth let the apostle receive nothing save bread, until he findeth shelter; but if he ask money, he is a false prophet.

Caution and wisdom are needed in the exercise of hospitality, though hardly in the legalistic way indicated in the *Didache*. John commends Gaius for his hospitality to brothers who were strangers to him, but who travelled for the sake of Christ's name.

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The emphasis of the New Testament on the grace of hospitality goes back to the promise of Jesus. He will say to those on his right hand, 'I was a stranger and you invited me in.' What we do for one of the brothers of Jesus, we do for him. While Christians are charged to do good to all as they have opportunity, the provision of hospitality is particularly directed towards fellow-Christians.<sup>4</sup> Peter calls for hospitality *to one another*.

Do we need the grace of hospitality as hotels, motels and credit cards multiply? The question is absurd in the eyes of any Christian who has offered or received hospitality in the name of Christ. The early church often met in the homes of its members; the fellowship of Christians in the setting of the home has a quality that can be duplicated nowhere else. Equally important is the function of our homes in aiding the homeless and those in crisis or trouble. In New Testament times evangelism, too, went from 'house to house', not by organized canvassing, but by the hospitality of Christian homes.

The whole community can participate in showing hospitality. Peter thinks also of the special gifts of individuals. Like Paul he emphasizes the ministry of the word of God in the church. *If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God* (4:11). Peter is not describing casual conversation. He has in view the preaching and teaching of the word of God. So Peter spoke the words of God to the household of Cornelius. Paul said of his own teaching, 'Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.'<sup>3</sup>

Peter stresses the grace that is needed to speak the word of God. Inspired apostles and prophets provided the foundation on which the house of God was built. Others join in the ministry of the word, building on their foundation. Those who now speak the word must depend upon the gift of the Spirit to proclaim the 'oracles' of God (4:11, RSV), the very word of God in the gospel. Preaching God's word is not a mechanical task; human eloquence is ineffective apart from the blessing of the Spirit. By the Spirit, ministers of the word speak 'as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.'<sup>5</sup>

It is true that every Christian must handle the word of God with reverence, and seek the help of the Spirit to make it known to others. Yet there are also those with special gifts of the Spirit for the preaching and teaching of the word of God. They have a special charge to tend and feed the flock of God (5:2). There is some danger that, in reacting against clericalism, the church may forget the importance of the ministry of the word of God by those called to be under-shepherds of the flock.

*If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides.* The serving ministry that Peter has in mind may be especially that of deacons in the church, here set beside the teaching ministry. In any case, Peter uses the same term for service here that he used in 4:10. We 'minister' or 'administer' God's grace in our service of others. The same Greek root appears in our word 'deacon'. It could describe those who waited on tables or performed other menial tasks. Jesus applied it to himself, as one who came not to be served, but to serve. It is used in the New Testament for Christian service in general, as well as for diaconal service in the official sense.<sup>2</sup>

Peter's exhortation is no less needed for service than for teaching. Christians may be more tempted to undertake diaconal service in their own strength. They may agree that the ministry of the word needs special grace, but waiting on tables, collecting money, or caring for the sick is just a matter of rolling up one's sleeves and getting the job done. Not so. If God is to be glorified by ministry in his name, it must be ministry performed in his *strength*. Paul speaks of the cheerfulness that God gives for showing mercy. This is very different from grumbling hospitality or condescending benevolence. Anyone who has served in a ministry of mercy will know the need for patience and strength to carry on. Peter would have us look to the Lord from the very beginning of every such ministry. Only when it is performed, not just in the name of Christ, but in the Spirit of Christ, does it bring praise to God.

#### **5. The purpose of our stewardship (4:11b)**

Why does Peter so emphasize our calling to minister as stewards, servants who recognize our dependence on God's gifts? Because only so will we give God all the glory. Anyone who has begun a ministry in Christ's name finds it perilously easy to shift the ownership of the enterprise. It becomes his ministry, her organization. Success demonstrates one's own organizational skill and entrepreneurial genius. The leader gives lip-service to God's enabling grace, but trusts management techniques. He looks to professional consultants more than to the Lord. The 'success' of such a ministry may be a graver judgment from God than its failure.

Peter insists that we must minister in the strength that God provides, *so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ*. God is to be praised not only for the new birth from which our service begins, but for the

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continuing grace that enables us, in serving others, to serve him. Peter was keenly conscious of the gifts he had received from Christ with the coming of the Holy Spirit. He had been granted the miraculous signs of an apostle and could bid a lame man to walk in the name of Jesus. He had also been given grace to speak the word with boldness, proclaiming the exalted Christ as Prince and Saviour.<sup>2</sup> Jesus' disciples had once argued about who would be first in Christ's kingdom. But such thoughts are now remote from Peter's experience. Not his own leadership skills, but the gifts of Christ's Spirit, were the secret of his apostleship. Peter is jealous for God's glory. In everything (or, perhaps, 'in everyone') God is to be glorified.

All is to be done to God's *glory* because his are the glory and power for ever. Peter's exhortation becomes an affirmation: God is to be praised in everything. Does Peter ascribe the glory and power to God or to Christ? Since he says that God is glorified *through* Christ, either interpretation is natural. (Either, God has the glory and power, and receives it through Christ; or, Christ has the glory and power, and God receives it through him.) Again we see Peter's conviction as to the deity of Christ.

It has been thought that this doxology marks the end, or the intended end, of the letter, and that the rest is an addition, occasioned perhaps by fresh news of persecution—'painful trial' (4:12). But it is natural for the inspired authors of the New Testament to pause to declare God's glory when they are brought to consider the wonder of God's grace.

The *Amen* reflects the response of the people of God to the glory and power that are his. By affirming 'So be it', they declare, in effect, 'Hallowed be your name'. The 'Amen' of the new-covenant people of God echoes that of the old.

#### 9. The blessing of suffering for Christ's sake

##### 4:12–19

##### 1. The joy of fellowship with Christ in suffering (4:12–16)

Should Christians be surprised when painful trials come? Peter speaks tenderly, for he can understand the question. Has he not assured them of the victory of Christ over all the powers of darkness and death? Has he not called them the holy people of God, living stones in God's own temple, heirs of heaven? Yet the more firmly Peter grounds their hope, and the more eloquently he states their privilege, the more strange it must seem that they should have to suffer. Given the resurrection victory of Christ, why should those who bear his name be abused, mocked and arrested as criminals?

Peter reminds confused Christians that suffering for Christ's sake is not unexpected or unaccountable. Indeed, if we understand why suffering comes, we will not only accept it, but rejoice in it. Peter shows the meaning of our suffering from two sides. First, our suffering for Christ finds its significance in Christ's suffering for us. We share now in suffering for him as we shall one day share in glory with him (4:13; 5:1). Secondly, our suffering does not destroy us, but purifies us. The fire of God's judgment that we endure is not the fire of wrath that will consume the unbelieving. It is the purging fire of his discipline. God will destroy all sin from his new creation; he has begun that work in us. The trials that we experience show us that God is already beginning his great work of renewal.

Consider first what Christ's sufferings mean for our sufferings. Peter is a witness of Christ's sufferings (5:1). He testifies not only to the events of Gethsemane and Calvary, but also to their meaning. Christ, the righteous one, suffered for us, the unrighteous, to bring us to God (3:18). The fact that the righteous suffer is the enigma posed in the book of Job and in many Psalms. Peter answers the question just as the Old Testament does. God is sovereign; we suffer according to the will of God (4:19). But God's will for our suffering must now be understood in the light of God's will for Christ's suffering. Only Christ is truly righteous, yet he suffered for our sins. The key to the mystery of the suffering of the righteous is the mystery of the suffering of Christ. The prophets testified of his suffering and of the glory to follow (1:11). In the wonder of God's design, it was his purpose that Christ should suffer for us, and by his suffering save us. Knowing his suffering for us, we may rejoice when God wills that we should suffer for him. We cannot add to his atoning sufferings, for he bore our sins in his own body on the tree (2:24). Christ suffered for sins 'once' (3:18). Yet when we suffer as Christians there is a sense in which we share in the sufferings of Christ. Made righteous by him, we suffer as the righteous with him.

The phrase *the sufferings of Christ* may refer to the sufferings that Christ endured or to the sufferings that we endure in his name. Since Peter speaks of suffering for *the name of Christ* (4:14), and *as a Christian* (4:16), we might

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*take the sufferings of Christ* to mean ‘Christian sufferings’. Peter also says, however, that he is a witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker of the glory to be revealed (5:1). There he has in view *Christ’s* sufferings and glory.

It seems best, therefore, to understand *the sufferings of Christ* as the sufferings that he endured. We partake of his sufferings, not by contributing to his atonement, but by following in his steps (2:21). As we suffer for Christ, we are linked to him. Our sufferings witness to his. We did not see Jesus on the cross as Peter did, but like Peter we understand the meaning of his atoning death. Because he suffered for us, we can rejoice when we are counted worthy to suffer for him.

The reality of our suffering for Christ becomes a pledge to us of the reality of our belonging to Christ. That in itself brings joy to our hearts. It also strengthens our hope. If, like Christ, we suffer according to God’s will, we know that, like Christ, we shall enter the glory of the Father. Joy lies before us, the joy of seeing Christ in his glory in the great day when he will come again (4:14). Suffering, then, is not a threat, but a promise. The pattern of Christ’s life is the pattern of our lives, too.

From the earliest centuries the church has treasured accounts of the joy with which martyrs have endured suffering for Christ’s sake. The letter from the church of Smyrna in the second century describes the martyrdom of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna. After the old man had been arrested and brought to the arena, the proconsul urged him to offer incense to Caesar. ‘Take the oath,’ said the proconsul, ‘and I shall release you. Curse Christ.’

Polycarp replied, ‘Eighty-six years I have served him, and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?’ Tied to the stake, Polycarp prayed to be received by the Lord ‘as a rich and acceptable sacrifice’.

Believers who suffer for Christ are filled with hope. They know that they will *be overjoyed when his glory is revealed* (4:13). The glory of Christ is more than a future hope, however. It is also a present possession. In the Holy Spirit Christ’s glory is already revealed, for the Spirit is sent from his throne (4:14). Peter had proclaimed the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. God’s glory was represented in the tongues of fire, but the reality is the person of the Spirit, the Spirit of divine glory. *The Spirit of glory and of God rests on you*, Peter says (4:14). Insults, of course, cannot drive the blessing of the Spirit from Christ’s disciples. Indeed, that blessing is specifically joined to being insulted and persecuted. Peter had heard Jesus pronounce blessings upon those who would be persecuted for his name’s sake. When he had first experienced the wrath of the high priest, he prayed with the others for boldness. The room itself shook with the power of the Spirit’s answer.<sup>3</sup>

Peter, no doubt, remembers that Jesus promised to provide the help of the Spirit in answering accusers. Christians in Galatia or Bithynia are not promised tongues of fire; they are not told that they will have Stephen’s vision of Christ at the right hand of God when they are insulted. But they are reminded that they do have Christ’s Spirit from his throne. In that glory they can rejoice.

Suffering for Christ leads to glory and tastes of glory; it also gives glory to God. When believers suffer because they are Christians, God is glorified. Satan’s accusations against God and Job were proven false; God was vindicated. Christians are given an understanding not granted to Job; all the more are they to glorify God in the midst of suffering for Christ’s sake. Paul and Silas sang praises in the prison at Philippi; Peter glorified the name of Jesus before the very rulers who had delivered the Saviour to Pilate; through the centuries Christians have defied their persecutors to praise the Lord. Armando Valladares, for twenty-two years a prisoner of Castro’s regime in Cuba, tells of how he came to a living trust in Christ: ‘Those cries of the executed patriots—“Long live Christ the King! Down with Communism!” had wakened me to a new life ... The cries became such a potent and stirring symbol that by 1963 the men condemned to death were gagged before being carried down to be shot. The jailers feared those shouts.’

The suffering that brings glory to God is not, of course, suffering that is the consequence of crimes that we commit (4:15). If we do evil and suffer for it, we do not bring glory to God (2:20). Peter mentions murder and theft, not because he expects Christians to be guilty of such crimes, but because they are crimes that carry a death penalty, the penalty that Christians may have to face for the sake of Christ. Perhaps the offence of ‘meddling’ is added as one that Christians might be more likely to commit. Kelly suggests that Christians may have ‘meddled’ through excessive zeal in attacking pagan habits.

As he describes suffering for Christ, Peter makes references to the *name* (4:14, 16). It is possible that the term is used in the sense of ‘account’ rather than ‘name’: ‘if you suffer on account of Christ (4:14); ‘let him glorify God on this account’ (4:16). The name of Christ is so strongly emphasized in the New Testament, however, that we may well

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read ‘for the name of Christ’ and ‘in this name’.<sup>3</sup> (*That you bear that name* in the NIV translation takes the ‘name’ to refer to ‘Christian’ and paraphrases to explain this.)

#### 2. The confidence of commitment to God in suffering (4:17–19)

The Christian who loves the Lord rejoices that he may suffer for the sake of the One who suffered for him. He patiently waits for the day when he will see the Lord and share his glory.

Yet suffering itself is a grim experience. Peter knew threats and imprisonment; his own martyrdom was soon to come. He therefore takes account of the judgment of God that has brought the curse of suffering and death into the world. But Peter sees God’s judgment in the context of hope. In this passage (4:12–19) he is alluding to the prophecy of Malachi:

‘See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,’ says the Lord Almighty.

But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.

God’s appearing will bring a refining process to purify his people and make their offerings acceptable to him. In contrast, Malachi prophesies that the coming of God will burn as a furnace against the wicked. The fire that purifies the house of God will consume them. Other Old Testament passages also compare God’s judgments to the fire that refines silver and gold.<sup>3</sup> Peter seems to have the prophecy of Malachi particularly in view, however, for it combines the thought of God’s coming to his temple with the double purpose of his judgment: to purify his worshippers and to consume the wicked.

Peter has already spoken of the refining of our faith through fiery trial (1:17). He has told the Christians he addresses that they are God’s house, his spiritual temple (2:4–5). Now he takes from Malachi the image of the purifying of the house of God through fire. *Judgment must begin with the house of God* (4:17). The fiery trials that Christians experience are the refining fire of the Lord who has come to his temple. But if the very house of God, the people of his own possession, is purged by fire, what will the end be of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Paul answers that question as Malachi does: the end will be destruction from the face of the Lord ‘at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God’.

The fire of judgment that will come when Christ comes already burns in the sufferings that Christians endure. Yet how different is the purpose of the fire in God’s house from the fire of the last judgment! God’s fire in his temple purifies the faith of his spiritual priesthood. By that faith, more precious than refined gold, God will keep them for the glory to come. The flames of persecution, therefore, are a token to Christians of the faithfulness of God who will deliver them from the wrath to come. God has come to his new temple; the Spirit of glory has his resting-place in the new sanctuary of living stones (4:14). Christians should not be surprised by the fiery trials, but should rejoice in the evidence that the Holy One has taken up his dwelling with his people. Fiery trials are not easily endured, but testing does not destroy us, it saves us. Alluding to Proverbs 11:1 in the Septuagint, Peter reminds us of that saving purpose. If even God’s saints must endure these judgments, think of the wrath that awaits the unbelievers who now mock and persecute the people of God!

*If it is hard for the righteous to be saved ...* Peter is not calling in question the security of that salvation kept for us and ‘ready to be revealed in the last time’ (1:15). The word for *hard* means ‘with difficulty’; ‘it does not imply uncertainty of the outcome, but the difficulty of the road that leads to it’. God’s purging of his people is not a process that takes place in purgatory after death, nor is it punishment that atones for sin. Rather, his purging is the discipline of suffering and trials by which the faith of his people is purified as gold in the furnace.<sup>3</sup>

Knowing the merciful purpose of their heavenly Father, Christians can commit themselves to him in their suffering. Christ committed himself to the Father, going to the cross; we are called to follow in his steps. He suffered according to the Father’s will. Although the Father wills our suffering for a different purpose, it is still for his glory; he is worthy of that total trust that Jesus showed. The word for *commit* (4:19) is used for making a deposit. The Hellenistic world lacked our modern banking system. Someone undertaking a journey might deposit his funds with a neighbour while he was gone. Naturally, he would be concerned about his neighbour’s integrity! God’s grace appears

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in his entrusting the gospel to us; how much more readily may we commit our souls to the *faithful* keeping of our *Creator* (4:19)! ‘I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.’

Only here in the New Testament is God called the *Creator*. Peter reminds us that the Lord whom we trust is the Architect of all things, accomplishing his great design. He feeds the birds and numbers the hairs of our heads; he will watch over us who commit ourselves to his care.

God is our refuge, as the psalmist says. We commit ourselves to him who is our rock and our fortress. But commitment is not simply flight to God from the sufferings that we endure. Commitment is active; we commit ourselves in well-doing. Peter again urges us to *do good* (cf. 2:12, 15, 20; 3:13, 16–17). Opposition and suffering open new doors of opportunity to show the love of Christ.

#### 10. Living in the suffering church of God

##### 5:1–11

#### 1. The humble rule of Christ’s elders (5:1–4)

##### a. *Their fellowship with Christ’s sufferings and glory* (5:1)

Peter now moves to the conclusion of his letter, calling his hearers to stand fast in the faith he has again declared to them, and to do so in the midst of the sufferings they must expect. His final charge calls for two attitudes that he has been describing throughout his letter: on the one hand, humility toward others; on the other, bold resistance to evil. These attitudes are fundamental for Christian living in this present world. They are by no means contradictory, as Jesus showed by his example.

Peter begins by calling for humility on the part of those who lead and those who are led. In the fires of trial, the shepherd’s leadership gains importance. Peter is Christ’s apostle, called to be a shepherd of the flock of the Lord. But his ministry will soon be over. He addresses those, therefore, who must continue to feed and guard the flock. They are not fellow-apostles, chosen, like Peter, to be eye-witnesses of Christ’s resurrection. They are, nevertheless, fellow-elders, called by the Lord to exercise oversight in his church. They have received the witness of the apostles, and with them they confess Jesus Christ.

The witness of Peter and the other apostles proclaimed the meaning of Christ’s sufferings and glory. Further, the apostles confirmed their preaching in their lives. Peter says that he is *a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed*. Peter witnessed to the *sufferings* of Christ that he had seen in Gethsemane and on Calvary; he witnessed to the *glory* of Christ that he had seen on the mount of transfiguration and after the resurrection. As he witnessed, he tasted of both. He shared in suffering for Christ; he knew the glory of the Spirit of Christ. For Peter, there was much more to come. As he knew from the words of Jesus, final suffering still awaited him; so did final glory. Peter would prepare his fellow-elders to bear their witness by mirroring the gospel in their lives. They, too, share in suffering as they proclaim the suffering Saviour; they, too, taste of glory as they proclaim his return.

Peter’s words remind us of Paul’s charge to the elders of Ephesus. Paul reminds the elders that he had borne witness to the gospel to Jews and Greeks, enduring trials and plots against his life. He pleads with the elders to remember his example, and to shepherd the flock, the church of the Lord, purchased with his blood. For Paul as for Peter, sharing in ministry means sharing in suffering: suffering now, and glory to come.

As an apostle and eye-witness, Peter was set apart from the elders he addressed, but in the witness of his life he stood beside them. If all Christians partake of Christ’s suffering and glory, how much more must the shepherds of his flock do so! With great tact, Peter speaks, not of their participating with him, but of his participating with them. His phrasing shows the humility to which he would summon his fellow-elders.

Peter is concerned for order and government in the church as well as for submission and devotion. He addresses the elders, those who served as leaders, administrators, and judges in the apostolic church. The pattern of eldership in the New Testament church followed that established by the Lord for Israel. Paul ordained elders in the churches he established, and distinguished teaching and ruling gifts.<sup>2</sup> The ministry of teaching elders is emphasized in the New Testament. In this exhortation Peter speaks primarily of the governing function of the elders. He uses, however, the figure of shepherding, a term that includes the feeding of the flock as well as their oversight.



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#### *b. Their charge as shepherds of the flock (5:2–4)*

##### *i. The calling of the shepherd*

When Peter calls the elders to *be shepherds of the flock*, he certainly alludes to his own calling. At an unforgettable breakfast by the Lake of Galilee, the risen Lord Jesus had restored Peter to his apostolic office and charged him to be a shepherd to Christ's little ones. Jesus charged Peter to feed his sheep and to tend them, the two major tasks of the shepherd. In that charge, Jesus was calling Peter to have a part in his own care for his disciples. Jesus is the good Shepherd who gives his life for the sheep.<sup>4</sup>

The Old Testament used the shepherd figure for those charged with the care of the people of God, but especially for God himself and the Messiah. Moses was called from Jethro's flocks to shepherd Israel. Later, King David was God's royal shepherd. Yet Moses and David were only undershepherds, serving the divine Shepherd.<sup>2</sup> God condemns the false shepherds of his people who behave as wolves, scattering and devouring the sheep. The Lord himself will come to gather and feed his flock; his coming is joined with the coming of the Messiah as the Shepherd.

Jesus, the Messiah and the Lord, comes to be 'the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls' (2:25). He looked with compassion on the scattered sheep of Israel and gathered the remnant flock, calling his own sheep by name. He promised also to gather other sheep; the scattered flock of the Gentiles. They, too, were 'like sheep going astray' but have now been brought back by the Shepherd. For his gathered flock, God promised to raise up faithful shepherds. The elders Peter addresses are themselves the fulfilment of God's promise.<sup>5</sup>

The care of pastors for their flock will be proportional to their care for the Lord. By the Lake of Galilee Jesus had examined Peter about his love for him. Only as he confessed his love for Christ was Peter charged to shepherd the flock of Christ. Love for Christ will kindle compassion for Christ's scattered sheep, the little ones for whom he died.<sup>7</sup> Lucas Cranach's altarpiece painting in Wittenberg shows on the right side Luther preaching, and on the left side the people listening. In the middle Cranach has represented Christ on the cross. The painting was evidently intended to show that worship centres on the preaching of Christ crucified. The people see not the preacher, but Christ. No doubt we should read that picture from the other side as well. The preacher must present Christ; more than that, to know his people, he must know Christ. He must serve the flock in the light of the cross. Their value to the Lord is the price of his blood (1:19).

Love for the Lord will motivate elders to imitate the care of the Good Shepherd. God directed his people as a flock, leading them through the wilderness. So, too, Jesus leads his sheep, going before them. The elder-shepherd is not a cowboy, driving his flock like cattle. He leads them as a shepherd would, walking on ahead.

Central to the work of the shepherd (and of Christ the Shepherd) is the feeding of the flock. False shepherds are condemned for taking from the flock to feed themselves rather than giving of themselves to feed the flock. Again in contrast to the false shepherds, God protects his flock. His rod and staff defend his own; he carries the lambs in his bosom; the sheep with their young are safe with him.<sup>3</sup> Jesus declares that he guards his sheep: none can snatch them from his hand, or from the hand of his Father. Paul presses this duty on the Ephesian elders: they are to guard against the wolves that circle the flock and may appear in the midst of the sheep.<sup>5</sup> The wolves are false teachers who 'distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them'.

Jesus the Lord came to gather his scattered sheep. He told his disciples that whoever did not gather with him scattered abroad. Faithful shepherds do more than care for the sheep in the fold; like the Saviour, they are seeking shepherds. They witness to the Gentile world in which they are now 'scattered' for the sake of their mission.

To be sure, the work of the Chief Shepherd is as distinctive as is his person. He is the only Lord of the flock; the shepherd's rod in his hand is a rod of iron, for he is the Judge of the nations; he goes before his flock, first to the cross, then to the throne. By his Spirit he gathers the sheep the Father has given him, for he knows them, and they know his voice. At the last, Christ, the Judge of all, will divide the sheep from the goats as no merely human shepherd could do. Yet the Lord of glory calls human beings to serve him as shepherds. By his grace, they too may taste of sufferings and glory, and so have fellowship with him. When Jesus recommissioned Peter he said, 'Follow me!'<sup>8</sup> Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, calls every undershepherd to walk in his steps (2:21).

##### *ii. The manner of the shepherd*

Since the flock is the Lord's and the elder is a servant of the Lord, shepherding is ministry. Pastoral oversight is not dictatorial rule (5:3). The dreadful mass suicide in Guyana of the followers of Jim Jones showed how a cult leader can

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compel idolatry. Television viewers watched with horror: Jones sat enthroned on a wooden platform while his subjects drank poison and died at his word. The phenomenon is not limited to bizarre cults like the People's Temple movement. It begins whenever anyone ascends a religious throne and starts to draw to himself the obedience that is due to the Lord.

The elder has authority; he is called to exercise a shepherd's oversight. Christ the Chief Shepherd (5:4) has called him to exercise a shepherd's care. But the undershepherd is not a stand-in for the Lord. He presents the word of the Lord, not his own decree; he enforces the revealed will of the Lord, not his own wishes. For that reason, any undermining of the authority of Scripture turns church government into spiritual tyranny. If church governors add to or subtract from the word of God, they make themselves lords over the consciences of others.

Far from being a lord and master, the elder is to be an example. That is, he is to lead others in humble obedience to God by being himself humbly obedient to God. Our one Lord and Master made himself an example to his disciples when he wrapped a towel round his waist and washed their feet. The shepherding elder lives among those he serves (*God's flock that is*—literally—'with you', 5:2). They are his 'lot', those whom the Lord has committed to his care ('the charge allotted to you', 5:3, ASV).<sup>3</sup> No-one is more involved with his work than a shepherd. Sheep cannot be managed by telecommunication. The elder addressed by Peter can be an example because he is seen and known by those for whom he cares. His life must support his words, and may be more eloquent by far.

The phrase *serving as overseers* translates a Greek verb from which the word 'episcopate' is derived. Unfortunately, our concept of a bishop (*episkopos*) seems to have lost the flavour that the term had for Peter. He calls Christ 'the Shepherd and *Episkopos* of your souls' (2:25). There, as here, Peter thinks of oversight in terms of a shepherd's watchful care over his sheep. 'Guardian' may catch the sense better than 'overseer'. The more technical use of 'bishop' to describe an office set over presbyters and deacons does not appear in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> Rather, Peter here describes the work of the elders as 'episcopal', and Paul, addressing the Ephesian presbyters, tells them to guard themselves and all the flock 'of which the Holy Spirit has made you bishops'. The deeper issue here, however, is not that of the organization of church office, but of its nature. Authority is given to the elders of the church. 'Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account.' Yet the exercise of such authority is always a service. As Peter reminds us, it is ministerial, not imperial. The despised shepherd guarding his flock in the fields, not a pompous churchman, is the model of pastoral oversight; indeed, the model is the good Shepherd, who gave his life for the sheep.

An American bumper-sticker urges us to 'Question authority' (a sentiment unlikely to endear the operator of the vehicle to a pursuing traffic officer). Is the bumper-sticker in the Protestant tradition? Recalling the challenge of the Reformation to the abuse of ecclesiastical authority, we might think so. Yet the New Testament, and 1 Peter in particular, put the matter differently. Clearly Peter would have us respect God-given authority and submit to it, in the church as in the state. Christian submission to authority, however, is never servile, and Christian exercise of authority is never authoritarian. Our awareness of the Lord gives dignity to our obedience and humility to our rule. In both we serve him. Elders serve in the freedom of the gospel as they watch over the doctrine and life of Christ's flock.

Peter gives another qualification for the way in which the shepherd is to discharge his calling. In addition to humility, there must be eagerness. Just as it is the love of the Lord that yields humble service, so it is love of the Lord that yields diligence. The elder is not reluctant, but *willing as God wants him to be*; literally, 'according to God', that is, with a readiness that springs from his grace and runs to his glory. Evidently the choosing and setting apart of an elder to his office was taken seriously in the apostolic church. A man so called might feel obliged to serve even though he would wish to escape the responsibility. The elders who received Peter's letter carried spiritual burdens that weighed heavier as they saw the darkening horizon of impending persecution. In some American and British churches Peter's exhortation would seem strange. Why should any elder serve unwillingly? The responsibility of church office has been trivialized; it is no more than a minor inconvenience that can readily be declined. But in countries where conversion to Christ is illegal and baptism brings a prison sentence, the office of the elder carries a different meaning. Quite apart from persecution, any real shepherd of Christ's flock will soon feel the weight of pastoral care.

Peter knew, however, that Christ's yoke was easy and his burden light. The enthusiasm of the elder of the new covenant springs from the joy of tasting Christ's grace (2:3). The love of Christ opens the shepherd's heart to share the joys and griefs of his people. Paul knew the compulsion of his office; he had no option but to serve Christ. 'I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!' Yet Paul was not therefore a reluctant prisoner of Christ's call; rather, he sought to show his love by going beyond what was asked of him. He

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would not only preach the gospel; he would do it in Corinth free of charge, zealous to show his grateful love of the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

Paul's surrender of salary as an offering to Christ illustrates the next contrast in Peter's words. Peter sets eagerness to serve over against a mercenary interest in church office: the elder is genuinely willing, *not greedy for money* (5:2). Peter uses a single word to describe an action motivated by a desire for 'shameful gain'. The pay that an elder receives is not shameful. Jesus taught that a workman is worth his wages. Shame enters when money becomes the motive. This and similar warnings in Paul's pastoral letters make it clear that elders were paid in the apostolic church.<sup>4</sup> With the money came temptation, and sometimes false accusations. Enemies could say that God's leaders were interested only in the money, or even that they misappropriated funds. Paul felt the sting of such false charges. It is hard to better his answer to the reproach: he became the first 'tent-making' missionary, labouring at that craft to support not only himself but others in his missionary team. Paul's strategy may be needed again today. Enemies of the gospel rejoice when scandal brings to light the vast sums garnered by television evangelists in the United States. Even preachers with a recognizable gospel message discredit their words with constant demands for money, money that must pass through their hands to build their empires. We may be surprised to see that Cappadocian elders in the apostolic age needed such a warning. Untouched by the pageantry of the medieval church or the hype of television hucksters, they had yet to guard against the lure of the denarius. Poor ministers, too, may be mercenary!

#### iii. *The reward of the shepherd*

*When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.* Peter writes this whole letter as an apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1). From start to finish he speaks for his Lord. He addresses the elders so that they too, may minister as servants of the Lord Jesus. He is concerned with their motives more than with their methods. Peter knows that their relation to Jesus Christ will shape the way they care for his people. To know the Lord is to seek to be like the Lord. Elders will be examples to their flock as they follow the example of *the Chief Shepherd* who gave his life for the sheep.

To speak of the Chief Shepherd is to remind the elders that they are only undershepherds. Their authority is not original: they minister only in Christ's name, and according to his word. He is the Lord, chosen in God's plan before the creation of the world and 'revealed in these last times for your sake' (1:20). Peter had seen his glory; the Father had revealed his Son to Peter. But now Peter looks ahead to the glory to come. *When the Chief Shepherd appears...* Christ who was revealed to Peter in his fishing-boat will be revealed again in the clouds of heaven. (To describe the revelation of Christ's second coming Peter uses the same word that he used in 1:20 to describe his first coming.) Again Peter reflects on God's programme: suffering now and glory to come (1:11, 13, 21; 4:13; 5:1, 10). The Chief Shepherd who will come is the risen Christ, who had gone into heaven, and rules at God's right hand (3:22).

Peter has drawn the elders to remember the good Shepherd, their example; now he draws their eyes forward to the Chief Shepherd, their hope. To be sure, the coming of the 'great Shepherd of the sheep' must remind every undershepherd of his accountability. Any 'hireling' will fear the appearing of the true Shepherd. For the true shepherd, however, as for every true Christian, the coming of Christ is the source of hope and joy.<sup>2</sup> The night of suffering and labour is over; the dawn of heaven rises with the light of Christ's glory. God's full salvation, ready to be revealed at the last day (1:5), will come with Christ (1:13). The saints will possess the inheritance that is theirs in Christ (1:7; 3:9). What the wicked most dread, and the redeemed most desire, will be revealed: the face of the Lord.

To his faithful shepherds Christ gives a garland of glory. '*Glory*' explains the meaning of the garland; their reward and joy are the glory of their Lord. The Greek word translated *crown* in the NIV can describe any circlet, whether of gold, silver, laurel, or flowers. The word translated *that will never fade away is amarantinos*; it is quite possible that the garland is of amaranth, a flower chosen for its 'everlasting' quality (like the helichrysum). The phrase would then be translated 'the amarantine garland of glory' rather than 'the garland of glory that will never fade away'. Our heavenly inheritance, like the amaranth, is unwithering (1:4).

Jesus Christ desires that those the Father has given him should be with him, should share his victory, his life, his glory. The Dead Sea community, meditating on the Old Testament, anticipated the endless blessing of God's favour:

And as for the visitation of all who walk in this spirit, it shall be healing, great peace in a long life, and fruitfulness, together with every blessing and eternal joy of life without end, a crown of glory and a garment of majesty in unending light.

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Only in Jesus Christ, however, does the promise of the Old Testament find realization. The crown of resurrection life is his to give; indeed, he is himself that crown.

In that day the Lord Almighty  
will be a glorious crown,  
a beautiful wreath  
for the remnant of his people.

The faithful elders who receive their crowns of blessing from the Lord will cast their crowns before the throne of him who wore the crown of thorns for them.

#### 2. The humble service of Christ's people (5:5–11)

##### a. *In mutual service (5:5)*

Mutual submission is the key to the pattern of life in Christ's church. Peter keeps returning to this theme. Christians are to find freedom in their submission to God, freedom in which they can submit to others for the Lord's sake. They can honour all people, and submit to lawful civil authority (2:13); Christian slaves are free to submit to their masters (2:18); wives to their husbands (3:1), while husbands show a corresponding respect for wives (3:7). The same principle appears in the relation of Christians to those who ask a reason for their hope (3:15). Because they reverence the Lord, they do not fear people, but can treat them 'with gentleness and respect' (3:15). That same humility before the Lord sustains suffering Christians as they await the return of their glorious Saviour, him to whom all must submit (3:22). When Peter says *in the same way* (5:5), he is continuing his application of this master principle to all the roles and relations of Christ's church.

*Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older* (5:5). The principle of humble submission is clear, but who are the *young* and *older* men of whom Peter speaks? If Peter is thinking only of age difference, the distinction is plain enough, although then, as now, 'young adults' could be an elastic category. But Peter had just been speaking of the authority of the elders, and the verb form he uses indicates an act of putting oneself under fixed authority. His word for *those who are older* is the word translated 'elders' in verse 1.

If the 'elders' in verse 5 are not just older men but church officers, who are the younger men? Some have suggested that they, too, have a fixed status: if not deacons, then the early equivalent of an ushers' association. The young men who carried out Ananias and Sapphira seem to have been a recognized group. The Hellenistic world had its youth associations, and the Dead Sea community was organized in rankings that included a number of classifications for young men.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Polycarp, in his Epistle to the *Philippians*, calls upon younger men to submit themselves 'to the presbyters and deacons as to God and Christ'. Since he then addresses the virgins as well, he seems to be speaking of younger men simply as an age group. It is not surprising that young men should be singled out in this call to submission. Our culture did not invent the generation gap!

Peter's call to *humility* is not just for the young. We all are to 'tie on humility' in our relations to one another. The verb suggests the tying on of a servant's apron. Peter remembered the towel that Jesus tied around his waist when he filled a basin and began to wash the feet of his disciples. The humility of those who serve Christ is not merely the absence of pride or the awareness of limitations. Christian humility is realism that recognizes grace. Paul declares: 'For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?'<sup>5</sup>

The Christian knows that he did not make himself or save himself. His humility springs from his total dependence on the grace of God. Added to that is the calling and example of his Saviour, who had everything to boast of, but 'humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross'.

##### b. *In confident devotion: humble service of God (5:5c–7)*

The humility that serves others is found at the throne of God's grace. God opposes the proud, as Proverbs 3:34 teaches, not only because pride despises our fellow-creatures, but because pride rebels against him. The proud person sets himself against God, and God, in turn, sets himself against the proud. In contrast, God lifts up those who cast themselves utterly upon his grace.

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We find a close parallel to this whole section in James 4:6–10. James quotes the same proverb and contrasts humility before God with bold resistance to the devil (1 Pet. 5:8–9). Like Peter, James speaks of the care that God shows to those who humbly cast themselves on his mercy (Jas. 4:8; 1 Pet. 5:7). James then describes the penitent mourning that forsakes pride to draw near to God (Jas. 4:8–9). Jesus contrasted the proud prayer of the Pharisee with the tax collector’s humble confession of sin. He concluded, ‘For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.’ The humility of which Peter speaks is like that of the tax collector; it is not simply a winsome graciousness, it is the humility of repentance, of despairing self-distrust that turns to God in saving faith.

Remembering the *mighty hand* of God should surely move us to humility. God’s hand had humbled Israel, purging out the rebels and bringing his people to repentance. But Peter speaks of God’s hand for another reason. He would remind us of God’s power to lift up the humble. At Pentecost Peter declared that Jesus was exalted by and to the right hand of the Father.<sup>2</sup> In God’s own time, when the Chief Shepherd appears, humble believers will be lifted up to share his glory.

Peter well knew the power of pride. He had boasted that although all others might deny Christ, he, Peter, would remain true. From the height of that proud boast he fell into the abyss of denial. Was there ever a morning when the crowing of the cock did not remind Peter again of Jesus’ word predicting his denials? Yet Peter had been chastened, humbled and restored. His pride had cast him down, but his Lord had lifted him up. The sound of the rooster at dawn brought another memory to Peter. There, in the high priest’s house, Jesus stood before his accusers; there, as the cock crowed, Jesus turned to look at Peter.<sup>4</sup> Jesus cared for him! Humbled and restored, Peter now urges, *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

Peter’s affirmation is drawn from Psalm 55:22, ‘Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.’ The psalmist’s anxieties arise from the attacks of false friends. The promise is therefore particularly appropriate. Peter is calling for humility in situations of hostility, betrayal, and persecution. Precisely in such situations, Christians are tempted to react in pride, perhaps even to draw the sword as Peter did in the garden of Gethsemane. It is such pride that the promise of the Lord dispels. Christians can trust the *power* of the Lord, for his hand is mighty; they can trust the *faithfulness* of the Lord, for their cares are his concerns.

When the French ‘Sun King’, Louis XIV, revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685, a long period of persecution forced Reformed Christians to gather for worship in the fields or mountains. Their pastors were hunted down by the King’s dragoons. Yet they preached the message of 1 Peter, urging their flocks not to take arms against the king, but to endure persecution for Christ’s sake. So few pastors remained, however, that leadership was taken by self-proclaimed prophets and prophetesses who identified the king of France with the beast of the book of Revelation, and summoned the people to holy war. The result was the Camisard rebellion, an armed revolt that became guilty of its own counter-terrorism. The church took the sword and destroyed its own witness.

The very act of casting our cares upon the Lord often changes them. In the village of Bethany Martha was preparing dinner for Christ and his disciples. She was distracted with the concerns of a hostess, and resented the fact that her sister Mary was listening to Jesus instead of helping her. When she complained, Jesus gently rebuked her. In her anxiety about the many dishes of the dinner, she had forgotten the one ‘serving’ that counted, the ‘serving’ that Mary had chosen. Martha’s many concerns grew from her pride, pride in many dishes that made her a servant of the dinner. When we cast our cares on the Lord, we often find that they were the concerns of our pride, not the cares of his kingdom.

If the Lord’s present care brings an end to anxiety, his future blessing offers a goal of hope. *Humble yourselves ... under God’s mighty hand*, says Peter, endure the testings that he sends, in order that, literally, ‘in time he may exalt you’. ‘In time’ could mean at the appropriate time, but here, as often in the New Testament, the reference is to what Peter calls, ‘the last time’ (1:5; see 2:12). At the coming of Christ God will vindicate his servants. Glory will take the place of humbling and abasement.

c. *In triumphant suffering (5:8–11)*

i. *The Christian resistance movement (5:8–9)*

In a vivid image Peter warns the church of deadly danger. Our image of a *roaring lion* may come from visits to the zoo, or from the zoom lens of a television nature series. Some who received Peter’s letter would have a stronger horror.

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They had seen human blood dripping from the chops of lions in the gory spectacles of a Roman amphitheatre. The time was approaching when Ignatius would anticipate his death in the Roman Colosseum:

Let me be given to the wild beasts, for through them I can attain unto God. I am God's wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread ... Come fire and cross and grapplings with wild beasts, wrenching of bones, hacking of limbs, crushings of my whole body, come cruel tortures of the devil to assail me. Only be it mine to attain unto Jesus Christ.

The psalmist often pictures his foes as lions, lying in ambush and waiting to pounce, or roaring in their pride. Peter's word for *devour* means literally to 'drink down', picturing the ferocity of a beast of prey. Peter is not speaking of the threat of martyrdom in an amphitheatre, however. The danger he sees does not come simply from suspicious neighbours or from hostile authorities. Lurking behind the 'authorities and powers' (3:22) that dominate pagan life there moves a more fearful destroyer, the figure of Satan.

A recent reference book describes the blows that Satan has suffered at the hands of sceptical liberal scholarship. The devil, we are told, reached his nadir in the 1920s and 1930s, 'but the concept has regained strength (at least as a metaphor) owing to the horrors of the period since 1939 and to an increasing sense that the destructive impulses of humanity may be intractable'. General disbelief in the devil, however, does not necessarily make a low point in his influence. Presumably Satan, like a lion, may hunt by stealth as well as by terror; he could not ask for better cover than the illusion that he does not exist, or that his comeback is merely metaphorical. Jesus Christ came to expose as well as to destroy the works of the devil.

Peter calls Satan the *enemy* or 'adversary'. The term has a legal connotation; it reflects the Old Testament picture of Satan as the accuser of the saints before the throne of God's justice. In the book of Job, Satan appears in the role of a heavenly prosecutor. In fact, he seems to patrol the earth collecting evidence. Satan's motivation is not zeal for justice, however. Rather, he seeks to discredit God's word and destroy God's works. In Zechariah's vision he stands beside Joshua the high priest as his accuser and is rebuked by the angel of the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

Satan's opposition to the 'offspring of the woman' comes into view when he tempts Jesus. Their encounter resembles a combat, an ordeal in which Satan attacks Jesus with respect to both his calling as Messiah and his identity as the Son of God. Satan's power is seen in his claim to control the kingdoms of the world; his subtlety is evident in the skill with which he quotes Scripture, calling on Jesus to test God's promise.

Jesus repulsed the attack of Satan and defeated him. Later, Jesus said that his casting out of demons showed that he had bound the 'strong man' and could therefore plunder his house, delivering those who were his slaves. With the cross in view, Jesus spoke of his triumph over Satan: 'Now is the time for judgment of this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.'<sup>5</sup> Jesus saw Satan, a defeated foe, fall as lightning from heaven.

But the fact that Satan has been cast down from heaven and knows that his time is short makes him, in a sense, a more formidable adversary. His fury against the Lord and his kingdom is the more intense. He may threaten the church from within, masquerading as an angel of light. He may rage from without, using the fire and sword of persecuting tyrants. But the Christian knows that 'The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.'<sup>2</sup> James, in his parallel passage, says, 'Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.' The danger to the Christian is not that he is helpless before the devil. He is equipped with the whole armour of God: the shield of faith will extinguish the flaming darts of the evil one.<sup>4</sup> The danger to the Christian is that he will fail to resist, that he will not watch and pray, that he will not put on the whole armour of God and take the sword of the Spirit. That sword, the word of God, was the weapon Jesus used in his ordeal in the desert; it is ours to use in his name.

Peter calls on us to do what he had failed to do in the garden of Gethsemane: to watch and pray. Roaring Satan is a tethered lion. He cannot tempt us beyond what we can endure, for God will not permit it. No temptation can overtake us that is not common to man; a temptation that has been overcome by others. Peter reminds his hearers, *you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings* (5:9). The Lord who prayed for Peter prays for us.

In southern France, overlooking the Mediterranean, stands the Tower of Constance. There, in the eighteenth century, Huguenot women were imprisoned for decades because they refused to surrender their Reformed faith. In the tower room where they were held captive, a stone coping surrounds a round opening in the floor. Inscribed in the stone is the word '*Résistez!*' Marie Durand entered that room in 1729, when she was fifteen years old. Three years later her

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brother Pierre was hanged at Montpellier. In 1745 she was offered her freedom if she would agree to renounce Protestant worship. She refused all such offers and remained captive for thirty-eight years, resisting the temptations to despair, to suicide, to betrayal. From her imprisonment she began a ministry of encouragement by correspondence. Some of her letters are kept today in the 'Museum of the Wilderness' in the mountains of the Cévennes.

If Satan is to be resisted, sober watchfulness is called for. Sobriety includes both alertness and realism. Christian wisdom will recognize the seductions by which Satan would deceive the church as well as the imitations that he would substitute for it in an endless stream of sects and -isms. Peter has already linked our sobriety ('self-control', NIV) to hope and prayer (1:13; 4:7).

Satan can be resisted only in a *firm* and settled *faith*. The word translated *firm* is used in the Septuagint version of Isaiah 50:7. There it describes the fixed endurance of the Messiah in terms of a solid rock:

I gave my back to the scourges, and my cheeks to blows; and I turned not away my face from the shame of spitting: but the Lord God became my helper; therefore I was not ashamed, but I set my face as a solid rock  
...

As Selwyn observes, the phrase 'solid rock' in this passage would not be lost on the apostle whom Jesus had named Peter, the rock. Jesus, fulfilling the Old Testament passage, had set his face like a flint to go to Jerusalem; we must be rock-solid in our trust in him.<sup>3</sup>

Peter has reminded us that the testings do not destroy our faith, but purify it. Since the peculiar nature of faith is its looking, not to oneself, but to the Lord, it is most strongly grounded when it is most dependent. 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' So the Lord said to Paul, and Paul could therefore say: 'For when I am weak, then I am strong.' In order to resist the devil we draw near to God.<sup>5</sup>

Suffering Christians who look to the Lord also gain comfort by remembering the brotherhood (2:17). Samuel Bénétreau points out four advantages to be gained from knowing that *your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings* (5:9). First, there is encouragement in knowing that you are not alone and isolated, suffering in a unique way. Secondly, you are reminded that the bond that unites you to Jesus Christ also joins you to the family of God throughout the world. Suffering Christians have a caring fellowship with those similarly afflicted. Thirdly, Christians are reminded that suffering is inherent in the Christian faith. Through suffering they have fellowship with Christ and their faith is purified. Peter speaks of the suffering that must be 'accomplished' or 'brought to its end' by the 'brotherhood'. (The NIV translates *your brothers ... are undergoing*.) Suffering has its place in God's plan for a world destined for justice, peace and glory. Christians know that the 'brotherhood' does not suffer in vain; their experience of suffering is being brought to the victorious conclusion that God has designed. Fourthly, knowing of the sufferings of the brotherhood stimulates hope. The spread of persecution and trials points to the nearness of the consummation: the promised land is in view.

#### *ii. The assurance of God's saving purpose (5:10–11)*

Peter closes his letter as he began it, rejoicing in the royal *grace* of God in Christ. The hope that will sustain the church through its fiery trial of suffering is hope in the sovereign grace of God. It is God who saves, from start to finish. God's initiative stands at the beginning of salvation. He has called us by his grace (1:1–2). God's purpose arches over the end of our salvation. He has called us to his own glory (1:7, 11; 4:13; 5:1, 4). The glory of God, the consuming fire of his holiness, becomes the transforming light of his love to those who have been 'chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father' (1:2). God's glory is an inheritance that can never be devastated, defiled, or turned to dust (1:4). The glory endures, for it is the blessing of God's eternal presence. Because the Spirit of glory already rests on the believer, the suffering church already tastes of the glory of the Lord (4:14). Paul, too, joins the beginning with the end of salvation: God's electing call and God's final work of glory. 'The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.'<sup>2</sup>

The glory to which God calls is his glory in Jesus Christ. Peter had experienced the awe of Christ's glory in the cloud that accompanied his Master's transfiguration.<sup>4</sup> Yet after Christ's resurrection he had also joined his glorified Lord on the familiar shore of the Lake of Galilee for a breakfast of broiled fish. Peter's hope of glory was not an indefinable nimbus cloud: it was as definite as the scarred hand of Jesus that passed the breakfast fish. Peter had heard the call of God in the voice of Jesus; he had seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus. He rejoices that God has called others from the nations of the world to share his precious hope. They have not seen Jesus, but, like Peter, they love him.

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God's call to the glory of Christ comes through the grace of Christ. God is the God of all grace, grace that can meet every need and prevail in every situation. Peter describes the power of that grace in four verbs: God will complete his work in us, he will establish us, strengthen us and ground us (5:10). Our brief time of suffering will not turn aside his gracious work. With joyful confidence we may cast all our cares on him.

First, God will make us complete (NIV, *restore*). The word means 'to put in order,' 'to make right'. It may describe 'restoring', putting right what was wrong, as a surgeon sets a broken bone. It may also describe 'completing', giving further order by providing what was lacking. Finally, it may mean 'preparing' or 'creating', giving initial order and shape. Peter, of course, had known the restoring power of God's grace after the ordeal of his denial. In this context, however, the thought of God's completing his work in believers is probably foremost. We are not to suppose that these actions of God will take place only after the time of suffering is over. Rather, God's gracious work of completing and perfecting us begins now, during the brief time of our suffering. Indeed, God uses suffering to perfect us as he leads us to the time when he will complete our transformation in the glory of Christ (1:6–7).

Secondly, God will establish us. 'The Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.' We are made strong in the sense of being given a firm and fixed position. Jesus, when he predicted Peter's denial, promised also his restoration and said, 'When you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.'<sup>2</sup> Peter, who had fallen away in denial, was made an apostle, a rock of foundation, fixed and solid. He promises to Christ's church the establishing grace he had received.

Thirdly, God will strengthen us. The verb Peter uses is found only here in the New Testament. The noun appears in the Greek version of Job, who speaks of the strength of the lion. C. S. Lewis, in his children's stories, uses the figure of Aslan to represent Christ, the lion of the tribe of Judah. The risen Christ removes our fear of Satan, the roaring lion.

Finally, God will place us on a firm foundation. The psalmist speaks of God's founding and establishing the earth; Peter used the same word to describe his 'founding' of his people. In the same sense Paul speaks of the Colossians as continuing in their faith, 'established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel'.<sup>4</sup>

All these words describe 'how firm a foundation' is promised to the saints of the Lord. We might understand that Peter, named the 'rock' by Christ, would be particularly attracted to the image of the house of God founded upon a rock. The house of living stone is joined to God's chosen cornerstone (2:6). We are established by the grace of God in the love of God, so that we might know him. Paul describes the richness of God's establishing grace in words to set beside Peter's:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fulness of God.

Overwhelmed by the promise of God's triumphant grace, the apostle Peter can only worship. *To him be the power for ever and ever.* That power of God, the right hand of his grace that raised Christ from the dead, is our hope and assurance. Peter is not wishing, or even praying, that God's power may endure; he is rejoicing in it. The power to accomplish the wonder of his will is for ever his.

#### 11. Final greetings

##### 5:12–14

#### 1. Silas: messenger or editor? (5:12)

Peter says, 'Through Silas ... I have written.' The NIV translation *with the help of Silas* takes this to mean that Peter employed Silas in the writing of the letter. The phrase is commonly used, however, to describe not the writer, but the bearer, of a letter. The letter to the church at Antioch from the apostles and elders at Jerusalem was sent 'through the hand of' Silas and Judas Barsabbas.<sup>2</sup> They were 'leaders among the brothers'. Peter's description of Silas as 'the faithful brother, as I account him' supports this understanding. He commends Silas as one worthy to be received. It is evident from the Acts passage that those bearing a letter were not regarded as mere messengers, but as representatives of the sender. Polycarp, in his *Epistle to the Philippians*, says, 'I write these things to you by Crescens, whom I commended to you recently and now commend unto you: for he hath walked blamelessly with us; and I believe also with you in like manner.'



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Alternatively, Peter's phrasing could describe the employment of Silas in the composition of the letter. Dionysius, bishop of Corinth in the second century, spoke of the letter they had received from the Roman church as 'written to us through Clement'. This has usually been taken to mean that Clement wrote the letter on behalf of the Roman church (he is not named in the salutation). Since three other men are mentioned at the end of the letter as 'our messengers', it seems that Clement was not a bearer of the letter, but its author.<sup>2</sup>

In any case, Peter's acknowledgment of Silas as a faithful brother would seem to indicate more than that he was a true Christian. Silas, who possessed the prophetic gift, was a brother to the apostle in the work of the ministry. Silas is associated with the apostle Paul in the address of the Thessalonian letters; a Jew but a Roman citizen, he had been a fellow-missionary with the 'apostle to the Gentiles'.<sup>4</sup> Whether he is here described as serving Peter in the preparation of the letter or representing him in its delivery, he is evidently a close associate. As a trusted brother of the apostle, he could interpret his brief letter. 'It is natural that St. Peter should here speak of him as "trustworthy," one who knew the apostle's mind and could expound it faithfully.'

#### 2. Peter's purpose in writing (5:12)

If Silas did write the letter, either as a secretary for Peter or as an inspired collaborator, it is possible that this last section came from Peter's own hand. Paul, who often dictated his letters, might add a PS in his own handwriting. Peter's statement beautifully summarizes the whole letter, and the theology on which it is based. Peter writes to exhort and encourage the scattered people of God. They will be facing fiery trials, but Peter can point them to a sure hope in Christ. Peter's encouragement, however, is grounded in his witness. The verb for *testifying*, or bearing witness, is used in the Greek Old Testament for the testimony of witnesses to the deed of sale for a piece of property. Peter is appointed as an apostle to testify to the facts of the gospel. The gospel is true (1:12), and Peter can attest its truth, for Jesus Christ chose him for that witness. The gospel is the good news of the grace of God, the fact that Christ bore our sins in his body on the tree, and is now on the right hand of God (2:24; 3:22). That grace of God will be brought to us when Jesus Christ comes again (1:13).

Because Peter's witness is true, his encouragement is real. In 2 Peter 2:2 we are warned that 'the way of truth' will be brought into disrepute by false teachers. At the end of this letter, too, Peter is concerned that his readers hold fast to the truth. They have received the gospel of God's *grace*. Let them *stand fast in it*. They cling, not to an impersonal moral code, nor to philosophical abstractions. They cling to the grace of God; not what they have done for God, but what God has done for them in Christ.

#### 3. Salutation and benediction (5:13–14)

The ancient city of *Babylon*, doomed by the prophets, had been reduced to ruins; it was largely abandoned at the time Peter wrote. The Jewish population had left, and there is no evidence of a church there or of any apostolic visit to the place. A small garrison town in the Nile delta also bore this name. It seems clear, however, that Peter is using the name symbolically to refer to Rome. This is also done in the book of Revelation (Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10), and in Jewish literature. Peter does not use the name as a code to disguise the place of his writing; that was not necessary. His point is rather the symbolism of the name. Babylon was the great city of world empire to which the people of God were carried captive. Peter writes to the new Diaspora (1:1), the 'captivity' of the people of God living under the empire of Rome, the new Babylon. The name 'Babylon' also suggests the judgment of this world by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, a theme that is taken up in the book of Revelation.

Peter's phrase means literally 'the fellow-elect in Babylon'. Since the noun for 'fellow-elect' is feminine, some have thought that Peter was referring to his wife, who had accompanied him on his travels, and who, according to tradition, was also martyred. But for Peter to designate his wife by the phrase 'in Babylon' seems unlikely. From an early time Peter's words have been understood as referring to the church in Rome. That church, like the churches to which Peter writes, is elect, a new people of God, sprinkled with the blood of Christ (1:1–2).

Peter's *greetings* come not only from the church, but also from John *Mark*, whom Peter calls his *son* in the love of Christ. John Mark had been a disciple from the earliest days. After Pentecost, Christians met for prayer in the home of Mark's mother. Peter joined them there when an angel released him from Herod's prison. Many years later, Mark had accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. He turned back when they entered Asia Minor, and was rejected by Paul as a companion on the next journey. He travelled instead with his relative Barnabas.<sup>5</sup> Still later, however, he was Paul's companion in Rome, and profitable to him. Papias, who was probably born before Peter's letter was written, tells us about the writing of Mark's Gospel. Mark, as Peter's 'interpreter', set down

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accurately, although not in order, the teaching of Peter about the words and deeds of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> Mark was to Peter what Timothy was to Paul, a ‘son’ in the sense of the book of Proverbs, but more; a son in the gospel.

*Greet one another with a kiss of love.* The gathering of the church is the setting for this command. The letters of Paul and Peter were read in the service of worship; the greeting was given in the service or at its conclusion. Paul uses the phrase ‘holy kiss’, but Peter says *kiss of love*: not in contrast, of course, but to emphasize the bond of fervent love that must unite brothers and sisters in Christ (1:22; 4:8). The greeting with a kiss was formalized as the ‘kiss of peace’ in the eucharistic liturgy of later ages. It was reduced to a ritual in which the officiating priest and a deacon put their hands on each other’s shoulders and bowed their heads. This ‘kiss’ is then passed on to a sub-deacon and to the clergy in the choir. The apostles were not programming a ritual; their desire was for Christians to show outwardly the tender affection that unites them as brothers and sisters in the Lord. The practice of exchanging greetings in the service of worship or at its conclusion has been making a belated reappearance in some churches. Such greetings were not part of gatherings at the synagogue, but they marked the fellowship and friendship of the home.<sup>6</sup> In this respect, too, the church is to show that it is the family of God.

*Peace to all of you who are in Christ.* Peter concludes his letter, as he began it, by pronouncing the blessing of peace in Christ’s name (1:2). Peter had himself received this blessing from the risen Lord, and had been authorized to pronounce peace upon those who received the gospel. The roar of the lion or the flames of persecution cannot overthrow the *shalom* of Christ’s salvation. ‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you ... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.’

That blessing of peace is the portion of all who are ‘in Christ’. They are God’s elect (1:1), chosen in Christ who was foreknown before the creation of the world (1:20). They are sprinkled with the blood of Christ (1:2), who bore their sins in his own body on the tree (2:24). Their union with Christ in his atoning death has ended the reign of sin in their lives (4:1–2). They are believers in the God who raised Christ from the dead and who has given them a share in his resurrection life (1:3–7). In his death and resurrection, Christ represents those who are united to him. By his Spirit he is also joined to them in living fellowship. They have not seen him, but they do love him, and wait with eager hope for his appearing. Peter’s apostolic blessing reaches across the centuries and around the globe to all who now share suffering in Christ, and will in a short time share his heavenly glory.

#### Appendix A

##### ‘Resident aliens’—literal or figurative?

Peter addresses ‘the elect transients of the Diaspora’ in the regions named (1:1). He also speaks of his addressees as ‘alien residents’ (1:17; *cf.* 2:11).

J. H. Elliott argues that the literal meaning of these terms must not be lost; he holds that the author is addressing those who are not residents, landowners, or Roman citizens, but are either transients or resident aliens in the communities where they live. Elliott does not deny, however, the religious meaning given to these terms in 1 Peter. Christians are urged, as ‘transients and resident aliens’, to abstain from the evils of Gentile life (2:11; 4:3–5). They do not belong to their cultural past, but have been bought from it at the price of Christ’s blood; they have been alienated from their roots so that they must pass the time of their alien residence in fear (1:17–18). Elliott proposes that both the literal and figurative meaning of these terms be kept. Those addressed are an ‘admixture of permanent and temporary strangers and aliens’ living in Asia Minor ‘under conditions of estrangement and socioreligious alienation’.

Elliott’s proposal faces major difficulties, however. Peter is writing to organized Christian communities with elders governing ‘God’s flock’ (5:2–3). Were all the Christian churches of Asia Minor composed of more or less temporary aliens? We may imagine that an American television preacher might address a message to the ‘born-again migrants in Orange County, California’. But is Peter singling out individuals belonging to one social strata within the Christian community? Is he writing only to churches composed of displaced persons? Certainly no letter in the New Testament is more inclusive as it speaks of the ‘people of God’ (2:10), the ‘house’ of God (2:5), the ‘brotherhood’ (2:17; 5:9), the ‘holy nation’ (2:9).

Further, the figurative meaning that is clearly present offers ample ground for setting aside the literal meaning. Elliott well stresses the time factor in the alienation of Christians. But if, in the figurative meaning, they *became* transients and resident aliens, it is certainly implied that they were not originally such. Rather they were well integrated into their own culture. Their empty manner of life had been handed down from their fathers (1:18). It was the

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characteristic life of the Gentiles (4:2). Their former associates had accepted them; they became estranged only when conversion produced such a radical change in behaviour.

Indeed, if Peter were thinking of the sociological position of those to whom he wrote, he surely would have used either *both* terms or only *paroikos* in opening words of the letter. Certainly *parepidēmoi*, ‘transients’, cannot serve as a primarily *sociological* description of all the Christian churches scattered through four provinces.

For Peter to be speaking figuratively rather than literally is not surprising in view of the development of the figure in the Old Testament. The Israelites were ‘resident aliens’ in Egypt, a situation from which God delivered them. They were also still ‘resident aliens’ when they received the land of their inheritance: ‘The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants.’ Further, David the king is described as confessing, ‘We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers.’<sup>3</sup> In Psalm 39, attributed to David, the king says the same of himself, addressing the Lord: ‘For I dwell with you as an alien, a stranger, as all my fathers were.’ Clearly the figurative meaning is not limited to the Platonism of Philo, but is grounded in the Old Testament, as the letter to the Hebrews shows.

#### Appendix B

##### Living rock, living water

In the Old Testament, ‘Rock’ is a divine name. In the wilderness at Massah-Meribah, Israel accused God of covenant-breaking, of abandoning them to die of thirst. God responded to the charges by standing trial. The elders of the people were summoned to pass before the congregation. Moses took in his hand the rod of judgment. In this formal setting, God stood before Moses upon the rock. As though he were indeed guilty, he received in symbol the blow of Moses’ rod. Moses struck the rock on which God stood, the Rock with which God was identified by his name as well as his position. For this reason Paul identifies the Rock with Christ.<sup>2</sup>

From the Rock that Moses struck, water flowed to bring life to Israel. God had presented himself as the source of the water of life as well as of the bread of heaven. That symbol was continued in the Old Testament prophets with the image of the stream of living water flowing from the temple of God’s dwelling, founded on the rock. Jesus not only presented himself as the source of living water to the Samaritan woman; he also stood up in the temple during the feast of tabernacles to call people to come and drink from him.<sup>4</sup> John reminds us of the fulfilment of the scriptural image of the waters flowing from the heart of God. For John the water that flowed from the spear-thrust on the cross was a symbol of the water of life from the smitten rock. While we cannot assume that Peter is suggesting John’s theme of living water when he speaks of Christ as the living rock, we may at least recognize the richness of the adjective for the apostle. If the living water from the rock was in view, it might account for the easy transition that Peter makes from the figure of drinking and tasting to that of the Rock.

#### Appendix C

##### The office of elder in the New Testament

The eldership in the New Testament church was not a fresh institution. It was carried forward from the Old Testament organization of the people of God. Luke makes frequent mention of the elders of Israel, and introduces, without further description, the elders of the church at Jerusalem to whom relief offerings were brought. Eldership in Israel had for its background the prestige and authority of older men in a patriarchal society. The Old Testament speaks of elders in ancient Egypt and in other nations.<sup>2</sup> We find Abraham’s servant described as ‘the elder of his house, that ruled over all that he had’.

At the time of the exodus the ‘elders of Israel’ formed a definite body of men whose authority was recognized. In Egypt the ordinance of the passover was given to Israel through the elders.<sup>5</sup> The institution of elders in Israel was sealed with God’s approval. Heeding the advice of Jethro, his father-in-law, Moses structured the government of Israel by appointing judges to govern groups from ten to a thousand, with referral of more important cases. Moses himself, as spokesman for the law of God, served as ‘chief justice’. Among the thousands of judges appointed under this system, seventy were singled out as the elders of the nation, to represent all the people, much as the elders of a tribe or city would represent their constituency.

Seventy elders were summoned to the feast of God’s covenant in Mount Sinai; there, with Moses and the chief priests, they were granted a vision of God. Later they were filled with God’s Spirit and prophesied.<sup>3</sup> Prophecy was not a permanent gift, but a sign of God’s recognition and approval of their representative office. The elders were not

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prophets 'like Moses', or teaching priests. Their function was administration and judgment. Yet the possibility of more highly endowed elders is suggested in the sign that confirmed their authority: 'I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!'

The elders often represented the people in political or religious activity. Moses gathered the *elders* and spoke to the *people*. On behalf of the people the elders asked for a king<sup>6</sup> and entered into covenant. Moses and Joshua associated the elders with them in a governing council.<sup>8</sup> We read of elders of the land, of cities, of Judah, and of Israel. In exile, the elders provided continuing order for the community.<sup>10</sup>

Following the exile an aristocratic nobility seems to have continued the functions of a national eldership in Israel. In Ezra and Nehemiah lists of nobles who are 'heads of fathers' houses' are given.<sup>12</sup> The system of local city elders appears to have continued. The roots of the Sanhedrin 'council of elders' reach back into the Persian period. In the Sanhedrin at the time of Christ, lay nobles (in distinction from both the priests and the scribes) had a seat and a voice.<sup>14</sup> Each Jewish community had its council of elders or 'presbytery'. Luke describes the officials who accosted Christ in the temple as 'the chief priests and the scribes with the elders'.<sup>16</sup> Scribes, as learned in the law, could be distinguished from the elders, or included among them.

Christ's fulfilment of the sacrificial system in his priestly work ended the priestly office among the people of God, but government by elders continued. Jesus' disclosure of the new structure of the church under apostolic authority teaches continuity as well as renewal. It is *his* church, but 'church' is an Old Testament term: the assembly of the people of God. He gives the keys of the kingdom of heaven, but the binding and loosing process is already familiar in the doctrinal and ethical discipline of the eldership in the synagogue. The process of discipline described in Matthew 18:15–20 corresponds closely to synagogue procedure.

Paul distinguishes the gift of rule from the gift of teaching in passages where office is defined in terms of function. Administrators as well as teachers served the church. It would appear that the 'scribes of the kingdom' of whom Jesus spoke were recognized as specially gifted elders whose work was preaching and teaching.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, Paul had to ask the Corinthian church to appoint judges so that financial suits would not be carried before heathen civil courts. Presumably the rich endowment of spiritual gifts at Corinth had so equipped the elders with teaching gifts that none were concerned to adjudicate financial disputes.

By referring to the task of elders as shepherding, Peter emphasizes the ruling aspect of their calling. At the same time, the figure itself suggests the teaching ministry committed to elders of the church.

#### Study guide

The aim of this study guide is to help you get to the heart of what Edmund Clowney has written and to challenge you to apply what you learn to your own life. The questions have been designed for use by individuals or by small groups of Christians meeting, perhaps for an hour or two each week, to study, discuss and pray together.

The guide provides material for each of the sections in the book. When used by a group with limited time, the leader is recommended to decide beforehand which questions are the most appropriate for the group to discuss during the meeting and which should perhaps be left for group members to work through by themselves or in smaller groups during the week.

In order to be able to contribute fully and to learn from the group meetings, each member of the group needs to read through the section or sections under discussion, together with the passages in the letter to which they refer.

It is important not to let these studies become merely academic exercises. Guard against this by making time to think through and discuss how what you discover works out in practice for you. Make sure you begin and end each study by focusing on God in praise and prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you through your discussion together.

#### Introduction

- a What do you understand by the word 'pastoral' (pp. 15ff.)? In what ways is this a 'pastoral letter'?
1. **To whom is the letter written?**
  - b What reasons does Edmund Clowney suggest for Peter's choice of recipients (p. 16)? What do we know about them?
2. **Who wrote the letter?**
  - c On what grounds has it been suggested that Peter did not in fact write this letter (pp. 18ff.)? Is this an important issue? Why?
  - d 'The greatest assurance of the authenticity of 1 Peter comes from ...' where (p. 20)?
3. **What kind of letter is it?**

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- e What do you make of the suggestion that 1 Peter is a sermon rather than a letter (p. 22)? Why might this be important?
- 4. Where and when was it written?**
- f Why does Peter send greetings from 'Babylon' (p. 23)?
- 5. What is its message?**
- g Read through 1 Peter at one sitting. Now, in your own words, try and summarize the main thrust of what Peter is saying. How does your summary compare with Edmund Clowney's (pp. 23ff.)?
- 1. The apostle to the Jews blesses God's true people**
- 1:1-2**
- 1. He greets them with blessing**
- a What does it mean to greet someone with the words '*grace and peace*' (p. 27)? How does such a greeting become a blessing?
- b What significance is there in the way Peter describes himself (pp. 28f.)?
- c What lies at the centre of what it is to be an apostle (pp. 29ff.)?
- d What makes a church 'apostolic' today (p. 31)? Is yours?
- 2. He greets them as the true people of God**
- e How does Peter describe his readers (pp. 31ff.)? Why is this so astonishing?
- f How do we know that the inclusion of Gentiles in God's people is not simply a 'divine afterthought' (pp. 32f.)? How does this strengthen Christian assurance?
- 
- 'The mystery of God's choosing will always offend those who stand before God in pride. Forgetting their rebellion and guilt before God, they are ready to accuse him of favouritism.'* (p. 34)
- 
- g What part does each member of the Trinity play in our salvation (p. 35)?
- h What is the significance of the blood of Christ being *sprinkled* (pp. 35f.)? Are these things true for you?
- 3. He greets them as the people of God in the world**
- i How does the description of his readers as *scattered* and *strangers* give us 'the key to Peter's whole letter' (pp. 36f.)?
- 
- 'God's people must be aliens in a world of rebels against God.'* (p. 38)
- 
- j What does it mean to be a 'resident alien' (pp. 39ff.)? What differences does this make to your life?
- k 'The theme of Christian pilgrimage stands over against the wandering of an unbelieving world' (p. 41). How does this happen?
- 2. Bless God for our hope in Christ**
- 1:3-12**
- 1. God establishes our hope in Christ (1:3)**
- a What is Sartre's image of hell (p. 43)? How does it fall 'far short of the reality'?
- b What distinctive ideas are there in Peter's understanding of what hope is (p. 44)? How can he be so sure?
- c How does the resurrection of Jesus give us new birth (p. 46)?
- 2. God maintains our hope: our inheritance (1:4-5)**
- d What is the difference between *treasure* and an *inheritance* (p. 47)? What does Peter tell us about the latter?
- 
- 'The wonder of our hope is that the same power of God that keeps our inheritance also keeps us.'* (p. 49)
- 
- e Why does Peter say that we are shielded by God's power *through faith* (p. 50)? How does this work out in practice for you?
- 3. Joy through trials in Christ our hope (1:6-9)**
- f Peter now gives 'four reasons why we can not only endure trials, but rejoice in hope in the midst of trials' (p. 51). What are these? How do they apply to your life at the moment?

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*'The whole nature of suffering is changed for the Christian when he realizes that his anguish brings honour to Christ.'* (p. 53)

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- g 'It is not necessary for us to have been in Galilee with Jesus' (p. 54). Why not? How can we have the same hope as Peter had without sharing his experience of Jesus?
  - h What 'apparent paradox forms the warp and woof of New Testament hope' (p. 54)? In what ways do you experience the tension between what we have now and what we will have then?
- 4. God's promises of hope are fulfilled in Christ (1:10–12)**
- i Why must glory be preceded by suffering (pp. 55ff.)? What evidence of this sequence have you experienced in your life recently?
  - j 'Peter is not announcing a general principle that those who look for reward must be prepared to pay in suffering' (p. 58). Why not? What is he saying, then?
  - k How can Peter be so sure that the God of the New Testament is the same as the God of the Old Testament (pp. 58ff.)?

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*'The least disciple of Christ is in a better position to understand Old Testament revelation than the greatest prophet before Christ came.'* (pp. 59f.)

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### **3. Live obediently in hope**

#### **1:13–2:3**

#### **1. Hope is ready (1:13)**

- a What difference should our Christian hope make to the way we live (pp. 61ff.)? Why?

#### **2. Hope is holy (1:14–2:3)**

##### *a. The holiness of children of the Father (1:14–17)*

- b 'The apostolic teaching about God's judgment has been misunderstood' (p. 64). In what ways? How then should we understand it?
- c What does it mean for you to live *in reverent fear* (p. 65)?
- d What does *holiness* mean (pp. 67f.)? How is it possible for us?
- e What difference would a more Jewish understanding of fatherhood make to the way we regard God the Father (pp. 68f.)?

##### *b. The holiness of redeemed believers (1:18–21)*

- f 'Peter appeals to the two most profound emotions our hearts can know' (p. 69). What are these? What part do they play in your Christian experience?

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*'God has claimed us as his own, claimed us at a cost that sears our minds with the flame of his love.'* (p. 69)

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- g How does the background to the idea of redemption help to deepen our understanding of what Jesus has done for us (pp. 70f.)?
  - h 'Peter contrasts the traditions that Gentile Christians had received from their fathers with the gospel they have received from the Father' (p. 71). What can you think of in your cultural traditions which might run counter to the truth of the gospel?
  - i What does Christ's 'divine pre-existence' mean (p. 73)? What evidence for this truth is there in these verses?
- c. Holiness through the word of truth (1:22–2:3)*
- j Can you think of any ways in which 'love and truth [are] set at odds in contemporary Christianity' (p. 74)? How can this be put right?
  - k What characteristics of Christian love does Peter set out here (pp. 74f.)? How can we love like this?

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*'Because God's love is the source of ours, the message of his love is what kindles ours.'* (p. 75)

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- l What pictures are used in these verses to describe the role of God's word (pp. 76ff.)?
- m How does your experience of reading the Bible match what Edmund Clowney suggests here (pp. 80f.)?

### **4. Live as the people of God**

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### I: The life of the spiritual temple

2:4–10

#### 1. The building of the temple in Christ

- a What is so striking about the fact that Peter calls Christ the *Stone* (p. 83)? What does he mean?
- b What passages elsewhere in the Bible illuminate these verses (pp. 84f.)?
- c How does Peter spell out ‘the wonder of God’s salvation’ (p. 87)?
- d What truths about the Christian life is the picture of the temple of God intended to convey (pp. 87f.)?

#### 2. The ministry of a priestly people

- e What is (a) the *status* and (b) the *ministry* of the church (pp. 88f.)? What further light is shed by the Old Testament allusions in this passage?
- f ‘The book of Leviticus cannot be amended to admit uncircumcised Gentiles into God’s courts’ (p. 90). Can you explain, then, how it can be right for non-Jews to be part of God’s holy priesthood?
- g On what basis does God choose people (pp. 91f.)?
- h What is the ‘vast difference between the election of Christ and the election of believers in Christ’ (p. 93)?
- i What are the implications of our being God’s *people* (p. 94)?

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*‘There is a spiritual “ethnicity” to the church of Christ; Christians are blood relatives, joined by the blood of Christ.’ (p. 94)*

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- j As members of God’s holy priesthood, what sacrifices do Christians offer to God (pp. 94f.)? How do you go about this?
- k What links between worship and evangelism does Peter suggest here (pp. 96f.)? How has this been the case in your experience?

#### 5. Live as the people of God

### II: The new lifestyle

2:11–20

#### 1. The new lifestyle’s pattern: freedom in bondage (2:11–17)

- a What is ‘surprising’ about Peter’s application of the teaching he has just given (pp. 99f.)? In what ways is this ‘in direct antithesis to the spirit of the world’ (p. 100)?
  - a. *Free in bondage to God: ‘Fear God!’*
    - b What is the link between Christian behaviour and the description of us *as pilgrims* (p. 101)?
    - c In what specific ways do *sinful desires* war against your soul (p. 102)?
    - d If his readers *live ... good lives among the pagans*, why will they be accused of *doing wrong* (p. 103)? In what ways have you experienced this?
  - b. *Free in submission to others*
    - e What are the differences between the way Christians submit to God and the way they submit to other people (p. 104)?

#### 2. The new lifestyle’s practice: submission in role relationships (2:13–14, 18–20)

- a. *Submission as citizens of worldly kingdoms (2:13–14)*
  - f What is distinctive about ‘the Christian pattern of loving service’ (p. 106)?
  - g Why was it difficult for Christians in Peter’s day to be law-abiding citizens (pp. 106f.)? Do you face similar problems today?
  - h ‘Peter’s description of the function of governments serves indirectly to limit his command to be in subjection to them’ (pp. 110f.). What function does Edmund Clowney in mind? Where would you draw the line in civil disobedience? Why?
- b. *Submission as servants of worldly masters (2:18–20)*
  - i What ‘golden opportunity to show the uniqueness of Christian service’ (p. 113) have you had recently? Did you take it? Why—or why not?

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*'It is the privilege of those who are sons and daughters of the Most High to imitate the magnificence of their Father's mercy.'* (p. 113)

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**6. Live as the people of God**

**III: The new lifestyle (continued)**

**2:21–3:7**

**3. The new lifestyle's motivation: Christ's suffering (2:21–25)**

- a. *His saving example: in his steps (2:21–23)*
- a To what are Christians called in these verses (pp. 116f.)? Why? What does Peter have in mind? In what ways do you experience this?
  - b Why is it so important to stress both that 'Christ's suffering leaves us an example' and that 'Christ suffered for us' (pp. 117f.)?
  - c What characterizes the path which Jesus calls every Christian to walk with him (pp. 118f.)? How do you react to this prospect?

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*'The very torture that Peter wanted Jesus at any cost to escape was the torture that Jesus came to endure.'* (p. 119)

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- b. *His atoning sacrifice (2:24)*
- d Can you explain the background to what Peter says here (pp.120f.)?
  - e In what ways have we been 'healed' by the wounds of Christ (pp. 122f.)?
- c. *His saving claim (2:24–25)*
- f 'Peter makes it clear that Christ has done more in his death than enable us to die to sin' (p. 124). What 'more' does Edmund Clowney mean? How does Peter make this clear?
  - g What aspects of the image of the shepherd are brought out in these verses (pp. 124ff.)? How do they apply to you?

**4. More on the new lifestyle's practice: submission for the Lord's sake in role relationships (3:1–7)**

- a. *Submission of wives to husbands (3:1–6)*
- h How does Peter signal the 'distinctive behaviour of the Christian wife' (p. 127)? What does this mean in practice?
  - i In the light of these verses, how would you advise the wife of a non-Christian husband to behave (pp. 129ff.)?
  - j 'Peter's teaching may be misunderstood' (p. 130). In what ways? How can such misunderstandings be countered?
- b. *Consideration of wives by husbands (3:7)*
- k What does it mean for husbands to be *considerate* to their wives (pp. 133f.)?

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*'Marriage ... is the human relationship that God has designed to mirror the love of Christ for the church, and of the church for Christ.'* (p. 135)

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**7. The blessing of living with Christian suffering**

**3:8–22**

**1. Response to suffering in a life of blessing (3:8–12)**

- a. *Called to a life of blessing*
- a What 'five characteristics of the life that brings blessing' does Peter identify here (p. 137)? What does each mean? Where do they come from?
- b. *Called to bless in response to cursing*
- b How should Christians 'get even' (p. 141)? Why? How do you intend to react to opposition?
- c. *Called to bless as heirs of blessing*
- c Why does Peter quote from Psalm 34 (pp. 141f.)? How does this help?

**2. The blessed witness of suffering for righteousness (3:13–22)**



## Presenting Peter

### Who is this man called Peter? WEEK 8: The Family of God / The Royal Priesthood

a. *The opportunity for witness in word (3:13–15)*

- d 'Peter is claiming that those who are eager to do good will come to no harm.' How would you answer someone who suggested this (pp. 143f.)?

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*'[Christians] must understand that suffering is not the opposite of blessing.'* (p. 144)

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- e How does what Peter says here 'prepare the church, not simply to endure persecution, but to find in persecution an opportunity for witness' (p. 145)?
- f What experience did Peter have of the fear of men (pp. 145f.)? How did he lose it? How can we?
- g How do Christians best 'defend their faith' (p. 149)? How effective are you at doing this?

b. *The opportunity for witness in life (3:16–17)*

- h 'We need a conscience that is both informed and clear' (p. 152). Why is this so important? How can we develop such a conscience?

c. *The victory of Christ's suffering (3:18–22)*

- i Peter has already written about the cross in 2:21–24. What further truths does he bring out here (pp. 154ff.)?
- j What suggestions have been made to explain what Peter means by Christ's preaching to *spirits in prison* in verse 19 (pp. 156ff.)? Which do you find most persuasive? Why?
- k What symbolic significance is there for us in the story of Noah (pp. 164ff.)?
- l What lessons about Christian baptism do these verses have for us (pp. 166f.)? Is this how you see it?

#### 8. The blessing of living as stewards of grace

##### 4:1–11

##### 1. Union with Christ in death to sin (4:1)

- a This verse could be understood to mean that 'Christians should not regret suffering, since suffering will advance their sanctification' (p. 169). Why is this unlikely to be the correct interpretation? What *does* Peter mean?

##### 2. The liberty of salvation (4:2–6)

- b What characterizes the two ways of life which Peter spells out here (pp. 171ff.)? Can you recall the difference in your approach to the will of God now and before you became a Christian?
- c In what ways have you found that your Christian life antagonizes former friends (p. 173)? How do you react to this?
- d Why was it that 'the death of Christians created a problem for the church in the time of the apostles' (p. 175)? How does verse 6 help to answer this?

##### 3. Understanding the time of our stewardship (4:7)

- e What does Peter mean by *The end of all things is near* (p. 177)? What difference does this make to you and the way you live your life?
- f What is the 'one value above others' which being sober and clear-minded gives us (p. 178)? How does this work?

##### 4. Serving in the grace of our stewardship (4:8–11a)

- g What does Peter teach about love in these verses (pp. 179ff.)?
- h Do you discuss spiritual gifts 'in a way that would surely distress the apostle' (p. 181)? What is Peter's emphasis here?
- i Which spiritual gifts have you received (pp. 182f.)? How do you know?

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*'It is in humble service that we discover the gifts that we have and the greater gifts that we may need.'* (p. 182)

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- j What spiritual gifts does Peter mention here (pp. 184ff.)? What instructions does he give about them? Why?

##### 5. The purpose of our stewardship (4:11b)

- k In what way can the 'success' of a ministry 'be a graver judgment from God than its failure' (p. 186)? How might this apply to you?

##### 9. The blessing of suffering for Christ's sake

**Presenting Peter**  
**Who is this man called Peter? WEEK 8: The Family of God / The Royal Priesthood**

**4:12–19**

**1. The joy of fellowship with Christ in suffering (4:12–16)**

- a 'If we understand why suffering comes, we will not only accept it, but rejoice in it' (p. 189). How does Edmund Clowney arrive at this conclusion?
- b What suffering do you face at the moment (pp. 190ff.)? How do these verses help you to face it?

**2. The confidence of commitment to God in suffering (4:17–19)**

- c How does the idea of judgment fit into Peter's view of suffering (pp. 193ff.)?
- d 'Only here in the New Testament is God called the *Creator*' (p. 196). What is the significance of this observation for the way we face suffering?

**10. Living in the suffering church of God**

**5:1–11**

**1. The humble rule of Christ's elders (5:1–4)**

*a. Their fellowship with Christ's sufferings and glory (5:1)*

- a What two attitudes are 'fundamental for Christian living in this present world' (p. 197)? Do you have them?
- b What is distinctive about Peter's ministry and what does he have in common with other Christian leaders (pp. 198f.)? Why is this important?

*b. Their charge as shepherds of the flock (5:2–4)*

*i The calling of the shepherd*

- c What will 'kindle compassion for Christ's scattered sheep' (p. 200)? How does this apply to you?
- d What are shepherds supposed to do (p. 201)? What parallels are there with the role of leaders in the church?

*ii The manner of the shepherd*

- e What 'turns church government into spiritual tyranny' (p. 202)? How can we guard against this?
- f What differences are there between the first—and twentieth-century understandings of the ministry of a bishop (pp. 203f.)?
- g Are you easy to lead (pp. 204f.)? Why—or why not?
- h Should church leaders be paid (pp. 205f.)? What dangers need to be avoided in this area?

*iii The reward of the shepherd*

- i What hope does Peter set before us here (pp. 206ff.)? What does this mean to you?

**2. The humble service of Christ's people (5:5–11)**

*a. In mutual service (5:5)*

- j What does it mean for you to be humble in your relationships with others in the church (pp. 208ff.)?

*b. In confident devotion: humble service of God (5:5c–7)*

- k Why does God oppose the proud (p. 210)? What can we do to avoid the sin of pride?
- l What anxieties do you face at the moment (pp. 211f.)? What does it mean for you to cast them on the Lord?

*c. In triumphant suffering (5:8–11)*

*i The Christian resistance movement (5:8–9)*

- m To what characteristics of the devil does Peter draw attention here (pp. 212ff.)? How is he to be overcome?
- n What advantages are to be gained from knowing that our *brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings* (verse 9; pp. 216f.)?

*ii The assurance of God's saving purpose (5:10–11)*

- o Which four verbs does Peter use to describe the power of God's grace (pp. 218ff.)? What do these mean to you?

Presenting Peter  
Who is this man called Peter? WEEK 8: The Family of God / The Royal Priesthood

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*'Peter's hope of glory was not an indefinable nimbus cloud: it was as definite as the scarred hand of Jesus that passed the breakfast fish.'* (p. 218)

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**11. Final greetings**

**5:12–14**

**1. Silas: messenger or editor? (5:12)**

- a Was Silas Peter's secretary or inspired collaborator (pp. 221f.)? Does it matter?

**2. Peter's purpose in writing (5:12)**

- b Can you explain how this verse 'beautifully summarizes the whole letter, and the theology on which it is based' (p. 223)?

**3. Salutation and benediction (5:13–14)**

- c What does Peter's reference to *Babylon* mean (pp. 223f.)?

- d What practical expression do you give to Peter's instruction to *Greet one another with a kiss of love* (verse 14; pp. 225f.)?

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*'The roar of the lion or the flames of persecution cannot overthrow the shalom of Christ's salvation.'* (p. 225)<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Clowney, E. P. (1988). *The message of 1 Peter: the way of the cross* (pp. 239–250). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.