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1-2 PETER

1-2 PETER: AN EXPOSITIONAL COMMENTARY

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—Dr. Joel R. Beeke
President and professor of systematic theology and homiletics,
Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan

1-2 PETER

AN EXPOSITIONAL COMMENTARY

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R.C. SPROUL

1–2 Peter: An Expository Commentary

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*To the Ligonier Ministry board members:
Faithful witnesses in Christ's kingdom and godly support to me.*

CONTENTS

Series Preface	xi
Preface	xiii
1 Peter	
1 Greeting to the Elect Pilgrims (1:1–2)	1
2 Heavenly Inheritance, Part 1 (1:3–5)	9
3 Heavenly Inheritance, Part 2 (1:6–12)	17
4 Living before God Our Father (1:13–19)	25
5 The Enduring Word (1:22–25)	33
6 A Living Stone (2:1–8a)	41
7 A Royal Priesthood (2:8b–10)	49
8 Honorable Conduct (2:11–17)	57
9 Servants and Masters (2:18–25)	65
10 Wives and Husbands (3:1–7)	73
11 Christian Virtues (3:8–9)	81
12 In Pursuit of Peace (3:10–17)	87
13 Apologetics (3:15)	95
14 Suffering (3:15–20)	105
15 Through the Resurrection (3:20–22)	113
16 Life in the Spirit (4:1–6)	121
17 The End of All Things (4:7)	127
18 Cover of Love (4:8–11)	133
19 God’s Glorious Self-Existence (4:11)	139
20 Suffering and the Goodness of God (4:12–19)	147
21 Faithful Shepherds (5:1–4)	155
22 Humility (5:5–14)	161
2 Peter	
23 The Authority of 2 Peter (1:1)	171
24 Make Your Calling Sure, Part 1 (1:1)	179
25 Make Your Calling Sure, Part 2 (1:2–4)	185

26 Giving All Diligence (1:5–11)	193
27 Eyewitness of His Majesty (1:12–18)	199
28 A Light That Shines (1:19–21)	205
29 False Prophets (2:1–7)	213
30 Judgment (2:4–11)	223
31 Balaam Rebuked (2:12–17)	231
32 Entangled and Overcome (2:18–22)	239
33 The Promise of His Coming (3:1–9)	245
34 The Day of the Lord (3:10–18)	253
Index of Names	261
About the Author	265

SERIES PREFACE

When God called me into full-time Christian ministry, He called me to the academy. I was trained and ordained to a ministry of teaching, and the majority of my adult life has been devoted to preparing young men for the Christian ministry and to trying to bridge the gap between seminary and Sunday school through various means under the aegis of Ligonier Ministries.

Then, in 1997, God did something I never anticipated: He placed me in the position of preaching weekly as a leader of a congregation of His people—St. Andrew’s in Sanford, Florida. Over the past twelve years, as I have opened the Word of God on a weekly basis for these dear saints, I have come to love the task of the local minister. Though my role as a teacher continues, I am eternally grateful to God that He saw fit to place me in this new ministry, the ministry of a preacher.

Very early in my tenure with St. Andrew’s, I determined that I should adopt the ancient Christian practice of *lectio continua*, “continuous expositions,” in my preaching. This method of preaching verse-by-verse through books of the Bible (rather than choosing a new topic each week) has been attested throughout church history as the one approach that ensures believers hear the full counsel of God. Therefore, I began preaching lengthy series of messages at St. Andrew’s, eventually working my way through several biblical books in a practice that continues to the present day.

Previously, I had taught through books of the Bible in various settings, including Sunday school classes, Bible studies, and audio and video teaching series for Ligonier Ministries. But now I found myself appealing not so much to the minds of my hearers but to both their minds and their hearts. I knew that I was responsible as a preacher to clearly explain God’s Word *and* to show how we ought to live in light of it. I sought to fulfill both tasks as I ascended the St. Andrew’s pulpit each week.

What you hold in your hand, then, is a written record of my preaching

labors amidst my beloved Sanford congregation. The dear saints who sit under my preaching encouraged me to give my sermons a broader hearing. To that end, the chapters that follow were adapted from a sermon series I preached at St. Andrew's.

Please be aware that this book is part of a broader series of books containing adaptations of my St. Andrew's sermons. This book, like all the others in the series, will *not* give you the fullest possible insight into each and every verse in this biblical book. Though I sought to at least touch on each verse, I focused on the key themes and ideas that comprised the "big picture" of each passage I covered. Therefore, I urge you to use this book as an overview and introduction.

I pray that you will be as blessed in reading this material as I was in preaching it.

—R.C. Sproul
Lake Mary, Florida
April 2009

PREFACE

Imagine what it would be like to receive a letter from someone who was a personal friend of Jesus during his earthly ministry. Beyond that, imagine receiving two letters from such a person. That's exactly what we have in the New Testament correspondence known as 1 and 2 Peter. Peter is known as a thundering paradox of a man. On the one hand he is known for his impetuosity, for his vacillating between faith and doubt, for his treachery of public denial of Jesus at the time of Jesus' greatest peril. On the other hand he is known for his magnificent confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi where, without hesitation, he declared his confidence that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God.

He is known also for his heroic acts of sacrifice and of suffering for the faith after the ascension of Jesus, even to the point of his martyrdom in Rome. When Peter writes to the church about faith and trust in the providence of God in the midst of suffering, he is speaking not in abstract terms but from the vantage point of one who has been called personally to endure such sufferings himself. He is one who testifies beyond speculation, as one who was an eyewitness, testifying not to cleverly devised myths or fables but to what he had seen with his eyes and heard with his ears. This is the testimony of a man who not only was part of the entourage of Jesus during his earthly ministry but was an eyewitness of the resurrection and part of the inner circle of disciples in the great triad of Peter, James, and John. These three were present on the Mount of Transfiguration and were able to see with their own eyes the glory of the transfigured Christ.

A letter from a man such as this is a treasure for the church. His letter, beyond the value of his own eyewitness testimony and his intimate friendship with Jesus, carries with it the weight of the divine inspiration of God the Holy Spirit. What Peter says to the church is merely an extension of what his Lord and Master, Christ, says to the church, so that we receive his apostolic testimony as from the Lord Himself. It is an enormous privilege and blessing for us to take the

time to consider line upon line and precept upon precept the teaching set forth in these two majestic epistles, 1 and 2 Peter. I commend to the reader a careful and devout reading of these letters.

—R.C. Sproul
Orlando, 2010

1 PETER

1

GREETING TO THE ELECT PILGRIMS

1 Peter 1:1–2



Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace be multiplied.

When we study a book of the Bible, we begin by asking basic questions of prolegomena or introduction: Who wrote the book? To whom was it addressed in its original composition? At what time in history was the book written? What were the circumstances or occasions that generated such a book? Asking such questions is customary, whether we are studying a Gospel, an epistle, or a book of the Old Testament. Knowing who wrote a book, for whom it was written, the time it was written, and the circumstances that provoked it assist us in understanding the book.

The Author of 1 Peter

The author is identified immediately as **Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ** (v. 1). The book of 1 Peter claims to be authored by the Apostle Peter, one of the two most important apostolic pillars of the early church. The basic distinction made in the early church was between Paul as the Apostle to the Gentiles and Peter

as the Apostle to the circumcised, the Jews. Critics have waged war against this book, as they have virtually all the books of the Bible, and have challenged its Petrine authorship for several reasons.

The first reason that Peter's authorship is questioned is that at the end of the epistle, when the final greetings are given, there is a greeting to the people from Silvanus, which indicates his involvement in the production of the letter. As a result, people say that the letter was not written by Peter but by Silvanus.

The second problem we encounter is that the Greek of this particular epistle is highly elegant. We think of Peter as an unschooled fisherman who, in all likelihood, would not have had the command of the Greek language displayed in this particular epistle.

Third, the epistle is addressed **to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia** (v. 1). Traditionally, *pilgrims* or *sojourners* was the term used by the Jews to describe Gentiles. For the most part, the churches established in Asia Minor in the apostolic age were established among Gentiles, and since Peter was the Apostle to the circumcision, not to the Gentiles, it seems unlikely that this Apostle would address his letters to a Gentile community.

Additionally, the circumstances that prompted the writing of this letter presumably involved suffering under persecution. We know from history that the persecution by the Roman Empire against Christians did not extend beyond the city of Rome until much later, toward the end of the first century and into the second century, with the persecutions of Diocletian and Domitian. Since the occasion of the letter was to comfort people in persecution, the critics say it could not have been written during the lifetime of Peter because Peter was martyred in Rome in A.D. 64. Peter and Paul were martyred, according to tradition, during the vicious persecution of Nero. Emperor Nero blamed the Christian community for the fire that wreaked havoc in the city of Rome, and many think the fire was set by Nero himself. Tradition holds that he played his fiddle while the city was burning. His fury against the Christians was, for the most part, confined to the city of Rome and did not reach into the provinces, particularly not as far out as the northern and western regions of Asia Minor.

Much of the content of 1 Peter sounds almost identical to the teachings of the Apostle Paul. We know from the book of Acts that Paul and Peter did not always see eye to eye, yet this epistle reads almost like a carbon copy of Paul's letters. That too has raised questions about whether this epistle was actually written by Peter or by someone associated with the Apostle Paul. It also reinforces the theory that the letter was actually written by Silvanus. That name, Silvanus, is just a longer version of the name Silas, and the only Silvanus or Silas that we know of

in the New Testament is Paul's companion on the missionary journeys. So, there are several reasons for which questions have been asked about the authenticity of the Petrine authorship.

Those who conclude that 1 Peter was not written by Peter, and then not until the end of the first century or into the second century, also assume that the epistle was not apostolic in origin but had its basis in the Gnostic literature of the second and third centuries.

As we seek to understand the authorship of a book in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, we must look at two things. We must look at the internal evidence and then at the external, historical evidence. The internal analysis includes an examination of the literary style, the level of Greek used. That notwithstanding in this case, the letter claims to have been written by the Apostle Peter.

This is where your view of Scripture virtually controls your interpretation of Scripture. If you think the Bible was errantly produced by authors without the supervision and superintendence of the Holy Spirit and therefore reflects diverse, even contradictory, theologies, that gives some license to compromise the internal claims of Scripture. However, if you come to the text already persuaded that it is the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, then God has to say only once that this letter was written by the Apostle Peter. The argument is settled. So, the most important internal evidence is the specific reference to Peter as the author of the epistle.

Concerning external testimony, the testimony of the early Christian church is universal and unanimous. This epistle was received in the very earliest times of Christian history, in the middle of the first century, as having come from Peter. That testimony is seconded by the greatest minds of the early centuries. It was affirmed by Irenaeus in his dispute against heresies, and by Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and the historian Eusebius. These are the most respected authorities outside of the Bible in the early centuries of Christendom. Not until the nineteenth century in the throes of higher criticism did anyone seriously suggest that the epistle was not written by the Apostle Peter. Both internal and external evidence agree that Peter the Apostle was the author.

What about the problem of the Greek language and the references to Silvanus at the end of the letter? Natives of Galilee in ancient Palestine were bilingual. They spoke Aramaic and Greek. Therefore, Greek was a native language of Peter's. Even though he had no formal schooling under Gamaliel, Hillel, or any rabbi in Jerusalem, he was certainly not unintelligent, and he was articulate, as we see in the record of his speeches, particularly on the day of Pentecost. The role of Silvanus in the production of this letter was, in all probability, that of an

amanuensis or secretary. The Apostle Paul customarily had a secretary to whom he dictated the substance of his message. We do not know what language he used to dictate it, but it was inscribed by the amanuensis in Greek. If Silvanus was Silas, he would have been capable of writing at a high level of the Greek language, and if he wrote the epistle under the supervision and even the dictation of the Apostle Peter, that would account for the eloquence of the Greek without denying Petrine authorship.

The final greetings of 1 Peter 5 were written from Babylon, which was biblical code in that day for Rome or Jerusalem, in this case almost certainly Rome, and the one giving greetings along with Silvanus is Mark. Mark was not an Apostle. He was part of the apostolic entourage. He had traveled with Paul on a missionary journey but was sent home following a dispute between Paul and Barnabas. We know from church history that John Mark became Peter's spokesman, and the apostolic authority that stands behind the Gospel of Mark is the authority of the Apostle Peter. So, the fact that Mark sends greetings here in this epistle is further evidence that the book was authored by Mark's principal mentor, the Apostle Peter.

To the best of our knowledge, the imperial persecutions against Christianity did not reach the outer parts of the Empire until late in the first century and early into the second century, long after Peter was martyred by being crucified upside down in Rome. However, local persecutions were constant in every decade and in every place, such as Paul suffered while on his missionary journeys in Asia Minor. People converted to Christianity in those areas constantly faced local hostility and persecution, which were keenly felt, even though not delivered by the sword of Rome.

As we noted, this epistle matches marvelously with the content of some of Paul's epistles, even though at one point Paul had opposed Peter over an issue concerning the Judaizers. That debate had been so significant that the Council of Jerusalem was called to settle the problem. The Apostle Paul had rebuked Peter publicly for falling away from the purity of the gospel by being seduced by the Judaizing heretics, but the issue was resolved long before the middle of the sixties. There is no reason to think that any ongoing dispute in perspective continued between Peter and Paul. Although Paul and Peter were separate men and had separate emphases in their ministries, they both wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and the message they communicated was the same gospel, the same ethic, the same truth. Therefore, to see striking similarities in their teaching content is exactly what we would expect from men writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Recipients of 1 Peter

Concerning the issue of the epistle being written to a Gentile audience, we can assume that Peter was not writing to Gentiles but to Jewish converts numbered among the Diaspora. Those were Jews who had fled from Jerusalem, expelled under the Emperor Claudius, and they had settled in little communities in Asia Minor. On Paul's missionary journeys he went to the synagogue in places such as Ephesus or the Galatian territories. Often the first converts were from the Jewish community. These Jewish Christians, members of the Diaspora, are addressed here as pilgrims or sojourners, a common label for Jews expelled from Israel, from the holy city, and living in a pagan environment that was not their sacred heritage. Jewish Christians living in a pagan community were pilgrims and sojourners in a foreign land. Therefore, the fact that this letter is addressed "to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" does not necessarily mean that it was addressed to Gentile converts in Asia Minor.

My wife, Vesta, and I were traveling from Hungary into Romania right after the breakup of the Soviet Union. We were warned about the great dangers of going across the border, as the border guards tended to be overtly hostile toward Americans. We were riding in an old train from Budapest to Cluj-Napoca in Romania, and we came to the border between Hungary and Romania. Two burly border guards got on the train where there were four of us: Vesta, me, and another couple. In gruff and broken English, the guard told us to empty our suitcases. Just as we were about to follow his command, their leader looked at our friend, who had her Bible in a brown paper bag on her lap. He grabbed the Bible from the bag and said in broken English, "You no Americans." We had our passports that identified us as Americans, but he questioned us about our citizenship. He pointed his finger at the Bible text and said, "Look what it say." *We are pilgrims and citizens of heaven.* He was a Christian. He turned to the other guards and said, "These people okay. Leave them alone." We made it through the checkpoint, but we experienced what it means to be pilgrims, sojourners, in a foreign land yet members of the kingdom of God and citizens of heaven.

The Gnostic Heresy

Finally, there is the argument that 1 Peter was written in the second century under the impetus of the Gnostic heresy. Although the concepts of Gnosticism are not found in the letter, the fact that it was written in the second century and named Peter as its author were grounds to consider that it was originally composed by one of the Gnostic heretics. We have seen products of ancient Gnosticism in recent years such as *The Da Vinci Code*, which features an

ossuary that supposedly contains the bones of Jesus. Scholars appeal to the *Gospel of Peter*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Gospel of Judas*, claiming these as extrabiblical proof of gnostic teachings.

The Gnostics took a variety of religions and philosophies and sought to blend them to produce a new religion or philosophy. There was Oriental dualism, Platonism, and elements of Neoplatonism, and they tried to bring in elements of Christianity. In their zeal to win converts, they targeted the early Christian community. The word *gnostic* comes from the Greek word *gnosis*, which is Greek for “knowledge.” When you get sick and go to the doctor, you are seeking a *diagnosis*. When the doctor explains that you will recover from the illness, he is giving you a *prognosis*. Prognosticators are those who think that they have knowledge of future events. The term *Gnosticism* is rooted in the Greek word for knowledge. Gnostics believed that truth was not discovered by reason, sense perception, or scientific inquiry, but only through direct mystical apprehension, and then only by an elite few.

The only way the Gnostics could seduce Christians to believe their heresy was to undermine the authority of the Apostles, so they suggested that the Apostles lacked the higher knowledge that only Gnostic practitioners could achieve. Many books have been written in the last several years about neo-Gnosticism, or New Age thinking, but there is nothing new about it.

Their strategy to undermine apostolic authority was somewhat ironic. They wrote their fanciful literature and tried to pass it off as apostolic by giving it titles such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Peter*, and the *Gospel of Judas*, but this literature denied the content of apostolic Christianity. This is why some critics say that, if 1 Peter was written later, Peter’s name was attached to it as a Gnostic ploy to undermine the actual New Testament canon.

I have no doubt that this letter was written by the Apostle Peter, one of the most fascinating characters of the New Testament. Peter the impetuous; Peter the bold; the one at Caesarea Philippi who made the great confession, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16); the big fisherman who gave his life being a fisher for men; the one who paradoxically refused to acquiesce to Jesus’ teaching immediately after the Caesarea Philippi confession, saying, “This shall not happen to You!” (v. 22). In a matter of minutes, Peter went from being the rock to being the spokesman of Satan; from the blessing that Jesus gave him, saying, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (v. 17) to a dreadful rebuke from the lips of Jesus (v. 23). This is the same Peter who said he would follow Jesus to the death, and when Jesus told him that he would deny Him three times, Peter protested with all his might, only to prove Jesus’ prophecy

accurately. This was the one who vacillated but nevertheless, over the course of the early church history, did become the rock, a leader who remained faithful to Jesus until his death.

It is ironic that Peter writes to those suffering persecution and tells them, as we will see, that they ought not to think it strange that they should have to suffer. He once had thought it impossible that this would be the course of Christianity, but as the years passed, he understood what Jesus had said about the cost of discipleship. Peter's intimate knowledge of persecution for the gospel comes across with a pastor's heart in this epistle.

Sprinkling of the Blood

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ (v. 2).

We do not have to wait to get to the doctrine of election; it is at the beginning of the epistle. He reminds his readers that, even though they are pilgrims and exposed to suffering, pain, and persecution, they ought not to forget who they are. They are the elect by the providence and eternal appointment of God.

When we talk about the work of redemption, we talk about it as a triune activity. There is the Father's work in election and His sovereign plan to save His people. That redemption is accomplished by Christ and applied to people's lives by the Holy Spirit. The Father sends the Son, the Son accomplishes the work, and that work is brought home to the lives of individuals through the intervention and the power of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit brings us to faith in Christ, He does not stop with the initial work of regeneration or rebirth; He is also the chief architect of our sanctification, of our being brought into conformity to Christ. All that is contained in this verse of introduction.

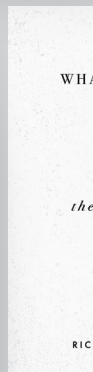
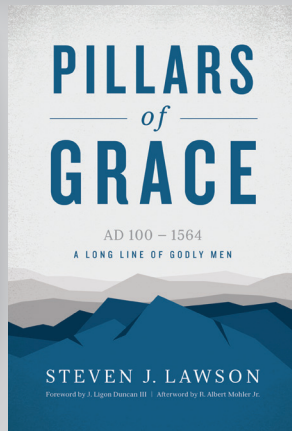
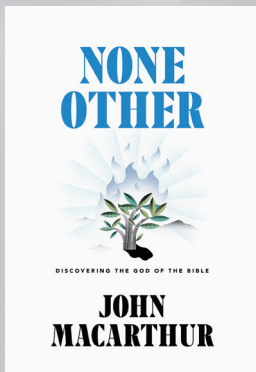
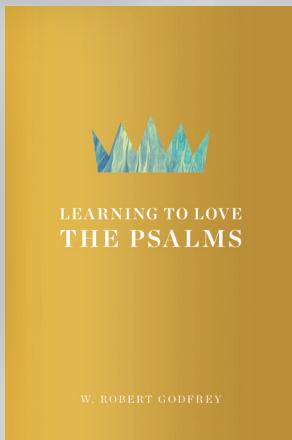
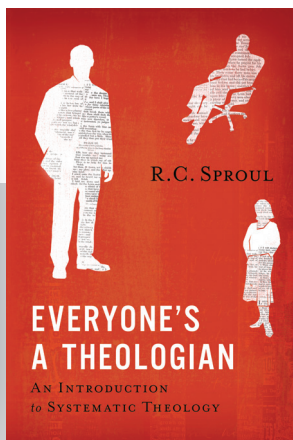
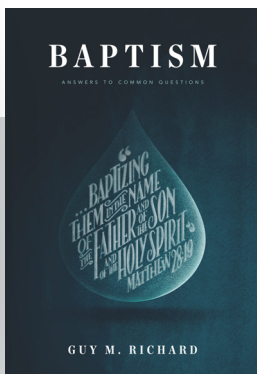
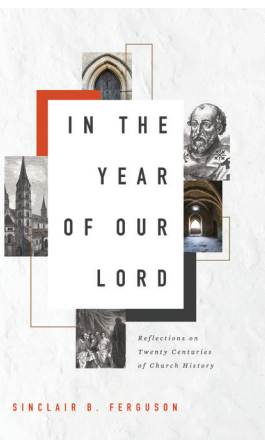
Peter uses an interesting image in verse 2 to speak of the work that Christ has accomplished for us: the sprinkling of His blood. We see in the New Testament that we are purchased by the blood of Christ and that Christ's blood has been poured out, but the *sprinkling* of Christ's blood is clearly a reference to the Old Testament. On the Day of Atonement, when reconciliation was made for the people of God, the blood of slain animals was taken by the high priest into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled on the mercy seat. That sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifices served as a blood covering on the throne of God. It was a symbol of the covering of our sins by the blood of the sacrifice. All the symbolism carried out on the Day of Atonement pointed beyond the Old Testament to the sacrifice that was made once for all in the atoning death of Jesus Christ, who effects our reconciliation by shedding His blood. When Jesus was on the cross, His blood was not sprinkled but poured out, yet the same principle is in view

here. What took place on the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament points to the accomplishment of our redemption by Jesus with the pouring out of His blood on the cross.

Grace to you and peace be multiplied (v. 2). “Grace and peace” was the usual greeting, and here Peter is asking that such grace and peace be multiplied to his readers, elect, sanctified, and reconciled by the grace of God, and who therefore have peace with God as a result of that reconciliation won for them by Jesus Christ. Peter is asking that this grace and peace would be multiplied—not just multiplied to other people, but in them—as the Apostle Paul said in Romans, from life to life, faith to faith, and grace to grace. We do not believe that the grace of justification can be augmented or diminished, but the grace of sanctification can be augmented or diminished, so the prayer of this Apostle with the heart of a pastor is that the grace of God would increase and multiply in their lives.

It is important to know, before we get to the body of the epistle, the heart’s desire of the author, the Apostle Peter, the one chosen by Christ to be an Apostle, who now bears witness to the ministry of Jesus in this epistle.

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R.C. Sproul was founder of Ligonier Ministries, founding pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla., and first president of Reformation Bible College. He was author of more than one hundred books, including The Holiness of God.



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