

# *Pursuing Holiness*

The Message of 1 Peter

Notes of prayer meeting addresses given by  
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# 1. *The Christian's special place in the love of God*

1 Peter 1:1-2

*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, <sup>2</sup>elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.*

13 September 2007

Peter was inspired to write this epistle to encourage Christians to persevere in the belief and profession of the truth, no matter what difficulties they might encounter.

He is speaking as a commissioned *apostle*, with the authority of God behind him, to those in different parts—*Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia*. Perhaps they were Jewish Christians, perhaps they were the Lord's people generally. Certainly, as this epistle is incorporated in the Bible, it is for all the Lord's people everywhere. *Strangers scattered abroad* is certainly a very apt description

of the Lord's people—they are pilgrims here, aliens now in this world to which they belonged by nature.

The apostle Peter is not hiding the difficulties they will encounter. He is not pretending things might not be as bad as they appear. They can expect to experience many difficulties simply because they are Christ's. But what is striking is the contrast between how they are in this world, and how they are seen in the light of their relationship with God. We can see from verse 2 that they are embraced in the favour of God.

Peter is bringing eternal things to their attention in order to encourage them to persevere. Like Paul, he was looking to the unseen and the eternal. That was why Paul didn't flag or faint. 'However much you are going to struggle,' Peter is saying to these believers, 'remember the place you have in the love and purpose of God, remember what you have experienced of his grace, and remember what he has done for you in the person of Christ.'

## **1. How they are described**

### ***Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father***

God the Father is the representative of the majesty of God. Christ represents his people, God the Father represents and maintains the prerogatives and rights of God. From God the Father the stream of salvation flows. Sinners are

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saved because God has chosen them, picked them out of the world, children of wrath and disobedient as they were by nature. They have no reason to look down on other people. They were just like everyone else, until God's mercy flowed down. They are saved only because he chose it. He has his reasons for everything, but his reasons are in himself, and not in us. He chose his people in his complete, free sovereignty. It was according to his mere good pleasure. The sovereignty of God is an absolute sovereignty.

Peter says they are elect *according to his foreknowledge*. This does not mean his omniscience. If God chose his people because he foresaw that they would believe, no one would have been chosen. They believe, not as the reason, but as the effect, of God choosing them. Rather, his foreknowledge is his fixing his attention on them. God knows everything, and God knows everyone, by omniscience. But this is the knowing of the love of his heart toward his people. As he says, 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.' So, Peter is saying to these elect ones, if you are scattered abroad, expecting trouble and persecution of all kinds, remember, God has chosen you.



**Through sanctification of the Spirit**

It is through the sanctification of the Spirit that God's gracious purpose is made effective, and God's people brought to Christ. The work of the Holy Spirit is just as essential to salvation as the work of the other persons of the Godhead. It is indispensable.

*Sanctification* can sometimes be taken in its broadest sense, meaning the whole of the Spirit's work of delivering sinners out of the state in which they were by nature, into the state of grace, and bringing them on into the state of glory. More commonly, 'sanctification' is understood as the work of the Spirit transforming and renewing the sinner, giving grace to battle against sin.

But sometimes the meaning of *sanctification* is even narrower. It refers to effectual calling—the Holy Spirit making the breach between what we were and what we are, creating life in the soul, so that the soul can respond to the overtures of the gospel. This is what it means here. What a precious work the Spirit engages in, when he convinces us of sin, and shows us something of the desirability of Christ!

Peter was writing to poor, outcast people, but they had within them the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God in them was uniting them to God who had chosen them and Christ who had died for them.

**To obedience**

The Holy Spirit brings the person who was the servant of sin to become obedient. They become obedient first of all to the gospel. This obedience consists in submitting to the terms of the gospel. 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he has sent.' They give the obedience of faith to the gospel of Christ in the first place. That is the order of God's dealings with his people.

Then, once faith is in existence, faith itself becomes productive of obedience. Faith is obedience, and faith promotes obedience. The apostle spoke of 'your work of faith and labour of love.'

**To sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ**

The *sprinkling of blood* is the application of it. The shedding of it is a God-ward act on the part of the Saviour. He offered himself to God, to make atonement for the sins of his people. The atonement was offered, and the atonement was accepted by God. But the atonement also has to be applied to the sinner. There has to be the application of the blood of atonement and its benefits. O to be under the shelter of the blood of Christ! 'God be propitious to me a sinner!' 'Take me under the shelter of the blood which was shed to make atonement for sin!'

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The Spirit of God applying the blood is reflected in the sinner coming under the shelter of the blood. This is the only place a sinner can find safety and security and hope.

The effect of the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ is the purging of the conscience. What gives peace to your conscience? Not the fact that you manage to shed a few tears. It is the blood of Jesus Christ that gives peace—that gives right of access to God—that opens up all the channels of grace to the soul.

The Holy Spirit brings this to be a reality in the experience of the Lord's people. It is obedience *and* sprinkling. These go together. It is new obedience, and true obedience, but it is never such that you can do without the sprinkling. The Lord's people are walking in the light, as he is in the light, *and* the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses them from all sin (1 John 1:7). Our fellowship with God is so broken by sin that even the most advanced Christian is dependent on the blood and the sprinkling of the blood.

What a wonderful thing it is therefore to be among those who have been delivered from the dominion of sin! They were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, they are saved by the Holy Spirit, brought by faith into union with Christ, and they have the blood of Christ and all its benefits applied to them.

## **2. How this gives encouragement**

These facts about the people of God give a foundation for hoping for the continuation and expansion of their experience of blessing. They give the encouragement and expectation that *grace and peace will be multiplied to them*.

*Grace* is the source that blessing comes from, and *peace* is the blessedness it results in. Peace with God, peace of conscience, peace of heart, peace of mind, peace with each other. However disrupted they may seem by external things, the Lord's people have grace and peace. And grace and peace will be *multiplied* to them. You will never get to the end of what's in the grace of God for you.

What a contrast the apostle points out! They were strangers scattered throughout an alien community, but grace and peace were multiplied to them. What a reason this is to encourage us to be filled with gratitude, and to persevere! 'Our light affliction worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen' (2 Corinthians 4:17–18).

The Lord's people should trace the experience they've had of grace back to the work of the Spirit, and then back to the election of God. Don't start with election—start where you are, whatever you've got. Whatever you've got, you didn't get it by yourself. You didn't get it by merit. You can't go

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direct to your election and discern that. You have to start where you are, poor, lost, ruined sinner, and with the streams of mercy flowing by, and Christ offered to you in the gospel. Christ is the elect Saviour—there is no secret about him and the fact that he is God’s elect. Christ is the mirror of election—your election is mirrored in Christ, when you receive Christ as he is freely offered in the gospel. Mercy is flowing down into the world, down to where we are. It is flowing past us in the gospel, and we are invited, and encouraged, and commanded to avail ourselves of the provision that has been made for salvation from our sins. But we mustn’t stop where we are. We have to trace it back to the electing love of God the Father.