

First Peter

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Introduction:

About Peter:

It is tempting to give an elaborate biographical sketch of Peter, but the scope of this study does not allow for it. We must limit ourselves to some introductory remarks about the author of this epistle.

Peter is generally known in the Bible as Simon Peter, Simon being his birth name and Peter (or Cephas) the name Jesus Christ gave to him. Simon means “hearer,” and Peter “rock.” Andrew, Peter’s brother, introduced him to Jesus. We read in John’s Gospel: “Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas’ (which, when translated, is Peter).”¹ Early in Peter’s training with Christ, Jesus assigned Peter to an important position among the Apostles. After asking the question: “Who do you say I am?” We read: “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’”²

The Easton’s Bible Dictionary states about Peter: “Simon was a Galilean, and he was that out and out...The Galileans had a marked character of their own. They had a reputation for an independence and energy which often ran out into turbulence. They were at the same time of a franker and more transparent disposition than their brethren in the south. In all these respects, in bluntness, impetuosity, headiness, and simplicity, Simon was a genuine Galilean. They spoke a peculiar dialect. They had a difficulty with the guttural sounds and some others, and their pronunciation was reckoned harsh in Judea. The Galilean accent stuck to Simon all through his career. It betrayed him as a follower of Christ when he stood within the judgment-hall (Mark 14:70). It betrayed his own nationality and that of those conjoined with him on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:7). It would seem that Simon was married before he became an apostle. His wife’s mother is referred to (Matt 8:14; Mark 1:30; Luke 4:38).”

Peter obviously lacked the refinement and scholarship of Paul. When he and John appeared before the Sanhedrin, we read: “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.”³ Both the lack of higher education and effect of intimate fellowship with Jesus, resulting in the fullness of the Holy Spirit in Peter’s life, are evident in this epistle.

About the Epistle

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia introduces Peter’s First Epistle with: “Simon Peter was a native of Galilee. He was brought to the Savior early in His ministry by his brother Andrew (John 1:40-41). His call to the office of apostle is recorded in Matt 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-16. He occupied a distinguished place among the Lord’s disciples. In the four lists of the apostles found in the New Testament his name stands first (Matt 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13). He is the chief figure in the first twelve chapters of the Acts. It is Peter that preaches the first Christian sermon (Acts 2), he that opens the

1. John 1:40-42
2. Matt. 16:15-19
3. Acts 4:13

door of the gospel to the gentile world in the house of the Roman soldier, Cornelius, and has the exquisite delight of witnessing scenes closely akin to those of Pentecost at Jerusalem (Acts 10:44-47). It was given him to pronounce the solemn sentence on the guilty pair, Ananias and Sapphira, and to rebuke in the power of the Spirit the profane Simon Magus (Acts 5:1-11; 8:18-23). In these and the like instances Peter exhibited the authority with which Christ had invested him (Matt 16:19) - an authority bestowed upon all the disciples (John 20:22-23) - the power to bind and to loose.”

According to *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* the Epistle was written about 64 AD, at the time when persecutions under the infamous Nero were raging, at which time also the apostle himself bore his witness and went to his heavenly home, even as his Master had forewarned him (John 21:18-19).

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary gives the following outline of First Peter:

- Part One: The Salvation of the Believer (1:1—2:12)
 - I. Salutation 1:1-2
 - II. Salvation of the Believer 1:3-12
 - A. Hope for the Future 1:3-4
 - B. Trials for the Present 1:5-9
 - C. Anticipation in the Past 1:10-12
 - III. Sanctification of the Believer 1:13—2:12
 - A. "Be Holy" 1:13-21
 - B. "Love One Another" 1:22-25
 - C. "Desire the Pure Milk of the Word" 2:1-3
 - D. "Offer Up Spiritual Sacrifices" 2:4-10
 - E. "Abstain from Fleshly Lusters" 2:11-12
- Part Two: The Submission of the Believer (2:13—3:12)
 - I. Submission to the Government 2:13-17
 - II. Submission in Business 2:18-25
 - III. Submission in Marriage 3:1-8
 - IV. Submission in All of Life 3:9-12
- Part Three: The Suffering of the Believer (3:13—5:14)
 - I. Conduct in Suffering 3:13-17
 - II. Christ's Example of Suffering 3:18—4:6
 - III. Commands in Suffering 4:7-19
 - IV. Minister in Suffering 5:1-9
 - A. Elders, Shepherd the Flock 5:1-4
 - B. Saints, Humble Yourselves 5:5-9
 - V. Benediction 5:10-14

The Text:

Part One: The Salvation of the Believer (1:1—2:12)

- I. Salutation 1:1-2

1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, 2 who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

In introductions like these, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,” the emphasis is always on the call of God. Much work is done for the Lord that has never occurred in the mind of God. Jesus says: “Every plant

that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots.”¹ It takes victory over self to come to the decision only to do that which God clearly wants us to do.

There is a reference to Israel’s captivity in v.1. As a matter of fact, some of the recipients of this epistle may have been the offspring of Jews who were taken to Assyria or Babylonia and never returned to Canaan. The word “strangers” also occurs in v.17. This emphasizes the fact that this world is not our home. We are citizens of heaven. As the Apostle Paul states: “Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.”² The Epistle to the Hebrews considers this statement to be a confession of faith. We read: “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.”³ It is part of our life of faith. If we confess in word and deed to be aliens on earth, we demonstrate that our expectation is a heavenly city which God has prepared for us. The life story of Abraham and Lot provides the best illustration of this point. The difference is not in having earthly possessions or being poor but in the way we treat our possessions. This shows itself in the way we leave them behind. The Apostle Paul puts it this way: “What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.”⁴

Election: Peter says about the recipients of his epistle that they are the elect, strangers, scattered, chosen for the purpose of sanctification and obedience. Added to this he mentions the foreknowledge of God the Father, the work of the Holy Spirit and the blood of Jesus Christ. Each of these terms and concepts has filled innumerable volumes of theological books. Whole systems of theology have been built upon them. Yet no one has ever been able to penetrate to the core of the mysteries involved. The main problem being that we cannot conceive of eternity, other than from the perspective of time, which is the dimension in which we live. We can grasp the meaning of being strangers and being scattered. We have some idea what sanctification and obedience mean, but the fact that God bases His election of us on His foreknowledge is what we cannot fit into the fact that we are human beings with a capacity to choose. Because time is the entity in which we live and the only thing we know, we cannot imagine what it means to live outside of time, that is in eternity. Because for God there is no past, present and future, “foreknowledge” is a term we use for His omniscience, His everlasting knowledge that knew, knows, and will know. I suppose we will understand more of the mystery when we leave time and enter eternity ourselves. For the present may it suffice that we understand that our salvation in time is anchored in eternity. Both God’s election and His foreknowledge are related to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, to our obedience, and to the sprinkling by the blood of Jesus. These three things are enclosed in God’s plan for our life and for this purpose we were chosen.

Sanctification by the Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit separates us from sin and sets us apart for fellowship with God. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance for us to be filled with the Holy Spirit if we desire fellowship with God.

Obedience: Obedience is our share in the matter. From the fact that Jesus had to learn obedience, we deduct that we must not only obey because we are sinners, but because it is fundamental to our relationship with God. Obedience does not primarily mean that we do not sin, but that we surrender our right to self-determination. It means giving up our position of independence and becoming dependant upon God for everything. It is a matter of the will. “Not my will, but your will!”

Sprinkling by the blood of Christ: Sprinkling by the blood of Christ in this context does not pertain to the forgiveness of our sins through which we have become a child of God. It is being sprinkled as a daily

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1. Matt. 15:13
 2. Phil. 3:20
 3. Heb. 11:13
 4. I Cor. 7:29-31

experience. It means seeing ourselves from moment to moment in the presence of God by which our sense of guilt is lifted and our conscience is cleansed of thoughts and motives that tend to make our relationship with God murky.

II. Salvation of the Believer 1:3-12

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

A. Hope for the Future

There are probably no words that are easier to overlook than “Praise God.” Praising God is the most important task we have in life. It is the first of all commandments. Genuine praise finds its motivation in the character of God. The discovery of who God is will in itself be sufficient to make our heart overflow with praise throughout eternity. Yet, as faith demonstrates itself in good deeds, so God’s majesty demonstrates itself in the redemption of man. As God’s redeemed children we ought to let an uninterrupted stream of praise mount from our hearts to Him who is the source of all life. A lack of thankfulness will make our soul dry up.

Peter’s heart is filled with awe about the fact that God has given us new life through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This new life, this regeneration is based on two things: God’s mercy and Jesus’ resurrection. The first is God’s compassion, the love that drove Him to save. The second is the hard fact, the legal basis for His compassion. God’s love is unchangeable, unlike our human love that is subject to change. But the fact that Jesus rose from the dead can never be undone by the fluctuation of our human emotions. Since God bases the renewal of our life upon this fact our soul has every reason to rest upon it also.

Because our new life originates in the fact of Jesus’ resurrection, it receives all its characteristics from that fact. It is life out of death; it is life that is stronger than death; it is life that can no longer be undone by death. This life is described with the words “living hope.”

It is not that God has promised us life and that we may hope to receive it; that life itself is our hope. The life God has given us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ helps us to look up and forward, in the firm expectation that the seed of salvation God has planted within us will grow up to the full revelation of fruition.

4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you

V.4 describes the content of our hope and of our life: a heavenly inheritance. Peter uses three adjectives to depict the eternal character of our future possession: “incorruptible,” “undefiled,” “unfading.”¹ “Incorruptible” contrasts this inheritance with all other earthly possessions, which sooner or later will fall victim to decay. “Undefiled” surpasses the understanding of our corrupted mind of God’s perfect gift to us. It is perfect; it has no hidden clauses; it is not issued by mixed motives. “Unfading” is a term borrowed from plant life. It reminds us of the youthful freshness of a flower. There is eternal youth in the inheritance that awaits us.

B. Trials for the Present 1:5-9

5 who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

1. Darby Translation

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

7 These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Being shielded does not refer to the inheritance but to the heirs. The inheritance cannot be lost, but the heirs are weak and unstable humans who cannot make it on their own steam. That is why God shields us by faith. We can be absolutely sure that God will see us through all circumstances and that He will keep us from stumbling. That is a promise which we may claim by faith. “Salvation” in this verse is the completion of our salvation that will be revealed at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not merely the salvation of our souls which is received upon repentance and confession of sin. It is not even the renewal of our spirit by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is the completion Paul had in mind when he wrote: “we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”¹ Hope of the resurrection must be the source of all our joy. Without that hope it would be impossible for us to keep going in life. Even Jesus could not take up His cross without the vision of the joy that was ahead of Him. As the author of Hebrews states: “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”²

This strange mixture of joy and grief is characteristic for the life of a child of God. We are all subject to “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,” but there is in the experience of every loss and hardship an undercurrent of joy that keeps us from despair.

God allows this blend of sweet and bitter to refine our faith by testing it. God has chosen faith as the means of our salvation, because there is no greater stimulus for the human character than faith. But faith needs a place to fix its hope on. In the words of the author of Hebrews: “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf.”³ If the rope that is thrown to a drowning man is not attached to a point of strong support on the other side, the man will drown with the rope in his hand. Faith is an anchor fixed upon the throne of God; that is, it is anchored in God Himself. God’s intent is not merely to bring souls into heaven. God wants us as individuals, not as part of a mass of humanity. He wants our personality, our spiritual character and our gifts to be fully developed. That is the precious part that will be exposed as being to the praise and glory of God at the revelation of Jesus Christ. The fact that these things wait for the revelation of the Lord Jesus means that the matter of fellowship with God and growing in the faith at present is a hidden form of communion with God. It is in stillness and solitude with Christ that we discover the secret and that faith becomes predominant in our daily life.

In v.8 Peter mentions joy for the second time in his epistle. This joy is an experience that surpasses all that is conceivable. Peter calls it “an inexpressible and glorious joy.” The word “glorious” sets it apart from all other joy we can experience on earth. As the Apostle Paul says: “For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory.”⁴

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1. Rom. 8:23
 2. Heb. 12:2
 3. Heb. 6:19,20
 4. II Cor. 3:10

The reason for this inexpressible and glorious joy is the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our love for Him whose face we never saw fills our heart with joy. The goal of faith is “the salvation of your souls.” The Greek word, rendered “salvation” is *soteria*, which also means “health.” It stands for a complete renewal and restoration, not merely to a return of a previous condition. That is, in fact, God’s purpose for our life.

People who have always been filled with their own selfishness and who only loved themselves, come to the point where Jesus not only occupies the first place but becomes the fullness of their life. As the Apostle Paul exclaims: “When Christ, *who is your life*, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”¹

C. Anticipation in the Past 1:10-12

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care,

11 trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

In these verses Peter gives us in a nutshell the content of all Old Testament prophecy. We will read the Old Testament in a different way when we realize that it speaks “of the grace that was to come to [us].” The context clarifies that this is particularly true about those sections that deal with the suffering and glory of our Lord. There is something overwhelming and glorious in the realization that we are the recipients of a mystery and a blessing that occupied the prophets for centuries. They served us who heard and received the Gospel. And the Gospel is for humans, not for angels! We are the heirs of things of which angels can only dream. As redeemed human beings we are set above the angels. “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”²

III. Sanctification of the Believer 1:13—2:12

A. "Be Holy" 1:13-21

13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.

15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;

16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers,

19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

1. Col. 3:4

2. Heb. 1:14

An undisciplined mind is a serious stumbling block in our spiritual life. *The New King James Version* reads v.13 – “gird up the loins of your mind.” As in Biblical times a loose hanging garment would hinder movement, so we must put restriction upon our brain. Even better, we must realize that our intellect has its limitations. Intelligence in itself is no hindrance to spirituality. But if we begin to imagine that our mind is the infallible measuring rod with which we can judge all things, we become a hindrance to ourselves. We must be sober-minded. The Greek word rendered “self-controlled” is *nepho*, which literally means “to abstain from wine.” The girded mind is sober, cool and businesslike, able to look objectively at reality.

Peter says: “Set your hope fully on the grace.” The context shows that being sober and objective creates the necessary ambiance for putting our trust completely in God. Faith in God’s grace is nothing but a logical conclusion of a rational deduction. C. S. Lewis says that he planned to be an atheist, but he found himself unable to refute the facts of Christianity. A lack of faith is created by a lack of sobriety and an inflated concept of one’s mental abilities.

In v.14 Peter suggests that evil desires are fed upon ignorance. Ignorance is more than lack of knowledge; it is foolishness and spiritual illiteracy. It is interesting to observe how rationally Peter speaks about conversion and sanctification. Our egoism and our self-will feed upon the fact that we are cut off from the life of Him whom to know is the beginning of wisdom. He who enjoys fellowship with the Lord has no unsatisfied desires.

Peter says: “Be holy in all you do.” There exists much confusion about the subject of holiness. Some people believe that holy persons have no weaknesses and that they cannot stumble or fall. Holiness is related to the presence of God. Sanctification is no mechanical process, but a surrender of our will, our mind and our emotions to the person of Jesus Christ. “Be holy, because I am holy” is more than a command; it is a statement that declares that we can become holy because God is holy. Holiness is a matter of personal contact with God. “We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”¹ Popular belief states that good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell. Paul, however, states that “the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.”² Some people conclude from that statement that since righteousness is not a matter of being good but of faith, it does not matter what we do, only what we believe. God’s purpose in declaring us righteous, however, is holiness of life. How, otherwise, would we have a testimony toward those who do not know God? It is true that good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell! But “goodness” is the result of God’s work in our life. As the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says: “without holiness no one will see the Lord.”³

The reverent fear we must demonstrate in the way we live and the confidence we may possess are based on the certainty that God’s demands are not impossible to meet. We can be holy because we have been purchased for that purpose.

Peter proceeds to explain the difference between the liberty that was purchased for us in Christ and the liberation of slaves. The image is of a person who wants to buy a slave for the purpose of setting him or her free. Such an act of compassion could be costly. Although the image will speak less to us in modern society, we understand how appropriate the illustration is and how well it illustrates what Christ did for us. Silver and gold were the most valuable items that existed at that time. They are here pushed aside as being “perishable things.” The concepts of slavery and expressions like “the empty way of life,” that is life without fellowship with God, remind us of the philosophy of *The Book of Ecclesiastes*. The fact that freedom has been purchased for us indicates that we have the right to be free. Satan has no claim upon us when we acknowledge that we are bought by Jesus.

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1. I John 3:2
 2. Rom. 4:5
 3. Heb.12:14^b

“The precious blood of Christ.” If we think that it is easy to become a Christian, almost too easy, it helps to remember the price God paid for us. The blood of Jesus Christ is so precious and costly that it outweighs all else that has any value on earth. By calling it “precious” Peter confesses himself to be a sinner. He could not have known how valuable Jesus’ blood was unless he had gone through the experience of confessing his sin and receiving pardon. It is the power of the blood that cleanses our conscience that determines the value.

Christ is called “a lamb without blemish or defect.” For a Jew the image clearly referred to the ritual temple sacrifices. One could write volumes about the concept of “the Lamb of God.” When Jesus Christ is called “a lamb” it refers, first of all, to His death for our sake. Jesus’ death was foreshadowed in the Easter lamb that was sacrificed in Egypt to protect God’s people from the angel of death that killed Egypt’s firstborn. It is preserved in the Passover celebration.¹ But the image also speaks of the mentality with which Jesus went through His suffering and death. The prophet Isaiah states twice “he did not open his mouth.” We read: “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”² Jesus’ blood is characterized by this spirit of loveliness, meekness and patience, as well as of perfection and holiness. Those are the characteristics of the life of Christ; life is in the blood. That is the life that makes us alive and purchases our freedom.

In v.20 we touch upon concepts that are for us the incomprehensible marvel of God’s plan of salvation. God has existed eternally in these three Persons: the Father, the Lamb and the Holy Spirit. Jesus being the Lamb of God reveals one of the divine attributes. It ought to be self-explanatory for us when we understand that our bondage and sin must lose their power, that is our sin, that particular perversion in our life. Our salvation from sin is no simple incident, but an essential part of God’s eternity. The revelation of this overwhelming secret of eternity is for us, for me! God had my salvation in mind long before He created the world.

V.21 indicates that that which brings the mystery within our reach and makes it a personal experience is faith. Trust in Jesus Christ helps us to understand some of the marvel that the eternal God partook in time and space and became part of history. He lived and died. Peter does not go into detail but dying must precede resurrection.

God glorified His Son; our faith, therefore, is also hope of glory. There would be no reason for us to have hope if His glory would not be our glory also. It is wonderful to discover that faith and hope are identical.

B. "Love One Another" 1:22-25

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

24 For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall,

25 but the word of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: “The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”³ The goal of all search for holiness is love, not holiness

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1. See Ex. Chapter 12 and I Cor. 5:7.
 2. Isa. 53:7
 3. I Tim. 1:5

itself. Impurity of heart will be an obstacle to love. The road to cleansing is obedience. If we obey what God commands us in the Bible sin will become powerless in us, and the way to love will be open.

We could ask why Peter adds to this another recommendation to “love one another deeply.” It is true that many of the opportunities God gives us when He makes us a new creation remain unused. This is also true of brotherly love. Holy people are no robots. The important thing is not that the road is open but that we take that road. Love is a choice. We must want to love one another.

It is important that we realize what it means to be born again and that we have become a new creation in Christ. If we keep on focusing on our feelings, if we want to experience holiness, the new creation will have little power within us. But if we lean upon the Word of God, and we make our feelings subservient to that Word, the results will be glorious. We are born again by the Word of God. This means that just as heaven and earth came into existence by the Word of God, so the Word that we read renews our life. This comes by faith; if we do not put our trust in God and His Word nothing will happen.

The emphasis in vv.24 and 25 is upon the eternal character of God’s Word. The living and enduring Word of God entered this transient and fluctuating world. We must realize what this means. On the one side we have this uncertain, fragile life of ours, this life that can be crushed or taken away without any previous notice. On the other hand is the eternal, unchanging Word of Him who thrones far above the universe and He gives us the promise: “The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”¹

We do well, to begin with, to understand that “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall” and that, in accordance with this we cease to ascribe such high worth to things that perish tomorrow. How much greater glory then it will be when we understand and believe that the Word of God and those who obey it will be there throughout eternity! That means victorious living!

C. "Desire the Pure Milk of the Word"²:1-3

***1 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.
2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,
3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.***

An unbeliever cannot rid himself of sin because it is rooted in his heart. As a child of God, however, we have been freed from the power of sin. As soon as we enter into a life of fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ, sin loses its power over us. Those tendencies to keep on sinning are cut off from their root; they are henceforth on the outside and we are under no obligation to obey them. In the words of the Apostle Paul: “Sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”² This does not mean that we will not commit sin or that sin does not matter anymore, but that we have the possibility to rid ourselves of it. Those things that spoil our life such as malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander, we can simply put aside. Ridding ourselves of sin means, first of all, confessing sin, not as weakness but as sin. Secondly, it means believing that the Lord Jesus Christ overcomes sin in us.

A baby’s craving for its mother’s milk is not a matter of loving delicacies; it is natural. It is just as natural for us to feel the urge of delving into the Bible because of the new life within us as God’s child. Reading, studying and assimilating the Word of God is the most essential part of our spiritual life. There will be no sign of spiritual growth unless our spirit is stimulated, formed and built up by this Word. We will reach no spiritual maturity and resistance against the devil’s temptations without being grounded in the Word of God.

1. I John 2:17

2. Rom. 6:14

“Now that you have tasted that the Lord is good” is an indirect quotation from one of the Psalms. David wrote: “Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.”¹ It is normal to be longing for more once we receive a taste of God’s love for us. At the moment of my conversion a sense of joy flooded my soul as I had never experienced before. This was so real that I never lost the taste. Even when the joy ebbed away a few days later and life seemed to turn against me, I knew that God had done something for me. That is what Peter means here. Once you taste it you always want more.

Tasted what? That the Lord is good! Our greatest problem in prayer is often that we do not believe and acknowledge wholeheartedly that God is good and that He wants to give good gifts to His children. The keyword in these verses is “crave.”

D. "Offer Up Spiritual Sacrifices"2:4-10

***4 As you come to him, the living Stone — rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—
5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.***

6 For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,"

8 and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message — which is also what they were destined for.

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

The Living Stone is Jesus. The word “stone” stands here for the whole foundation. As such the Apostle Paul uses it in the verses: “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”² And: “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but 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.”³ It may be helpful for us to say to ourselves slowly and emphatically: “Jesus Christ is the foundation of my life!”

That which man has rejected, God has chosen. How is it possible that we do not understand, that our insight and judgment about such essentials is so far from the mark! It is obvious that God does not make mistakes. We not only differ in opinion with God, we even dare to reject what God has chosen. We ought to ask God to save us from the illusion that our own insight would be sufficient to understand the divine mysteries and pray that we will see things as God sees them.

God will not use us as living stones in His building without our consent. The Greek verb *oikodomeisthe* is in the passive imperative, meaning that it is being done to us but also that we must obey the command. We cannot confess that Jesus Christ is the foundation of our life and then live our life in according to our own will. When a stone is put in place it is meant to remain in the place in which it was put. This does not mean that God violates our personality or that He limits our freedom. We are, in fact, only free as we are a stone in God’s wall. Our freedom is not in ourselves but in Christ. After all, we are not dead stones but living ones.

The fact that God fits us into His wall also determines our relationship with others. Maybe God did not make a mistake when He paired us up with someone with whom we cannot get along. Much of our joy of

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1. Ps. 34:8
 2. I Cor. 3:11
 3. Eph. 2:19,20

fellowship will depend upon our vision. If we can only see the stones around us, which is what the devil wants us to see, our lives will bear the marks of a stiff and stale kind of Christianity. If we keep our eye on the house and on its purpose, we will have the experience that “the glory of the LORD fills His temple.”¹

God’s purpose is that we will become “a royal priesthood.” These images open up for us the whole of the Old Testament. Israel had been called to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”² They were to stand between God and the rest of the world as priests. In the whole ceremony of the consecration of a priest we see the complete picture of our redemption and sanctification in Jesus Christ.³ We tend to put the emphasis in this more upon our representation of mankind before God, than upon our speaking for God to mankind. The emphasis in Exodus Chapter Twenty-eight is quite different. Priests are there, first of all, for God’s sake, not for man’s. More than man needing God’s redemption, God needs man to proclaim His redeeming love.

In the Old Testament every sacrifice foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. His sacrifice was the fulfillment of all the offerings brought in the old dispensation. It is also the fulfillment of our sacrifice. God does not want us to give up our body to be burned in a literal sense or that we would throw all our possessions in the fire. He wants spiritual sacrifices, meaning the surrender of ourselves to Him. It means detaching ourselves from who we are and what we have. This does not mean that we become acceptable to God because we give ourselves. Our surrender in itself does not make us acceptable. We are only “acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” It is not our sacrificial spirit or our act of surrender in itself that has value. It is only precious if it is in answer to Jesus’ death in our behalf.

V.6 “the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame” is one of the great verses in the Bible. We believe that faith puts us at risk, as if God is the most unreliable basis to build our life on. We tend to believe that any human being would give us a more solid assurance. It is only if our eyes are open to the reality of God, that faith provides the strongest possible foundation. “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”⁴ *The King James Version* gives an even more powerful rendering: “faith is the substance of things hoped for.” God’s promises are overwhelmingly sure and great. Sometimes God answers our prayers immediately; sometimes our circumstances worsen before they get better. But if we trust Him, we will never be put to shame. If we cannot trust Him who runs the universe, what hope would we have!

Peter calls God’s stone “precious” and precious it is! The life that is revealed when we simply put our trust in the Lord is the most precious that exists. Life becomes a precious secret, hidden in our heart, if we live it with God.

But for the unbeliever...! There is no third choice. We either trust God, with all the glorious consequences of it, or we make a fatal miscalculation, which causes us to stumble, fall and perish.

Mind the climax in these verses. The builders reject the stone. In their opinion He does not fit. They act upon their own human insight. They are wrong. That is how it starts: they miscalculate. But then they hurt themselves on the stone as a result of disobeying the Word of God. Ultimately, the stone becomes to them a stumbling block.

With the words “But you” in v.9, Peter turns from the unbelief in the previous verses. Those who let themselves be saved by Jesus Christ deal with faith, not with unbelief. Peter calls the body of believers in Jesus Christ “a chosen people.” As God had chosen Israel for the purpose of revealing Himself through them to the world, so He has now chosen the church as the body in which His Spirit can dwell. In the “royal priesthood” the tribes of Judah and Levi are combined. In the Old Testament the two offices were separated.

1. See I Kings 8:11.

2. Ex. 19:6

3. See Ex. Chapters 28 and 29.

4. Heb. 11:1

In Jesus Christ they are combined. The word “royal,” as applied to us, suggests high birth. We received our royal blood through our unity with Jesus Christ. His life is in us.

As “a holy nation” we are God’s property. We are holy because we belong to God. The Greek word translated “holy” is *hagios*, which according to *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*, can mean “set apart for God, to be, as it were, exclusively his.” A nation is holy if its members are holy. Personal holiness will result in collective holiness if we are God’s possession. This fact is not only a stimulus for living a clean life, it is also the cause of it. Holiness does not mean only the absence of sin, it means the presence of God’s glory. Our task is to “declare the praises of Him...” It is our mission in this world to testify and demonstrate what God has done for us. Jesus said to the man who had been demon possessed: “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”¹ We all, who by God’s grace, have been called “out of darkness into his wonderful light” have enough things to boast about for the rest of our life.

V.10 makes reference to the first two chapters of *The Book of Hosea*. Hosea’s children were given the names Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ammi. Especially Lo-Ruhamah (no mercy) and Lo-Ammi (not My people) are envisioned here. The names of these children symbolized God’s attitude toward the sins of the kingdom of Israel. But at the end of the second chapter of Hosea, Lo-Ruhamah is called Ruhamah (mercy) and Lo-Ammi becomes Ammi (My people). God has shown mercy to us and has adopted us as His people. This mercy is evinced in God stretching out His arms toward us and embracing us. That is what He does.

E. "Abstain from Fleshly Lusts"2:11-12

11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

To be aliens and strangers does not only mean that we do not get attached to our place in this world and to our possessions, but especially that we remain strangers to the mentality of this world. “Sinful desires” are the desires that lead us to things we would like to have, not through our fellowship with God, but because of our egoism. These desires war against our soul because they undermine fellowship with God. If our communion with God is real and pure it will not escape the scrutiny of the critical eye of the world around us. People who do not know God have a keen understanding of the way a Christian ought to behave. They know to separate genuine faith from counterfeit.

The accusations of the pagans were probably geared to Christians who did not involve themselves in the emperor worship. They were, therefore, branded as anti-social. That being the case, the day of God’s visit probably refers to the fall of the Roman Empire. That is the day that revealed that those who had put their trust in the things of this world had betted on the wrong horse.

Part Two: The Submission of the Believer (2:13—3:12)

I. Submission to the Government2:13-17

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority,

14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

15 For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.

16 Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.

1. Mark 5:19

17 Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

Submitting ourselves to human authority “for the Lord’s sake” demonstrates great faith in God’s omnipotence and victory. We will only be able to submit to the restrictions such submission lays on us if the Lord has His hand upon our life. Waiting for the Lord and submitting are proof of fellowship with God. Our obedience to God will demonstrate itself in submission to those who are over us. If we cannot obey human authority, we will also find ourselves unable to obey God.

Although Roman law has been world-famous and the judicial system in the Roman Empire must have worked smoothly, we know from Biblical records that some Roman judges were corrupt and could be bribed. There may, therefore, be a note of irony in Peter’s remarks here.

We are not always aware of the fact that God wants our lives to be a testimony of His character. We live in an evil world but evil’s victory in the world is not complete, nor is it lasting. Having to stand up against prejudice and slander of fellowmen can be a horrible experience. As long as we find ourselves dependent upon other human beings we will try to argue with them and try to convince them of our innocence. But as soon as we see ourselves only dependent upon God, we know that we can only convince others by allowing the life of Jesus Christ to flow through us.

It is important that we free ourselves from the tendency to please people. As servants of God we are really free from social pressure and even pressure laid upon us by economic disadvantage. But in these verses Peter points to the danger such freedom brings with it. Our spiritual freedom is related to our being inwardly bound to Jesus Christ. Without an intimate relationship with God there is no freedom. If we pretend to be free without being enslaved to the Lord we expose ourselves to all kinds of dangers.

“Show proper respect to everyone,” reads literally in Greek: “Honor all men.” The Greek word is the same as in “honor the king.” That is a profound advice. We may not deride a human being who is created by God. To love the brotherhood does not mean that we must love a particular church or denomination but that we love all who are born again in Jesus Christ. We fear God if we recognize His omnipotence. We know that nothing and nobody will be able to harm us without God’s permission. “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”¹ But also: “If God is for us, who can be against us?”²

V.17 orders us to “honor the king.” It is not up to us to judge God’s ways. Jesus said to Pilate: “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”³ It is important for us to recognize every human authority over us as coming from God. It may be difficult for us to submit to human authority. But that is the touchstone for our submission to God’s.

II. Submission in Business 2:18-25

18 Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.

19 For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.

20 But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."

23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

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1. Heb. 10:31
 2. Rom. 8:31
 3. John 19:11

24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

25 For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Evidently, Peter had no intention to change the social conditions of his time. The idea that we must bring all facets of society under the dominion of Christ does not originate with Peter. The general tendency of that time seems to have been to consider every existing circumstance as being the will of God. When Peter admonishes slaves to submit to their masters, he does not take their position in life into account. It makes no difference whether their masters were good or bad. What matters is the will of God.

Peter proceeds to express a philosophy of life that is completely contrary to all human thinking. The Greek word, rendered “commendable” is *charis*, which can be rendered “grace.” The most natural reaction to suffering is to oppose it. In case suffering is unavoidable we tend to resign ourselves to it. To consider our suffering to be part of God’s grace is unusual. This is only possible if our suffering finds its base in our fellowship with God. Not all suffering is, of course, grace. There is suffering that Christ took upon Himself in our stead. God does not want us to suffer under sin or sickness. But the kinds of suffering Jesus suffered because of His love for the Father is the kind that will be ours if we take our life with the Lord earnestly. In that respect Christ is our paradigm.

There is some irony in the question: “But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it?” Yet, there is misunderstanding on this point, even among mature Christians. There is suffering that is our own fault. That kind of affliction has nothing to do with experiences that draw us closer to the Lord. We understand that “grace” has, of course, nothing to do with suffering itself. Our misery and pain is no source of pleasure to God. There is a sense in which suffering and grace are irreconcilable opposites. The preciousness is in the contrast. Suffering can become precious because we meet God in it. That is the “grace” part of it.

We are called to live as Jesus lived. We must adopt His attitude toward suffering that other people cause us. This is only possible if we have Christ’s life in us, and if we have the same relationship with the Father He had. “Because Christ suffered for you” opens for us the way to renewal of our life through the forgiveness of our sins. Without Christ’s suffering for us it would be impossible for us to follow this call. Christ’s suffering is, in the first place, reconciliatory and then exemplary. He gives us a model to be followed. This does not mean that we ought to seek suffering. We must only put our feet in the imprints His feet left for us. This guidance will involve all of our life, not just the moments of suffering. David sang: “My steps have held to your paths; my feet have not slipped.”¹

In vv.22 and 23 Peter gives us a moving description of Jesus’ suffering in our behalf. Meditating upon Jesus’ suffering will always overwhelm us.

“He committed no sin.” As long as we are upon this earth we will never be able to understand what it means to lead a life that is not ruined and twisted by sin.

“No deceit was found in his mouth.” We live in a world in which deceit comes to us from every direction. The whole advertising world is based upon the principles of deception. Articles are shown to us that will make us look younger, save our life, or meet our emotional needs, not for the purpose of helping us, but to get from us whatever money we have in our pockets. Even hiding ourselves in the jungles of Indonesia did not protect us from this devilish propaganda. No deception was ever found in Jesus and even now we will not be able to find any deceit in Him. Forgiving of sin, renewal of life and filling with the Holy Spirit are not things that need an advertising agency. They are the genuine articles.

V.23 reveals the secret of Jesus’ attitude in suffering: “He entrusted himself to him who judges justly.” A. W. Tozer said: “He who defends himself, only has himself for defense.” If we have really

1. Ps. 17:5

surrendered ourselves and our circumstances to God, God will be our defense and our defender. David testified: “But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head.”¹

V.24 speaks of the suffering of Christ in which we cannot follow Him. His suffering on the cross was unique. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.” We must not let this wonderful statement become so familiar to us that it ceases to speak to us. Praise the Lord, He suffered for me! With Paul, Peter preaches our identification with the crucified Lord. The Apostle Paul states that we ought to “count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”²

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”³ The blessing comes to us in that order. First there is the atonement of our sins because Jesus put those on the cross. That leads us to earnestly seek identification with Jesus’ death and resurrection. And when we become conscious of the fact that His life is at work in us, we experience the stream of cleansing and healing of life. As in Ezekiel’s vision, “Where the river flows everything will live.”⁴ By His wounds!

V.25 completes the quotation from Isaiah. “For you were like sheep going astray” complements Psalm 23 and is a needed supplement. Some people think it wonderful to be called “a sheep of the Good Shepherd.” They find comfort in its romantic fuzziness. I think it is horrible to be compared to a sheep, which is one of the dumbest animals God created. The comparison rests on our tendency to go astray, and as such I have to accept it.

III. Submission in Marriage 3:1-8

1 Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives,

2 when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

3 Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes.

4 Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.

5 For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands,

6 like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

These verses are mainly addressed to women. As a male, maybe I ought to refrain from commenting on them. We must observe, however, that Peter gives here a reason for the wife’s submission to her husband that is not found elsewhere in Scripture. She must try to win her unbelieving husband for Christ by her silent testimony.

We must not interpret Peter’s words here as a condemnation of the wearing of ornaments. The point he makes is that if outward beauty is the only beauty that exists in a woman, she cannot be called a beautiful

1. Ps. 3:3
2. Rom. 6:11
3. Isa. 53:5
4. Ezek. 47:9

woman. Real beauty is inward. If hairdo, jewelry and clothes are the only beautiful thing about a lady, she is, in fact, ugly. *The Book of Proverbs* states: "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion."¹ Jewels that are used to hide a lack of inner beauty are trinkets. If a person, male or female, is endowed with inner riches before God it will demonstrate itself outwardly. We note that Peter uses the expression "without words" and "inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit." Women who know God are not loud and boisterous. The same can be said about a man. As the saying goes: "Empty vessels make the greatest sound." In this there is no distinction between the sexes.

Peter advises the women of his time to take the women in the Old Testament as their ideal. Peter's quotation from Sarah, who called her husband "master," is from the story of God's announcement to Abraham that Sarah will become pregnant. We read: "So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, 'After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?'"² If we understand this to mean that Sarah refers to having sexual intercourse with Abraham, it seems that Peter takes her words out of context. Submission of a wife to her husband does not mean that she subjects herself to all of his whims without protest. It is not subjection out of fear either. Because in the same breath, Peter says: "do not give way to fear." Peter refers to God's arrangements of relationships that can only be achieved through mutual love and respect.

V.7 advises men to be considerate in their marital relationships. Men are supposed to be emotionally more stable than women. Yet, it is amazing to see how many men act upon impulse, rather than upon consideration. This seems to be even more prevalent within the bond of marriage than without. The most reasonable conclusion a man can draw is that his wife is co-heir with him of God's gracious gift of life. A husband ought, first of all, to see his wife as being "in Christ." That is the only solid basis for lasting mutual love. If love is based upon emotions only, love will disappear when the emotions fade. If conjugal love rests on a mutual relationship with God, God will provide the lasting emotions also. All emotional ties, outside of God's gracious gift of life, as well as all unbridled sexual desire, will form a hindrance for a person's prayer life.

In using the word "finally" in v.8 Peter obviously draw a conclusion from what precedes, which is our attitude as Christians in this world. Our testimony consists in seven parts:

1. harmony
2. sympathy
3. brotherly love
4. compassion
5. humility
6. absence of vengeance
7. blessing

IV. Submission in All of Life 3:9-12

9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

10 For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech.

11 He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it.

12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

1. Prov. 11:22

2. Gen. 18:13

Peter says that we must bless others “because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.” This could be called the theme of the whole epistle.

Our attitude in the hostile world in which we live is determined by the blessing God has given us. As God blessed Abraham to make him a blessing,¹ so we must be a blessing to others. We are called to bless because God called us to His glory. The quotations in vv.10-12 are taken from *The Book of Psalms* and used as an illustration.²

Talking about others often stands in the way of both giving a blessing and receiving one for ourselves. The blessing is presented here in the form of a love of life. “Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days.” This is existentialism in its purest form. God looks at people who look up to Him and He hears those who listen to His voice.

Part Three: The Suffering of the Believer (3:13—5:14)

I. Conduct in Suffering 3:13-17

13 Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?

14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."

15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

17 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Saying: “Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?” Peter makes a rather sweeping and general statement. This is certainly not the general rule. In a human heart, or in a society where corruption has eaten through to the core, doing good will not constitute a powerful weapon. Yet, “non-violence” has gained some victories. Mahatma Gandhi brought India to independence through non-violent opposition against Great Britain.

In case of suffering as a result of doing good, there are three important factors to observe:

- First: “you are blessed.” Our blessedness is anchored in the accomplished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, whether our circumstances are pleasant or unpleasant. It is important to hang on to his. The word “blessed” is emphatic. We could say: “Yet you are blessed!”

- Second: “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” A footnote in *The New International Version* gives the alternate reading: “Or not fear their threats.” Fright is a reflex but fear goes deeper than fright. The blessedness of our salvation ought to be so real to us that our body and soul no longer react in reflexes to things that would normally cause us to panic.

- Third: We must give witness to the hope within us. The instruction Peter gives us regarding the preparation for such witness is precious. We must “set apart” in our hearts Christ as Lord. The Greek uses the verb *hagiazō*, “to consecrate,” or “to sanctify.” Without this consecration of Christ as Lord of our life there can be no testimony. If Christ is Lord of my life, it is no longer I who makes the decisions. In the practice of daily life, this means a constant surrender of my will to His. Christ will only rule in me if I want Him to. He is not a dictator. Without willing surrender, Jesus refuses kindly, but firmly, to be my guide.

This speaks about the manner in which we must be a witness. Witnessing can be an effort. Peter speaks about being prepared to give an answer, which suggests a spontaneous and natural kind of giving our testimony. Our testimony ought to be an answer to people who ask. This means that our life must be such that it raises questions in the hearts of others making them curious to the point of wanting to know what kind

1. See Gen. 12:2,3.

2. See Ps. 34:12-14,16.

of hope we cherish. There appears to be a double feature in witnessing: there is the ambiance we create which evokes the question and there is our answer to the question. Someone once said: “Be a witness of Christ; use words if needed.” It is obvious that the first part of the testimony is the more important one. Everyone can talk about Jesus; living with Jesus is for those who are serious in their search.

The spirit in which we speak is also important. Gentleness is the opposite of arrogance. We must not have an attitude that says: “I have it, you don’t.” We must have a longing to draw others to the Lord in order for them to be saved. *The New International Version* uses the word “respect.” The Greek word is *phobos*, which literally means “fear.” The English word “phobia” is derived from it. This fear is not panic but the respect and awe we have toward the Lord, as expressed in the term “the fear of the Lord.” It is the awareness of people who know that they stand, not because of personal achievement but because of God’s grace. We must keep our conscience clear. We must make sure that our behavior is such that others are drawn to the Lord because of us. A true Christian will evoke a feeling of shame in others. Everyone knows deep inside how he ought to live. We must lead such a life that other people will think: “That is the way I ought to be, but I am not.”

We do not create our own circumstances; God does. God determines whether we suffer or not. But it is up to us how we react to the circumstances God places us in. If we suffer by our own fault, we are responsible; if we do good and suffer for it, others carry the responsibility.

II. Christ’s Example of Suffering 3:18—4:6

18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,

19 through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison

20 who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.

In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,

21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also — not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

22 who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand — with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.

2 As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.

3 For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do — living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.

4 They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.

5 But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

6 For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

Peter’s whole argument is based on v.18. The suffering of the righteous finds its antitype in the suffering of Christ. But the suffering of Christ is infinitely more glorious.

Almost every word in this verse carries weight. The fact that Christ died “once for all” shows the unique, absolute and perfect character of Jesus’ death. It requires no repetition; duplication is impossible. “Died for sins” points to the purpose of Jesus’ death. It shows God’s atonement for our sin, His provision for our need, His payment of our debt.

“The righteous for the unrighteous.” The Apostle Paul comments on this: “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates

his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”¹ From a human point of view, this makes Jesus’ death unlikely. This is proof of the fact that the Gospel was conceived in the heart of God, not in the human heart.

“He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.” Jesus said to His disciples: “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 soul and body in hell.”² But this does not seem the way in which Peter’s words ought to be read. The point is not that human beings killed Jesus but that the Spirit of God brought Him back to life. Peter seems to say that when Jesus died “the flesh,” that is sinful nature, died with Him. That is the aspect of the cross about which the Apostle Paul wrote extensively. Jesus’ death means death to our sinful nature. His resurrection means new life for us.

Vv.19 and 20 are known as being some of the most difficult to explain in Scripture. The Greek words “through whom” are *en hos*, which some Bible scholars read as “Enos,” or “Enoch.” That would mean that a copying mistake had been made. Some Bible scholars suggest that Enoch preached to the people in Noah’s day. Peter mentions “the spirit in prison” from the days of Noah. What he probably means is that the spirits of the people who lived in Noah’s day are presently held in prison and that the message of Christ had come to them through Noah in the time that Noah built the ark, not in the present while they are being held captive. There is no indication that these people are having a second chance of salvation after their disobedience in ages past. The one hundred twenty years in which Noah prepared the ark were a sign of God’s grace. In that period people could be saved by faith. They could have been saved if they had turned away from their corruption and believed Noah’s words, even though his prophecy about the coming end of the world was something new and unheard of.

There is probably no clearer image in the Old Testament of salvation in Christ than Noah’s ark. It was the only place in which people could have been saved and kept from God’s judgment that swept over the earth. The two characteristics of Noah’s ark were judgment and salvation.

Peter says that the water of the flood of Noah symbolizes baptism. The Greek uses the word “antitype,” meaning that the flood was an image of baptism, which is the reality. This does not mean that we are saved because we enter the water of baptism. Baptism in turn is also an image. The water in which we are baptized would mean our death if we would not rise up from it in time. Death and salvation are the two things baptism symbolizes. And salvation consists of two parts: the cleansing of our conscience and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. God saves us by forgiving our sins and by giving us the resurrection life of Jesus. In his opening words in this epistle Peter stated already: “In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”³ As at the baptism of Jesus Himself, heaven opens up for us.

Peter concludes this section about our suffering in this world by showing us the perspective of the reality that is behind that which is visible to us. “Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand — with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.” It is this glorified Jesus, the living Lord, who has all power in heaven and on earth, whom we must set apart in our heart (v.15), who occupies the central place in our life. It is this vision of the Lord in His glory which will make the difference for us in victory or defeat.

We suffer in the body because Christ suffered in His body. This speaks about Jesus’ death on the cross in our stead. We have been crucified with Him. The result of our identification with His suffering is that sin loses its grip upon our life.

“Arm yourselves also with the same attitude” is strong language. The word “arm” suggests struggle. The fact that we have been crucified with Christ is the object of Satan’s constant and unrelenting

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1. Rom. 5:7,8
 2. Matt. 10:28
 3. I Peter 1:3

attacks, especially because we will be freed from the power of sin if we apply the principle to our life. Our defense against the enemy consists in repeating to ourselves: “I am crucified with Christ!”

In v.2 “evil human desires” are placed in opposition to “the will of God.” The two are always in opposition. “Evil human desires” is that which humans want. In comparison with “the will of God,” our desires are puny and measly. Our evil desires and greed are born out of dissatisfaction. By growing into identification with Jesus’ crucifixion we will come out of the narrow confinements of our evil desires and enter into the infinite space of God’s will.

“Evil human desires” not only stands for following one’s own will, but also being influenced by the desires of others. The Apostle Paul asked the Galatians: “Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.”¹ A choice for God will often mean opposing the desires of our fellowmen.

The words “the rest of his earthly life” indicate that Peter was aware of the brevity of life on earth. God has measured our lifespan. We would avoid much sin if we kept in mind that a time is coming when God will tell us that our time is up and that we must give account. It may also be a comforting thought that our struggle will not go on forever and ever. The day will come on which the victory we carry in our hearts will come out.

V.4 suggests that sin often consists in allowing ourselves to be carried away by the current of public opinion. Trying to keep up with the others means saying “no” to God. As in the reference to the brevity of life, we find the same thought of accountability in v.5 in connection with people’s reaction of heaping abuse on us because of our being different. Life takes on a different character if we see it in the light of the Day of Judgment. This places the life of both believers and unbelievers in a different light.

V.6 cannot mean that people will hear the Gospel after they have died. Although this is what the verse seems to say, the context of the rest of Scripture makes that interpretation impossible. The people mentioned here are now dead, but they heard the Gospel while they were still alive. The verse makes more sense if we take these people to be the believers who lived in the Old Testament dispensation. Their being judged “in regard to the body” speaks of their physical death, which is the general punishment of sin for mankind as a whole. Their being alive “according to God in regard to the spirit” speaks of their salvation. They are saved because they believed the Gospel as it came to them in the rituals and symbols of the Old Testament.

III. Commands in Suffering 4:7-19

7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.

8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.

11 If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

1. Gal. 1:10

15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

18 And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

19 So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

"The end of all things is near" (v.7). Peter's specification of "all things" is significant. These are the things that dominate our life on earth. Peter does not merely state that our life on earth is limited but the very things that are important to us now will cease to be. The things in life are transient even as we are transient. If we understand this we will be "clear minded and self-controlled."

Being clear minded and self-controlled ought to be normal conditions in life. The Greek word rendered "clear minded" is *sophroneo*, which literally means: "to be of sound mind," "to be sober." It stands for a proper use of our senses. In using our senses wrongly we take temporal things to be eternal. This means that we do not have an open eye for reality.

Peter gives us five points that are directly connected to our vision of reality: 1) prayer, 2) love, 3) hospitality, 4) service, and 5) speech. And he shows us where we can obtain the energy to do these things.

- 1) Prayer: Our prayer is linked to our vision of life. If we understand God's will regarding His creation and we see the reality of everyday life, the Holy Spirit will urge us to pray.
- 2) We tend to link the spontaneity of love to our freedom of choice. We love those we choose to love. We believe it is impossible to put two people together and to command them to love each other. The Bible makes clear that, once we have chosen the love of God, we are no longer free to decide which of our fellowmen we will love. Love becomes a commandment! It is remarkable, or actually if we understand how it works, it is natural that the love of God will work in our heart the urge to love others as we are loved by God. Diminishing of neighborly love can always be traced to a cooling of our love for our Creator. That is the reason Peter links love for each other to the realization that the end is near. If we wake up to that trumpet call, the love of our neighbor that has gone asleep within us will be woken up also. "Love covers over a multitude of sins." James writes the same in his epistle: "Remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins."¹ And the Apostle Paul writes: "It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth."² He who does not love his neighbor will remain in a state of guilt toward God also. That is why we pray: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."³
- 3) Hospitality. We find a parallel of this verse and the previous one in the Epistle to the Hebrews. "Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it."⁴ The principle of hospitality rests on the understanding that our home and our food are not our personal possession. The root of inhospitality is egoism. V.10 still deals with hospitality, although in a larger setting. The word "administering" points to handling the things that are not our own. Peter mentions some interesting features in connection with our earthly possessions:

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1. James 5:20
 2. I Cor. 13:5,6
 3. Matt. 6:12
 4. Heb. 13:1,2

- a) It is all God's grace. We do not even deserve what we earn.
 - b) We are administrators, not owners of our possessions.
 - c) God gives us our possessions to provide us with means of showing neighborly love.
 - d) The only limitation of our love is the limitation of our possessions. We cannot give away what we do not have. This is quite different from the way we look upon our possessions.
- 4) Our speech. James explains in his epistle that our speech is often a bridgehead of Satan in our life. Our sanctification demonstrates itself most clearly in the way we speak. Jesus said about the Holy Spirit: "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you."¹ This deals with the speech of everyday life, not with preaching from a pulpit, although that is not excluded. In our common conversation, we ought to display the glory of Him who saved us.
- 5) Service. "If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides." We find a perfect example of such service in Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet.² Being sinful human beings, we cannot do anything but with mixed motives. If we perform a good action, sin will whisper to us: "You did well!" Jesus advises us: "So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"³ If our redemption is perfect, the only motive for our good acts will be to glorify God in Jesus Christ. Jesus' only thought always was the Father's glory. That was the first and foremost reason He gave His life as a burnt sacrifice, a sacrifice that was completely consumed by fire, that was a pleasing odor to the Lord. He could therefore say: "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do."⁴ Our carnal nature rebels against this kind of truth. This made the Apostle Paul exclaim: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!"⁵ According to the author of Hebrews, "we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."⁶ Our refusal to glorify God will in no way diminish God's glory. God will be glorious and omnipotent throughout eternity. If we seek our own glory instead of God's we merely demonstrate how faulty is our sense of reality. Those who seek themselves are not clear minded.

Suffering ought not to surprise a Christian. It is the natural reaction of an evil world to the Christian's new life in Christ. The Scottish writer George MacDonald wrote: "The Son of God did not suffer unto death so that man should not suffer, but so that their suffering would be like His."

Both in the announcements of His suffering, as in His conversation with the two men walking to Emmaus, Jesus emphasized that He must suffer. It is the normal reaction of an evil world to the revelation of the life of God, in the life of a Christian as well as in the Christ.

The only way we can rejoice in our suffering with Christ is if there is genuine love for Him in our heart. Take love out of it and our being insulted because of Christ will turn life into a tragedy. Real communion with the Lord in His suffering is one of the deepest spiritual experiences we can have. We could say that without this suffering with Him, our fellowship in His glory cannot have the meaning God wants it to have for us.

If we are insulted because of the Name of Christ, we give proof of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life. This does not mean, of course, that there are no Christians where there is no persecution. But it is

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- 1. John 16:13,14
 - 2. See John 13:1-17.
 - 3. Luke 17:10
 - 4. John 17:4
 - 5. Rom. 7:24,25
 - 6. Heb. 10:10

particularly in conditions of persecution that God reveals His glory. We think, for instance, of the martyrs who sang psalms as they were burnt at the stake during the Reformation. A spirit that can sing in that kind of suffering and death cannot be but the Spirit of Truth.

Christians and criminals are sometimes lumped together as if they belong to the same category. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained.”¹ The same prison cells house criminals and martyrs of the faith. Yet, the difference between the two classes is immense. Jesus and Barabbas stood both chained before a Roman judge: the Savior of the world and a murderer. The shame of the handcuffs becomes an honor if they are worn for the cause of Christ in this world.

God’s judgment over God’s family is no condemnation to death, but a judgment of love. God may have much to judge in us, maybe all. Even our own hearts condemn us. God’s judgment may be hard on the boil but it is healing to the body.

It is not hard for the righteous to be saved; it is impossible; it needs a miracle. And miracles are not difficult, they are impossible. Our problem is that we want to substitute God’s miracle with our own human efforts. It is not the gate that is too narrow, we are too big to squeeze through. Yet, God finds ways to save us. If that is already so difficult in the case of a relatively good person, what does that mean for the person who never even considers the marvel of God’s grace?

It is noteworthy that Peter uses the term “faithful Creator” in v.19. The circumstances in which we find ourselves find their origin in the creation of this world. When we undergo physical pain it is a comfort to know that God created our bodies. He knows all the secrets of our organs. He gave us a soul and the ability to think. And He is faithful. We may go to Him at the slightest malfunction and expect Him to give relief and renewal. But God’s faithfulness will have no effect if there is no surrender on our part.

IV. Minister in Suffering 5:1-9

A. Elders, Shepherd the Flock 5:1-4

1 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed:

2 Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve;

3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

Peter calls himself here “a fellow elder.” In the Greek this is one word, which could be rendered “co-elder.” Peter puts himself on the same level as all the other elders of the church. Although this can be seen as a gesture of humility, it is also an expression of reality. One individual is not more than another in the eyes of God. Peter does not speak here as the Pope to his priests or as the pastor to the elders of his church, but as a redeemed person to other redeemed people. What separates Peter from the others is that he was “a witness of Christ’s sufferings.” He saw it with his own eyes. This experience must have helped the strengthening of his faith. We see several times in the Bible that being an eyewitness generates faith. We read in Peter’s second epistle: “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.”² And the Apostle John writes: “That which was from the

1. II Tim. 2:8,9

2. II Peter 1:16-18

beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”¹ Yet, we must remember that the saying “to see is to believe” is not correct. Jesus said to Thomas: “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”² Without the deeper work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, seeing alone will not save us. Doubting Thomas did not say to Jesus: “My Lord and my God!” because he put his fingers in Jesus’ scars.”³ The Holy Spirit convinced him of the reality of Jesus’ resurrection before he came to that point.

The memory of Jesus’ resurrection also must have been painful for Peter; it was a special illustration of the meaning of grace. How could he have gone back in his mind to the day of Jesus’ capture, condemnation and crucifixion without hearing the crowing of the rooster and without seeing Jesus’ eyes fixed on him after the denial? Jesus’ suffering remained always linked to Peter’s own failure. Only those who fail know what grace means.

Suffering and failure are strictly personal experiences, but “the glory to be revealed” will be enjoyed in fellowship with all the saints. Peter uses the Greek word *koinonos*, meaning “a sharer,” or “partaker.”

God’s Word will become flesh and blood in us inasmuch as we grow in fellowship with Him. It is Peter’s intimacy with Jesus Christ which gives his admonition this weight and authority. Words derive their importance from the personality of him who speaks. And personality is formed in fellowship with the Lord. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: “Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.”⁴

“Be shepherds of God’s flock.” These words cannot be separated either from Peter’s experience with Jesus. When Peter encountered Jesus again at the shore of the Sea of Galilee, when the risen Jesus exonerated Peter, He said: “Feed my lambs,” “Take care of my sheep,” and “Feed my sheep.”⁵ Peter’s admonition is backed up by a life of loving dedication in service of God’s flock. Older people who have spent their lives in serving the Lord can be living admonitions to younger people to dedicate themselves that the same kind of service of love.

This service is not forced upon us; we volunteer for it. God never forces us to serve Him; we serve Him because we love Him. The Greek text of v.2 reads literally: “Feed the flock of God that [is] among you, overseeing not constrainedly, but willingly, neither for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.” “Willingly” means that it is a matter of the will. It is our decision for which we are personally responsible. We can only serve God if we have experienced His love personally and have decided to dedicate our life to Him in response to this love. When the Apostle Paul writes: “Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”⁶ He does not speak of forced service but of a moral obligation. The compelling did not come from God but from Paul’s own conscience. If we find ourselves to be so constrained, we do well. But if we say that God forces us, we take the burden of decision from ourselves and blame God for what we do, “Woe to us!”

Peter balances our “willingly” with the will of God. We find in the same phrase: “because you are willing, as God wants you to be.” Peter sees no contradiction between our freedom of choice and our

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1. I John 1:1-3
 2. John 20:29
 3. See John 20:26-29.
 4. I Tim. 3:13
 5. See John 21:15-17.
 6. I Cor. 9:16

surrender to God's will. He also shows that without surrender of our will to the will of God there is no real freedom. The idea that freedom consists in our doing as we wish, either good or bad, is the devil's lie. The Apostle Paul put the paradox in the right perspective when he wrote to the Christians in Rome: "Therefore, 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. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will."¹

The mention of greed strikes us as being out of place. Most people believe that being spiritual means to be immune to greed. When I enrolled in the Brussels Bible Institute in Belgium, I anticipated that a Bible Institute would be a place of constant spiritual refreshment, where all the students would live together in a spirit of happiness and unselfishness. Having been disappointed at that point, I thought that I would find those higher standards on the mission field. For some reason I expected that other people would have gained the victory where I had failed. We will probably not find such a spirit of unselfishness until we get to heaven. Peter had asked Jesus at one point in his life: "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"² Evidently, Peter knew the spirit of greed. Being engaged in spiritual ministry is no protection to any kind of temptation. Could a minister of the Gospel commit adultery? God forbid that we consider ourselves immune because we serve Him. No danger is so great as the one we do not recognize.

"Not lording it over those entrusted to you." The desire to dominate is the original sin. It is beyond the scope of this study to trace the psychological implications of the desire to dominate. It is regrettable that we find in ourselves the urge to make ourselves be counted at the place the Lord has assigned to us. Often the sheep of the herd recognize this tendency better and earlier in us than we do ourselves. If others see in us a tendency to be self-seeking in our service to the Lord, they know intuitively that they can expect little blessing to flow out of our life. We all know that we need more than what other humans can give us. An elder of the church cannot be a dictator. His task is to stimulate, not to rule. If we are blessed and our life is full of the Holy Spirit, others will want to become the same kind of Christian we are.

Peter packs a series of confessions in the phrase "when the Chief Shepherd appears..." First, it means that we are not the actual shepherds of the flock. Jesus has the souls of the believers in His hand. We are on safe ground if we consider ourselves to be God's co-workers, people who work in His Name and who are unable to do anything without Him. Secondly, we are expecting Him to come. Without this expectation, our labor has no content or perspective. The routine of daily life will make us deaf and blind if we do not keep focused on the goal. It is the expectation that our destination can be around the next corner that provides the incentive to purify ourselves as He is pure.³

"The crown of glory that will never fade away" (v.4) is a reference to the Greek Olympics in which the winner would receive a crown of laurels that was put on his head. As far as material value was concerned, it had none. Laurel leaves were found in abundance and they wilted easily. The value was in the symbolism. It was a recognition of human values by fellow humans. Although there probably was a lot of heathenism mixed in the Greek glorification of human beings, we must maintain that man, created in the image of God is honorable. The laurel crown in Greek culture was not only a symbol of human honor, it also was a reminder of human frailty and transience. The honor one human bestows upon another is as fleeting as the wind.

In the Book of Acts we read what happened to Paul and Barnabas in Lystra, where the people believed the apostles to be two Greek gods, Zeus and Hermes. The priests of the city brought bulls and wreaths to sacrifice to the two men. Immediately following this event the public mood changed and Paul

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1. Rom. 12:1,2
 2. Matt. 19:27
 3. I John 3:3

was stoned and left for dead.¹ The story illustrates the difference between the crown God gives us, one that never fades or wilts, and the honor mankind bestows on its idols.

Peter's words refer to the glorious mystery Jesus formulated when He said: "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me."² Thus God honored David, saying: "You are not the one to build me a house to dwell in. I declare to you that the LORD will build a house for you."³ This is the miracle of God's redemption of us. "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor."⁴

B. Saints, Humble Yourselves 5:5-9

5 Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

"Young men ... be submissive." This speaks of a double submissiveness: to those who are older and to God. This does not represent a contrast but an extension. It does not mean either submission to men first and afterward to God. Submission to God must take place first before there can be submission to human authority. The Apostle Paul states about the Christians in Macedonia: "And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will."⁵ The complete surrender to the Lord forms the basis, the beginning of a life that Peter uses here as a point of departure. As people who desire to follow the Lord, we owe obedience to others who have gone before us in being faithful to God and who can look back upon an experience younger people still have ahead of them.

The result of this kind of submission is not that others dominate our life, but that they guide and admonish us. The context suggests that Peter may have had his own youthful rebellion in mind. In cases in which we have doubt about the advice other older Christians give us (I am not referring to people who believe they must meddle in other people's business, but to those who, because of way of life and spiritual maturity, play an important part in the life of the church) this verse can be of decisive importance.

The Greek verb in "clothe yourself with humility toward one another" is *egkoomai*, which literally means "to engirdle oneself for labor." Peter used the same metaphor earlier in this epistle in the phrase "prepare your minds for action."⁶ "Toward one another" speaks of those who, because of their age and experience (or the lack of it) belong to the same group of youth. Humility is a scarce entity, not only among young people, but among people of all ages. Lack of knowledge and experience is usually not a reason for people not to speak their mind and have an opinion. We will keep having a high opinion of ourselves until we ask ourselves the question what does God think of us. If we engirdle or clothe ourselves we consciously prepare ourselves for action. In the act of putting on our clothes we get ready to move.

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1. See Acts 14:8-19.
 2. John 12:26
 3. I Chron. 17:4,10
 4. Ps. 8:4,5
 5. II Cor. 8:5
 6. See I Peter 1:13.

Spiritually speaking, clothing ourselves with humility is an act of the will; it is a decision we make for things we plan to do. In spiritual things we often tend to be more impulsive than deliberate. In the realm of brotherly love, for instance, we believe that we must experience being flooded by feelings of affection, instead of deciding to love the other for Christ's sake. In the same way we consider humility, not as a deliberate pulling down of our pride and illusions of grandeur, but as an emotion that ought to come to us naturally. It is the discovery that humility is the only kind of soil in which God's grace can grow, that will bring us to the point where we desperately plead with God to capture our city and open the gate.

Our human nature will always consider that kind of surrender to God to be suicide. If there were no resurrection from the dead and no resurrection power for life that would indeed be the case. The proud oppose God and God opposes the proud. But God gives grace to the humble. Deep down in his own heart the proud person condemns himself, but he refuses to admit that even to himself. The arrogant will try to cover up his sins, refusing to admit that he is wrong. In such a life there can be no question of grace and forgiveness. If I am being accused of a fault I do not admit to have made, I say to myself: "Does that person think I would be that stupid to do such a thing!" But if I realize that the accuser is right, I will bow my head. Humility is not a denial of what I have or what I am. A rich person who says he is poor is not humble. Humility consists in recognition of reality. Jesus was humble when He said: "Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?"¹

The Greek verb in "Cast all your anxiety on him" is a strong word. The Greek word *epirrhipto* is only found twice in the New Testament. The other instance is in "They brought it to Jesus, *threw* their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it."² Peter's words are a direct quotation from *The Book of Psalms*. We read: "Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall."³ Jesus issued a similar invitation when He said: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."⁴ Casting our anxiety on Jesus means exchanging our load for His. His is a yoke, a burden carried by two. Since He is humble, He carries the heavier part of the load. Small people always get the heavier part to carry when they are yoked up with tall ones. We will find rest in Christ's humility.

The verb "cast" receives emphasis because of the presence of the lion. A person, who carries a load as he is all of a sudden confronted by a lion, will throw down his load and run.

V. Benediction 5:10-14

10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

12 With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.

13 She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.

14 Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

Peter packs a lot of truth in his description of grace. First of all, he uses grace as a title for God, calling Him "the God of all grace." There is no grace outside God; He is the sole source of it. The Greek word for "grace," *charis*, has a rich variety of meaning. Peter uses the word ten times in this epistle. It means favor on the part of the giver and thanks on the part of the receiver. The Apostle Paul once uses it in its

1. John 8:46
2. Luke 19:35
3. Ps. 55:22
4. Matt. 11:28-30

meaning of being beneficial. We read: “Because I was confident of this, I planned to visit you first so that you might *benefit* twice.”¹ It can mean a monetary gift, as in: “Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your *gift* to Jerusalem.”² It can describe a person as being gracious, favorable. It can pertain to a person, to speech, to love. It is the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament “lovingkindness.”

God’s grace will make us enter into His eternal glory in Christ. That is our goal, our final destination. We all know, however, that life is not a bed of roses. We do not know how far it is from where we are at present to where we go, but we are told that the road is strewn with obstacles, called “suffering.” Paul and Barnabas “encouraged” the new converts by telling them: “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”³ But Paul also said: “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”⁴ Grace will help us to make the comparison and draw the right conclusions. God’s grace will also restore us and make us strong, firm and steadfast. God does not expect us to make it on our own steam. His eternal power, that which enabled Him to create and maintain, is enough energy for every believer to reach his destination.

History does not tell us how Silas arrived at Peter’s side. He had been Paul’s companion during the apostle’s second missionary journey and his name is found in the epistles to the churches of Corinth and Thessalonica. It is assumed that Silas remained in Rome and joined Peter after Paul’s death. Here he is mentioned as Peter’s secretary.

In his conclusion to the epistle, Peter mentions in passing that the theme of the whole letter is God’s grace. The context suggests that it is particularly grace that sees us through times of suffering.

Much has been written about “she who is in Babylon.” The King James Version has: “The church that is at Babylon...” but the word “church” is not in the Greek text. This makes some Bible scholars lean to the opinion that a female person is meant, especially since Mark, whom Peter calls “my son” is mentioned in the same breath. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes about this: “The question now meets us — Is ‘Babylon’ to be taken in a mystic sense, as a cryptograph for Rome, or literally? Eusebius, and ancient writers generally, understand it of Rome. Eusebius is commonly understood to claim for this view the authority of Papias and Clement of Alexandria ... seem to claim that authority only for the connection of St. Peter with St. Mark’s Gospel; the identification of Babylon with Rome seems to be mentioned only as a common opinion in the time of Eusebius. It is said that there is no trace of the existence of a Christian Church at the Chaldean Babylon, and no proof, apart from this passage, that St. Peter was ever there. There had been a great Jewish colony at Babylon, but it had been destroyed in the time of Caligula ... There may have been a second settlement of Jews at Babylon between A.D. 40 and the date of this Epistle. But it is quite possible that St. Peter may have been working as a missionary among the Babylonian Gentiles, for we cannot believe that he confined his ministrations to the Jews. On the whole, it seems much more probable that St. Peter was writing at the famous city on the Euphrates, though no traces of his work there remain, than that he should have used this one word in a mystical sense at the end of an Epistle where all else is plain and simple.”

The only definite conclusion we can draw about the matter is that we do not know! What is obvious is that someone or some people sent greetings to the recipients of Peter’s letters. Those who received this epistle must have known whom he meant.

The letter ends with a kiss and “shalom” which is an appropriate way to make us share in “the true grace of God.”

John Schultz, GA, USA

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1. II Cor. 1:15
 2. I Cor. 16:3
 3. Acts 14:22
 4. Rom. 8:18