

Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE
EXPOSITION OF
THE EPISTLE OF
FIRST PETER

The Deep Counsels of Eternity

1 Peter 1:1d-2

1 Peter 1:1-2 ... *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.*

1 Peter has long been understood as something of a primer on Christian doctrine. It certainly begins that way with its striking reference to the Trinity - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is one of the pillars of historic Christian orthodoxy. Historic Christianity has affirmed the biblical theology of one God or monotheism.

One of the most famous passages of Old Testament Judaism was the Shema. **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**, "*Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is **one!** 5 And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*" In the later prophets, Isaiah is a clear representative of biblical monotheism. **Isaiah 44:6**, "*Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts : 'I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me.'*"

The Shorter Catechism asks, **Are there more Gods than one (Q. #5)?** *There is but one only, the living and true God.*

Historic Christianity has also affirmed that there are three persons in the Godhead. The Catechism asks, **How many persons are there in the Godhead (Q. #6)?** *There are **three** persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these **three** are **one** God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.* Clearly this confession is rooted in the Scripture. **Genesis 1:26**, *Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.* **Matthew 3:16-17**, *And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him,*¹⁷ *and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."* **Matthew 28:19**, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." II Corinthians 13:14*, *the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.*

These two essential tenets – one God in three persons - are affirmed in the Nicene Creed. *"We believe in **one God, the Father Almighty**, Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. And in **one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God**, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made. And we believe in **the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life**, who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified."* So I Peter begins with an affirmation of the Trinity.

I Peter 1:1-2 not only affirms the reality of the Trinity but also assigns unique functions to each of the three persons of the Trinity. While the three persons are the same in essence it appears that there is some distinction in terms of roles. While the members of the Trinity are co-equal and co-eternal, they have different roles or functions within the Godhead. Theologians use the term “economic Trinity” to describe the operations of the three persons of the Godhead in the work of redemption. From our verse we learn that the Father elects or chooses, the Son redeems, and the Holy Spirit sanctifies or sets apart the people of God.

In **1:1-2** you notice a triad of prepositional phrases that describe this eternal ordering or arrangement. The first is this: as the redeemed of God we have been *chosen*² *according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*. Two words demand our attention. The first is *foreknowledge*. “Foreknowledge refers not simply to God’s ability to know what is to occur, but also to the fact that what occurs does so in accordance with his plan. [Listen to Peter’s words from his sermon recorded in **Acts 2:22-23**, “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know--²³ this Man, delivered up by the *predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God*, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. Foreknowledge involves choice or determination.] *Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God* is thus meant to point to the divine initiative in the readers’ election as Christians, and to assure them that their perilous situation is not the result of accident or divine oversight, but is indeed part of God’s plan for them” (Achtmeier, *I Peter*, p. 86).

The second key word is *chosen*. Our catechism asks, **What is God (Q. #4)?** *God is a Spirit infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness,*

justice, goodness, and truth. For Peter and for Paul the Gospel is about **God**. **Romans 1:16-17**, *For I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the **power of God** for salvation ... in it the **righteousness of God** is revealed.* The Gospel is about a **sovereign God**. **Psalm 135:5-6**, *For I know that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and in earth.* The Gospel is about this sovereign God bringing **glory** to Himself. **Psalm 86:9-10**, *All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord; and they shall glorify Thy name. For Thou art great and doest wondrous deeds; Thou alone art God.* In **4:11**, Peter will say, *so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.* God brings glory to Himself in the **redemption** of sinners (see **Eph. 1:5-6a, 14**).

You see as sinners we are **unable**, by reason of our **sin**, to come to Christ. Without Christ our situation is hopeless. **Romans 5:6** tells us that sinners without Christ are *helpless*. **Romans 5:10** tells us that sinners without Christ are *enemies* of God. **Romans 6:6** tells us that sinners without Christ are *slaves to sin*. **Romans 8:7** tells us that sinners without Christ are both unable and unwilling to obey *the law of God*. **James 2:10-11** tells us that sinners without Christ are *guilty transgressors of the law*. But, surely, the most disturbing is **Ephesians 2:1** which tells us that sinners without Christ are *dead in trespasses and sins* - as dead as Lazarus in the tomb there in Bethany.

How shall a man dead in sins be made alive if God does not give him life? How shall the man who is unwilling to obey God's law become obedient to it if God does not conquer his will? How shall the man in bondage to sin be freed if God does not release him? How shall the man in rebellion against God be subdued if God does not change his affections? The answer of the Bible is by sovereign mercy alone.

Election magnifies God's infinite **mercy** which we did not seek but desperately needed. **Romans 9:15**, *"I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY."* **Romans 9:11, 16**, *for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls ... So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.* No one here became a Christian solely by your own choice. You were saved because God poured out His grace and mercy upon you, a condemned sinner. Indeed, **Ephesians 2:8-9** makes it clear that salvation is *not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.* **Acts 13:48**, *and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.* Jesus Himself said, **John 5:21**, *"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes."* **John 6:63**, *"It is the Spirit who gives life."* **John 6:65**, *"no one can come to Me, unless it has been given to him from the Father."* We, who are saved, are debtors to **mercy** alone. Look forward at **I Peter 1:3**, *Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again.* Is this stuff just the excited ramblings of some wild-eyed Calvinist? These words are the glad confession of one in whose eyes election is beautiful.

Many see election as something harsh or unfair. The reality is that election is full of **love**. In election we are set apart *by God* for Him and for His work. In election God claims us for His own possession. We, the undeserving, are made objects of divine affection.

Deuteronomy 7:6-8a, *"For you are a **holy** people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has **chosen** you to be a people for **His own possession** out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The Lord did not **set His love** on you nor **choose** you*

*because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples but because **the Lord loved you.*** Election is full of **encouragement**. It is the grace of God in election that produces gratitude in redeemed sinners.

II Thessalonians 2:13, *But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation.* It is the grace of God in election that produces **rejoicing** in the heart. **Luke 10:20**, *“rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.* It is the grace of God in election that produces eternal **security**. **Romans 8:33**, *Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect?* It is the grace of God in election that works true **humility**. **Luke 17:15-16**, *Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at his feet, giving thanks to Him.* It is the grace of God in election that produces **holiness** in the children. **Colossians 3:12**, *as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.* It is the grace of God in election that fosters **anticipation** of future blessing. **II Thessalonians 2:14**, *And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Do you not see? How is it that the book of the Bible that is most closely associated with suffering should begin with a statement, with an affirmation, with a proclamation of God’s mercy in election? It is because the grace and mercy of our heavenly Father in election calms, comforts, fortifies, and assures the soul sorely tried by hardship. Salvation is a work of all three persons in the Godhead.

Now the second prepositional phrase: *by the sanctifying work of the Spirit*. If the first phrase gives the plan in accordance with which sinners become elect sojourners, the second phrase gives the means by which that election occurs: it is

through the setting apart accomplished by the Spirit. Mention of such activity by the Spirit is not unique to I Peter and gives a fuller explanation for the common reference to Christians as “ones set apart”, that is, set apart for God, and thus pure and holy. Do you not see? How is it that the book of the Bible that is most closely associated with suffering and alienation should begin with an affirmation that we are set apart as God’s special possession. Salvation is a work of all three persons in the Godhead.

Now the third prepositional phrase: *that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood*. Literally this reads, *to obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ*. The significance of the preposition *to* is to indicate the goal and thus the purpose of God’s plan carried out by the Spirit, namely, “obedience” and “sprinkling.” Behind these words is the Old Testament account of the establishment of the covenant between God and Israel in Exodus 24:3-8. In that ceremony, the people pledge their obedience (24:3), after which a sacrifice is made and blood sprinkled on the altar (24:4-6). After a second pledge to obey God (24:7), the remaining blood is sprinkled on the people (24:8), and the covenant is declared to be in force (see Achtemeier, pp. 88-89). The goal or the end of God’s election and the sanctifying work of the Spirit is that we, as the covenant people of God, now render a glad obedience having been cleansed by the blood of Christ, the final sacrifice for sins. Salvation is a work of all three persons in the Godhead.

We looked at the theological significance of verse 2. But that’s not all there is to it. Salvation is a work of all three persons in the Godhead. Notice that Peter does not begin with their circumstances which were hard and grievous. In Peter’s words, they were *distressed by various trials* (1:6). Their faith was being

tested by fire (1:7). They were the targets of *malice, slander, and ill-treatment*. They were *suffering unjustly (2:19)*. They were being *intimidated (3:14)*. They were enduring a *fiery ordeal (4:12)*. Beloved, don't miss this. I Peter 1:2 is not just a cold statement of doctrinal orthodoxy. In 1:2 Peter presents a spectacular vision that pierces the foreboding, fearsome dark clouds of time.

I've always been fascinated, intrigued, and invigorated by great views. I love to linger at the overlooks along the Blue Ridge Parkway. I still prefer the window seat on an airplane so I can enjoy the view especially on a clear day.

In times of particular hardship we often lose the perspective that Christians are supposed to enjoy. Our world is constricted. It is as if we are incarcerated in a cell in which there is no sense of a world beyond. Clouds of our own personal concerns obscure the sweep of the grand purposes of God in the gospel. Circumstances suck our energy, time, joy, and attention like a black hole sucks in matter and even light. We simply exist from day to day waiting for the storm to pass. It seems that the clouds of disappointment and doubt in which we find ourselves will never dissipate.

I repeat, I Peter 1:2 is not just a cold statement of doctrinal orthodoxy. In 1:2 Peter presents a stunning vision that pierces the foreboding, fearsome dark clouds of time and circumstances.

On December 11, 1941 (only three days after the US entered the war), Pilot Officer John Gillespie Magee, Jr., was killed. The Spitfire he was flying collided with an Oxford Trainer. Magee struggled to push back the canopy. He finally

stood up to jump from the plane but was too close to the ground for his parachute to open. He died instantly. He was 19 years old.

During the desperate days of the Battle of Britain, hundreds of Americans crossed the border into Canada to enlist with the Royal Canadian Air Force. Knowingly breaking the law, but with the tacit approval of the then still officially neutral United States Government, they volunteered to fight the Germans.

John Gillespie Magee, Jr., was one such American. Born in Shanghai, China, in 1922, Magee was 18 years old when he entered flight training. Within the year, he was sent to England and posted to the newly formed No 412 Fighter Squadron. Flying fighter sweeps in his Spitfire over France and air defense over England against the German Luftwaffe, he rose to the rank of Pilot Officer.

On 3 September 1941, Magee flew a high altitude (30,000 feet) test flight in a newer model of the Spitfire V. As he orbited and climbed upward, he was struck with the inspiration of a poem -- "To touch the face of God." Once back on the ground, he wrote a letter to his parents. In it he commented, "I am enclosing a verse I wrote the other day. It started at 30,000 feet, and was finished soon after I landed." On the back of the letter, he jotted down his poem, 'High Flight'.

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds, — and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of — wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,

I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air. . . .

Up, up the long, delirious burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace
Where never lark, or ever eagle flew —
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high untresspassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.

Magee's words reflected the stunning scope, grandeur, and panorama of being in a small place 30,000 feet above the surface of the earth. So much affected by it all was he that it seemed he could reach his hand out and touch the face of God Himself.

In I Peter 1:2 the Spirit of God lifts us to the elevated heights of the great mercy of the triune God in salvation. He transports us above the clouds of time and circumstances into the deep counsels of eternity. Objects of the derision of men but objects of the delight of God. Rejected by men, elected by God. Aliens on the earth, children in heaven. Scattered on earth, set apart by the Spirit. Acquainted with grief and distress on earth, recipients of grace and peace in fullest measure from God. Peter wanted them and wants us to know the extraordinary privilege that is ours. The extraordinary eternal purposes behind all that is happening in our lives. He reminds us of our status, our identity, our privileged standing as the elect people of God. Our salvation, beloved, is a glorious work of all three persons of the Godhead.